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THE MÉDITATEURS OF 1800: ESOTERIC COLLECTIVISM AMID MONASTIC RUINS

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THE HISTORY OF MODERN ARTISTIC collectivism has one of its origins in the groups that began to form at the beginning of the 19th century. This text is an account of one of the first: the Méditateurs, those students of the painter Jacques-Louis David who rebelled against their master. Beyond their scant pictorial activity, from the beginning they were characterized by their peculiar behavior, in which theatricality and ritual were used to build a shared identity. In a way, the theatricalization of the ideals that they upheld during their brief existence can be seen as a “utopian performativity,” one that would constitute a precedent for many communities to come.

THEATRICALITY IN DAVID’S WORKSHOP

In 1790, David joined the Jacobins. After being elected a member of the National Convention in 1792, he served as a deputy along with Robespierre and Danton and as head of the General Security Committee. During this time, David did not only work as a painter, and his activities expanded into other areas of life. The artist designed swords, and following a call from the Committee on Public Health, he devised costumes “appropriate to the customs and character

of the Revolution,” which mixed Roman aesthetics with medieval and oriental elements. Among these new costumes, there was even a uniform for the French citizen.¹ As the leading member of the Committee of Public Instruction, David also acted as scenographer for the festivals of the Revolution, excessive celebrations that included the construction of artificial mountains, symbolic sculptures, and altars, as well as processions with classical costumes.² During the most frenetic days of the Revolution, the scenographic elements of these public celebrations were manufactured in David’s studio.³

A strong theatrical dimension was clearly present in his Parisian atelier, located in the Louvre building. There, the so-called Hall of the Horatii was completely furnished according to designs that David himself had adapted from Greek vessels.⁴ This furniture, together with the wide curtains that covered the walls, functioned as a scenography that would appear in the artist’s paintings. At times, the models posing were the painter’s own students, dressed (or undressed) and characterized as Romans, in a role-play that also involved acting. David had a direct relationship with the world of theater, not only through his friendship with actors such as Talma,⁵ but also through his activity as an adviser for costumes and sets, a role he owed to his passionate erudition regarding the classical world.⁶

Opened in the 1780s, David’s workshop has been described by Thomas Crow as a space where the intensity of relationships wove ties akin to family bonds.⁷ During the 1790s, however, the prominence of David’s political activities and his subsequent imprisonment for his involvement in the Terror somewhat weakened his relationships with his students. And when the painter was released from prison, in 1795, his attitude changed, and he retreated from his previous public pronouncements.

Despite this more restrained role of David himself, the workshop continued to be a space of strong conviviality among the students, some of whom were accommodated in the Louvre building. This was the case for twin brothers of very humble origins: Jean-Pierre and Joseph-Boniface Franque. In the apartment they shared with their companion Jean Broc, small groups of students began to meet. At the center of these meetings was Maurice Quay, a charismatic pupil of David’s, who at that time was barely in his twenties. A portrait attributed to Henri-François Riesener does not allow us to guess the force that, according to every testimony, emanated from his physical presence. Within this group, Quay became a leader, along with a woman painter, poet, and musician named Lucile Messageot.⁸

According to the writer Charles Nodier, who probably exaggerated, the group had about sixty members.⁹ Sources, however, have left us a shorter list of names: Antoine-Hilaire Perié, Jean Broc, Guillaume François Colson, Agustin D., Auguste Gleizes, and Nodier, who would enthusiastically write about the group. According to him, they did not have an official name, although they did receive various nicknames: “Méditateurs sur l’homme,” “Méditateurs de l’Antique,” “Penseurs,” “Observateurs de l’Homme,” “Illuminés des Arts,” “Primitifs,” and, later, “Barbus.”

The social and geographical origins of the members were very different: Hilaire Perié came from a family of parliamentarians in Languedoc.¹⁰ Jean Broc was from a family of shopkeepers in Dordogne and had been part of the revolutionary army before joining David’s studio.¹¹ The daughter of a postmaster who died when she was a child, and the stepdaughter of a judge, Lucile Messageot had grown up in a bourgeois environment in the Jura area, in the town of Lons-Le-Saunier.¹² Charles Nodier was the son of the mayor of Bessançon and was known for a Jacobin discourse he delivered at the age of twelve, before he turned toward more conservative positions. Amid this heterogeneity of origins and, perhaps, ideologies, the unifying factor seems to have been youth and friendship, developed under the attraction exerted by Quay and Messageot.¹³

This group of friends would revive classical ideas through a means that we would today consider as performative. Seeking to hasten a change in sensibility, they started off with a change in dress: In 1798, the young painters disported themselves through the streets of Paris wearing ancient Greek clothes, provoking scandal and bewilderment.¹⁴ In 1799, French society could not stop speculating about the ideological meaning of this uniform. During the Revolution and the Directory, clothing had been strongly linked to the expression of political opinions.¹⁵ But with this group of painters, it could be simultaneously associated with opposing tendencies. Because of its rejection of trousers, some of their contemporaries mistakenly linked the Méditateurs' costume with the Jacobins.¹⁶ At the opposite pole, and resulting from their extravagance, the artists' attire was also perceived as related to the provocative attitude of proto-urban tribes such as the Incroyables and the Merveilleuses, whose respective exaggerations of English dress and classical tunics marked them as dandies of an uncertain ideological bent.¹⁷ However, the Méditateurs had a moral will that placed their costumes much closer to those designed by David, having been conceived with the idea that a new era demanded a new costume. The Méditateurs understood their transformation of dress as the first step toward a different sensibility, which in turn would lead to a transformation of society.¹⁸ According to Charles Nodier, "It was nothing less than a social reform following a plan. Although it would be a different reform from that of the Sansimonians, it would be a reform of the same kind, and it had to begin with a change of clothing."¹⁹ Although we do not know what this project might have consisted of, it seems clear that it would have been a question of creating the future through a staging of the past, proposing social regeneration as a return to the origins.²⁰

Among their various nicknames, the group seemed to identify most with Méditateurs. This alluded to their attitude toward "meditation," which was considered more important than the technical training of the artist.²¹ In the then recently opened Louvre, they carried out the strange practice of repeating certain words, in series of three, fifteen times. These litanies have been interpreted by art historian Jerry Rubin as relating to neo-Pythagorean tendencies.²² This ritual element would gain importance. In 1799, the group's criticism of David's painting *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* led the master to expel them from his workshop. The Méditateurs then embarked on a path of retreat. Between the middle of 1801 and the spring of 1803, their main meeting place would be an abandoned monastery. This ruined setting has left us some descriptions of an enigmatic everyday life, which seems tied to the period's esoteric currents.

AT THE MONASTERY

*This generation is rising and it demands cloisters!*²³

From the middle of 1801 until the spring of 1803, the Méditateurs were installed in a monastic building below the hill of Chaillot. The Monastery of Sainte Marie de la Visitation had been abandoned shortly before 1790 and was by then a dilapidated environment²⁴ whose wild gardens grew down to the edge of the Seine. According to historian Louis Madelin, in its state of abandonment the complex was a *refugium peccatorum* (refuge of sinners).²⁵ In April 1800, the police had discovered an underground system of tunnels for the illegal distilling and distribution of alcohol, and a year later reported an opening that led to a space of half-ruined buildings, often without doors and very easy to occupy.²⁶ Nodier described an atmosphere tinged with echoes of the mysterious:

The midday sun shone above the towers and amid the ruins. I descended by a bizarre path, between crumbling buildings, and the sound of my steps resonated in the hollows of the mountain.²⁷

During this period, the group was enriched with some new figures, including the brothers Alexander Laurent and Horace Hue, Fabre d'Englantine, and unidentified others including a woman known only as Jenny.²⁸ Of particular importance was the role of the writers Nodier and Jean Antoine Gleizes. Nodier, who would become one of the main proponents of Romanticism in France, was then a young man fascinated by esotericism and conspiracy.²⁹ Jean-Antoine Gleizes was a thinker linked to esoteric currents and a preacher of vegetarianism.

Together with Maurice Quay, Lucile Messageot would live in the monastery with her partner, Jean-Pierre Franque,³⁰ with whom in 1799 she had a daughter whose very name distills orientalism: Isis-Mélanie-Christostémie-Laodamie. The two married in 1802.

Although not all members of the group lived permanently in this precarious space, there seems to have been a substantial amount of cohabitation in the monastic environment, as well as a strong feeling of community.³¹ A certain legend had already grown up around the group, which received visits from important figures such as Chateaubriand and Pindare Lebrun.

OCCULTIST ATMOSPHERE

Abandoning the world and union with nature seem to have been important ideals for the collective at this time. Art historian Georges Levitine notes how in Chaillot "one senses an increasingly hermetic, illuministic atmosphere, in which the utopian idea of a perfect primitive society takes the form of a poetically conceived paramonastic, esoteric group."³²

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, an expert in the history of Western esotericism, points to the huge growth of secret societies in France and Germany during the 18th century, which challenges our conception of the period as one of reason and secularism.³³ In reaction to the Enlightenment, the increasing irrationality would develop in tendencies such as Illuminism, Christian theosophy, and Freemasonry.³⁴

In *Les Sources occultes du romantisme*, Auguste Viatte showed that the Méditateurs participated in these 18th-century theosophical and Pythagorean movements.³⁵ In this way, they formed part of what Isaiah Berlin has called the Counter-Enlightenment, a term designating those intellectuals who, during the 18th century, attempted to reaffirm the importance of wonder and religion.³⁶ Principally through Nodier and Gleizes, we can see how the group clearly took part in these traditions linked to theosophy and Pythagoreanism, also being influenced by such thinkers as Emanuel Swedenborg.

Taking into account that the Western esoteric tradition has its origins in Greece, the evolution of the Méditateurs is not inconsistent with the Greek primitivism that they displayed in Paris. Thus, it is also relevant to point out that, already in the classical world, the East was understood as the place from which ancient wisdom and magical knowledge came: Even in Greek, the word *magus* ("magician, sorcerer") comes from further east, being of Persian origin.

Influenced by the orientalist fever that followed the Napoleonic campaigns in Egypt and Syria,³⁷ and which had made turbans fashionable even in England,³⁸ the imaginary of the Méditateurs in Chaillot moved from classical Greece to the desert. Once again, their adoption of the esoteric references of their time was through a performative attitude that seems to have revolved around ritual. At the monastery, Quay is described as having won a turban, purple robe, perfumes, and sandals,³⁹ in an image that could be evoking the archetype of the oriental *magus*. Viatte refers to how Quay appeared to the group as the "god of a new religion,"⁴⁰ and grandiose descriptions by Nodier compare his friend to Jupiter, Antinous, Moses, and Jesus Christ⁴¹: "This man is pure magic, a demigod!"⁴¹

Nodier describes his daily life at the monastery in relation to Quay: "Since four months ago, I have sat down on his mat, drunk from his cup, smoked his calumet, and, in the morning and at night, I gave him a fraternal kiss."⁴² Writers such as Levitine have read this descrip-

tion as a specific ritualism, which we can relate to a kind of personality cult.⁴³ Although this description could be merely exaggerated adulation on Nodier's part, if we accept his testimony, Quay's role seems to have been similar to that of the guru of a sect.⁴⁴ Orientalism, in this sense, is tinged with esoteric theatricality.

The French writer describes a scene where the members of the group sat in a circle on rugs, eating dried figs and oranges and smoking pipes filled with oriental tobacco.⁴⁵ They read aloud from Ecclesiastes and the Apocalypse, their costumes similar to those of monks from the Middle East. In the monastery in Paris, the artists spoke of the desert and staged scenes of exalted everyday life, in which a mysterious sense of transcendence can be divined: "Dressed in white tunics, our hair floated over our shoulders. We have sat on the grass, we have spoken of the desert, of friendship, of you. We have looked towards Paris and we have wept."⁴⁶

MYSTICAL VEGETARIANISM

The influence of the writer Jean-Antoine Gleizes seems to have been important to this orientalist sensibility. Gleizes came into contact with the group in the summer of 1800. That same year, he had published his book *Les nuits élyséennes*, which placed pre-Romantic melancholy in an oriental landscape. In this prose poem, a character of Greek origin journeys to the East, taking the route of the desert,⁴⁷ a geographical voyage from Greece to the Orient in which we can see a parallel with the evolution of the references of the Méditateurs. There also seems to be an echo of the group in the appearance of the protagonist, who wears a white tunic and a long beard.⁴⁸ Throughout the book, Gleizes eulogizes animals and plants, presenting the union with nature as the only way to attain happiness.⁴⁹

Les nuits élyséennes is full of mystical references. At the end of the 18th century, the second golden age of Christian theosophy began, which in France highlighted the figure of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin. Gleizes' thinking, also imbued with Pythagoreanism, fit within these currents of the time.⁵⁰ However, his great peculiarity is the primacy that he granted the practice of vegetarianism, understood as a precondition of gnosis or spiritual ascension.

Sharing the esoteric notion of a unified tradition or *philosophia perennis*,⁵¹ Gleizes forged his own synthesis, which centered on abstaining from eating meat, invoking the vegetarianism of mythical figures such as Zoroaster, Triptolemus, and Orpheus and of the mathematician Pythagoras and the philosopher Plato.⁵² In his view, it had been the great vegetarians (including the Hindus, Pythagoreans, Orphics, Egyptians, and *true* Christians⁵³) who had been the authors of all humanity's advances.

Gleizes himself had become a vegetarian in 1798, shortly before joining the Méditateurs.⁵⁴ He introduced this diet at Chaillot,⁵⁵ where the group would subsist on no more than plants, milk, and honey. Gleizes related abstinence from eating meat to a search for solitude and the retreat to the country, understood as a place of innocence. This belief was also connected to the group's rural existence.

Following Auguste Viatte, art historian Jerry Rubin has suggested that the spiritual beliefs of the Méditateurs could be those of Gleizes himself, who would have played a role similar to that of a theologian. According to this view, the group believed in a Pythagorean metempsychosis, in a mystical pantheism, and in a theory of cosmic unity.⁵⁶ For his part, Nodier contradicts this theory, claiming that the group's theosophy was simple, able to be summed up in the vague idea of the genius of creation and an "ardent but doubting" desire for immortality.⁵⁷

NODIER AND ESOTERICISM

Viatte showed how Nodier's ambiguous relationship with the esoteric traditions could have been one of incredulous fascination.⁵⁸ The writer's testimonies here are contradictory: If

on some occasions Nodier claims not to believe in esoteric doctrines, on others he defines himself as a believer, stating that "it was so easy to allow myself to ascend on the mystical wings of Swedenborg's angels or bury myself alive in the great entelechies of [Louis Claude de] Saint-Martin, that I became a convert after the first call, like St. Paul."⁵⁹

It seems that Nodier might have been introduced to Illuminism between 1799 and 1801, which is precisely the period during which the writer was a member of the Méditateurs. This temporal coincidence helps make sense of his interest in locating the group within the genealogies of esotericism. As Gleizes is a vegetarian, Nodier presents the Méditateurs as one more link in a chain of references within a wide esoteric tradition, thereby connecting them with the *philosophia perennis*. Similarly, this interest in esotericism seems to have determined Nodier's choice of words in explaining their project: Referring to a path of revelation that is a convention of this tradition, Nodier described the various phases of the Méditateurs' ascension toward wisdom. After the fusion with nature and the abandonment of art would come madness, understood to mean a kind of revelation:

The general feeling that for them . . . took the place of religion . . . at the beginning was a love, a fanaticism towards art. Through their ascension, through their purification in the fire of their soul, they would then reach sublime nature, and art, in this second stage, no longer offered . . . anything more than an object of comparison and the resource of an artisanal knowledge. Nature itself, finally, shrank in their thoughts, because the field of their ideas had broadened. They understood that there was something marvelous and incomprehensible behind this last veil of Isis, and they withdrew from the world, then becoming mad . . . like the therapists and the saints, mad like Pythagoras and Plato.⁶⁰

Nodier likens the group to "the Illuminati of the arts," and also to a "tribe of angels." And while the first comparison clearly evokes Illuminism, the second recalls both the meetings with angels described in various esoteric practices and the names of certain groups such as the theosophical Brethren of the Angelic Life.⁶¹

The French writer's perspective was also probably influenced by his regular consumption of opium, a habit dating back to his youth. Perhaps Maurice Quay and Lucile Messageot, stricken with tuberculosis, were also users of this substance, which was then employed in the treatment of that disease.

NOSTALGIA OF THE SECRET SOCIETY

For Nodier, however, fascination with esotericism and sects was mixed with other ideas tied to mystery. The idea for a secret society had been with the writer since adolescence: In 1797, he had founded the secret society of the Philadelphes, whose name means "those who love their brothers." Grouped around five friends, including Charles Weiss, the society's insignia was a sky-blue ribbon worn on the collar, its symbolic elements the sign of the pentagon and the number five. The rituals of this group imitated those of Freemasonry:⁶² Combining mysticism, secrecy, and elements of universal brotherhood, the Philadelphes sought to rediscover the happiness of the golden age.⁶³ Although originally apolitical, it would end up acquiring anti-Jacobin overtones.

The Philadelphes came to an end when Nodier moved to Paris and got to know the Méditateurs, becoming enthusiastic about them⁶⁴ and finding parallels between the two groups.⁶⁵ As in all his writings, this comparison was tinged by the subjectivity of a Romantic who constantly fictionalized his life.⁶⁶ However, leaving aside the exaggerations and the doubt with which one always has to treat Nodier as a source, it seems clear that at Chaillot the poetics of the sect and the secret society merged behind a veil of hermetic secrecy, through which one can make out the forms of a project for the ideal society.

UTOPIA AND SECT

*I was afraid that, in the poem of this Tribe of Angels, one cannot see but an indirect satire of our proud utopias.*⁶⁷

At Chaillot, the ideal society was conceptualized in terms of isolation, proximity to nature, and the flight from the city. On various occasions, Nodier insists on a very specific reference, claiming that the group was “a living portrait of the golden age.”⁶⁸ It is important to highlight how the metaphor he chose implies both an allusion to a primitivist myth of the classical world and a fantasy utterly remote from the urban realities of the French Revolution.

Other texts allude to more contemporary examples. Already in the period of David’s studio, Delécluze compares the “humanitarian utopias” of Maurice Quay with the project of the Saint-Simonians. At Chaillot, this affinity—which does not seem intentional—could be seen to have been underlined by “aspects such as the symbolic dress code, the conventual existence, and the orientalist leanings.”⁶⁹

Levitine show how the project of Quay’s followers was closed to society at large and offered only to the small group of the chosen.⁷⁰ While restricting membership is a feature of initiation societies in general, it is the Pythagorean brotherhood in particular that comes to mind.⁷¹ We know that, submerged in mystery, this association followed strange ritual prohibitions that they shrouded in secrecy. Similarly, they adhered to vegetarianism and were known for their practice of silence, which—as happened in the case of the Méditateurs—would contribute to the legend around them.

Another previously unnoted reference is that of friendship understood as a social model. If Pythagoras himself had claimed that “among friends, everything is common,” we can see how the exclusivity and limited membership of the Méditateurs may have a very simple explanation, related to the structure that corresponds to a group of friends.

FRIENDSHIP AS A FOUNDING PRINCIPLE

During the French Revolution, friendship often served as a social metaphor, whether lauded in relation to Rousseauian and classical models or feared as a possible site of conspiracy.⁷² Linked to friendship, the concept of *fraternité* would be key in conceiving a revolutionary community of equals devoted to achieving the collective good.⁷³

This idea could have been linked to a wider set of theoretical references: It is possible that, in reviving ancient customs, the Méditateurs were also reappraising the classical world’s notion of friendship. Within the value systems of the Greek *philia* and the Roman *amicitia*, friendship was understood as an ethical good that served to constitute a society.⁷⁴ Similarly, the esoteric tradition is rich in metaphors referring to friendship, from Louis Claude de Saint-Martin’s Society of Intimates to the Masonic lodge of the Harmonious Society of Reunited Friends. In this sense, Freemasonry was seen as an idealized friendship.⁷⁵

Maybe the community of the Méditateurs adopted friendship as a foundational principle. And within the different ways of understanding the Greek *philia*, perhaps it would be interesting to take up that of Epicurus. For this thinker, friendship was a refuge from a decadent society. Epicurus recommended living hidden away in small communities, together with friends and far from the city. His school also included women and slaves, and it seems that some members were vegetarians. The philosopher Aurélien Robert indicates how the philosopher’s legacy would include the call to “multiply these experiences [of friendship] until achieving the total transformation of the world into a place of self-sufficient micro-communities.”⁷⁶

The case of the Méditateurs, however, never generated other similar communities, and the group itself died out very quickly. The early demise of its leaders was followed by the

dissolution of the Chaillot settlement. After a while, the area was even closed by the police and became inaccessible.

EPILOGUE: DEATH, MYTH, AND BOHEMIA

*The soul of these people soon devoured its envelope.*⁷⁷

To his desolation, when Charles Nodier returned to Paris after travelling, he was confronted with the death of his friends.⁷⁸ Maurice Quay died of tuberculosis at Chaillot between June 1802 and December 1803. In 1803, Lucile Messageot also died there, a victim of the same disease. We can imagine them in the ruined monastery, suffering fevers and night sweats, coughing up blood, and losing weight, in a condition that has come to be associated with Romanticism. This lunar tonality pervading the demise of the group would culminate in the suicide of another member, one Agustin D., partly inspired by Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.⁷⁹ The group as such disappeared with them, leaving a very scant pictorial output.⁸⁰

Most of the surviving Méditateurs continued their careers, with mediocre results. Reality, though, never gets in the way of legend, and the group was remembered in the 1820s and 1830s through the filter of Romanticism.⁸¹ We shall never know to what extent the story of the group was embellished by the accounts of Delécluze and Nodier, and it is very difficult to separate historical reality from mythologizing. Providing a genealogy for the artists of that time, the legacy of the Méditateurs would have functioned as a first step in the construction of the myth of the bohemian artist, with its strange mixture of politics, ritual, religiosity, collectivism, and leadership located between social change and flight from the world. ●

1. See Philippe Bordes, “L’élégance républicain à travers le portrait masculin” (1789–99) in Christophe Leribault (dir.), *Figures du Dandy, de Van Dyck à Oscar Wilde* (proceedings of the colloquium that took place on 13 September 2016, at the Petit Palais-Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris), 52.
2. See Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David After the Terror* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999) and Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).
3. Philippe Bordes, “Jacques-Louis David et ses élèves: les stratégies de l’atelier,” *Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l’art*, 1, 2014, 103.
4. Delécluze, Étienne-Jean, *Louis David, son école et son temps* (Paris: Didier Libraire-Éditeur, 1855), 20.
5. Talma was one of the first actors to wear a historical costume onstage, becoming famous for his Neoclassical characterization.
6. Delécluze, *Louis David*, 22–23.
7. Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).
8. Saskia Hanselaar cites two lost manuscripts that Lucile had composed during her involvement with the Méditateurs between 1799 and 1802—*Le Tombeau d’Eléonore* and *Essai sur les harmonies et la mélancolie des arts*. See Saskia Hanselaar, “Marguerite-Françoise-Lucile Messageot,” *Société Internationale pour l’Étude des Femmes de l’Ancien Régime*, 2014, at http://siefar.org/dictionnaire/fr/Marguerite-Fran%3%A7oise-Lucie_Messageot [consulted: March 12, 2018].
9. Delécluze refers to other members only by their initials and highlights the success of the group among younger students. Delécluze, 71.

10. Antoine-Hilaire-Henri Perié came from a cultured and prominent family of Languedoc parliamentarians, and his father was also a poet of some reputation. In 1799, he was already in David's studio and a friend of Maurice Quay's. Later on, he attained a good social position, becoming the director of the archaeological museum and the drawing school of Nîmes, although he would not succeed as a painter. Georges Levitine, *The Dawn of Bohemianism: The Barbu Rebellion and Primitivism in Neoclassical France* (London and Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 50.
11. Jean Broc was born around 1779, entered David's studio before 1798, and received the *Prix d'encouragement* in the Salons of 1800 and 1801, the same year that he left David's studio (1801). His initial relative success would later decline. Levitine, *op. cit.*, 49.
12. Hanselaar, "Marguerite-Françoise-Lucie Messageot."
13. Levitine, 55.
14. The main source for the Parisian stage of the *Méditateurs* is the text by David's student Etienne Jean Delécluze, who was at David's studio when the group was formed: Delécluze, *Louis David*. See also the monograph dedicated to the group by Levitine, *op. cit.*
15. See Elizabeth Amann, *Dandyism in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), and Richard Wrigley, *The Politics of Appearances. Representations of Dress in Revolutionary France* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2002).
16. William Vaughan, "The First Artistic Brotherhood: Fraternité in the Age of Revolution," in Laura Worowitz and William Vaughan, *Artistic Brotherhoods in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Ashgate, 2000), 40.
17. Amann, *Dandyism*.
18. Delécluze, p. 90.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
21. See James Henry Rubin, "New documents on the *Méditateurs*: Baron, Gerard, Mantegna and French Romanticism circa 1800," *Burlington Magazine*, no. 117 (1975).
22. *Ibid.*, 789.
23. Charles Nodier, "Méditations du cloître," in *Romans de Charles Nodier* (Paris: 1850), 85-86. First edition, 1803.
24. The monastery of the Visitation de Sainte Marie in Chaillot was founded in 1652. Since 1878, the Trocadero Palace has stood in its place.
25. Louis Madelin, *La Colline de Chaillot* (1926, 40-41), quoted in Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 73.
26. *Ibid.*, 74.
27. Nodier to Charles Weiss, Letter XI, A. Estignard, ed., *Correspondance inedite de Charles Nodier 1796-1844* (Paris: Librairie du Moniteur Universel 13, 1876), 22. The letters in which Nodier writes to his friend Weiss about the *Méditateurs* are from 1802.
28. Alexander Laurent and Horace Hue were sons of the seascape painter Jean-François Hue. Fabre d'Englantine bore the same name as his father, a famous dramatist guillotined during the terror. The son later became a naval engineer. Nodier mentions Jenny in Letter XII, Estignard, *Correspondance inedite*, 25.
29. Nodier probably came into contact with the group through Lucile during the winter of 1800-1801. Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 69.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Nodier says that they "lived in common." Quoted in Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 75.
32. *Ibid.*, 79.
33. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions. A Historical Introduction* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 137.
34. *Ibid.*, 138.
35. Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du Romantisme: Illuminisme-Theosophie. 1770-1820*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion Éditeur, 1965), 154. First published 1928.
36. Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997).
37. The Napoleonic campaign in Egypt and Syria took place between 1798 and 1801, resulting in French fashion adopting exotic elements in which the Egyptian was mixed in the magma of orientalism. In this sense, we can recall how Sartre said that "at the origin of the picturesque is war": Sartre, *Situations V* (1954), cited by Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 53. Text first published in *Art in America* in 1983.
38. James Laver, *Breve historia del traje y de la moda* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2017), 137.
39. "Brodequins." Nodier, Letter XIII to Weiss, in Estignard, *Correspondance inédite*, 29.
40. Viatte, *Les sources occulte*, 154.
41. Nodier "Deux beaux types de la plus parfaite organisation humaine," in Delécluze, *Louis David*, 74-76. First published in *Essais d'un jeune barde* (Paris and Besançon: 1804), 87-95.
42. Nodier, in Estignard, *Correspondance inédite*, 29. Quoted in Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 80.
43. Nodier, Letter XIII to Weiss, in Estignard, *Correspondance inédite*, 29.
44. Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 80.
45. If Nodier describes his friend as a kind of divinity, he also uses religious terminology to describe Lucile, with whom he was in love. Marie Messenier-Nodier, woman of letters and Nodier's daughter, said that for her father "her memory was a cult, and the love that he had for her an idolatry." Marie Messenier-Nodier, *Charles Nodier: épisodes et souvenirs de sa vie 1780-1844* (Paris: 1867), 91.
46. Nodier, Letter XII to Weiss, Estignard, *Correspondance inédite*, 25.
47. *Ibid.*, 22.
48. Jean Antoine Gleizes, *Les nuits élyséennes* (Paris: Pierre Didot l'Aîné), 7.
49. *Ibid.*, 3.
50. *Ibid.*, 103-104.
51. The historian Ceri Crossley indicates Gleizes' affinity with writers such as Antoine Court de Gebelin, Jean Sylvain Bailly, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, and Fabre d'Olivet. Ceri Crossley, *Consumable Metaphors: Attitudes Towards Animals and Vegetarianism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 42.
52. A. Faivre, *Western Esotericism. A Concise History* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 6.
53. Viatte, *Les sources*, 155.
54. Crossley, *Consumable Metaphors*, 51.
55. "Jean Antoine Gleizes 1773-1843," in Howard Williams and Carol J. Adams' *The Ethics of Diet: A Catena of Authorities Deprecatory of the Practice of Flesh-Eating*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 208-18 (first edition, 1883). Fragment available at <https://ivu.org/history/>

williams/gleizes.html (consulted April 4, 2018)). In 1821, Ernest Bonejoy, a leading scientific vegetarian of the time, described Gleizes as the greatest vegetarian philosopher of the 19th century. Ernest Bonnejoy, *Le Végétarisme et le régime végétarien rationnel* (Paris: Baillière, 188). Cited in Crossley, *Consumable Metaphors*, 37. See this book's chapter on Gleizes, "The Post-Revolutionary Vegetarian Synthesis: Jean-Antoine Gleizes (1773–1843)," 37–62.

56. Following Gleizes, Nodier compares eating meat with anthropophagy. Charles Nodier, *Revèries littéraires, morales et fantastiques* (Brussels: J. P. Meline, Libraire-Editeur, 1832), 32–33.

57. Rubin, "New Documents", 789.

58. Nodier, *Les Barbus*, in Delécluze, *Louis David*, 442.

59. Viatte, *Les sources*, 145–146.

60. *Ibid.*, 150.

61. Nodier, *Les Barbus*, in Delécluze, *Louis David*, 442. Despite this claim, it seems that poetry was written at Chaillot and Hue, or at least that seascapes were painted

62. This group had been formed in Amsterdam in 1668 by Johann Georg Gichtel (1630–1710), follower of the theologian and philosopher Jakob Boehme.

63. Nodier's father was a Freemason. The group's own name could be read as a reference to the Philalethes, a masonic "academy" of knowledge and occultism. It could also be related to certain esoteric groups such as the English theosophical community of the 17th century that, under the name of the Philadelphian Society, gathered around John Pordage and Jane Leade.

64. Marguerite Henry-Rosier, *La vie de Charles Nodier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), 49. In Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 70.

65. Claude Rétat, "Les Philadelphes de Nodier (*Histoire des sociétés secrètes de l'armée, 1815*)," in *Politica Hermetica*, no. 21 (*La tentation du secret: groupes et sociétés initiatiques entre ésotérisme et politique du XVIIIe au XXe siècle*, 2007), 59.

66. In 1802, he wrote to his friend Charles Weiss, telling him that he had found a society that had more in common with Philadelphie than any other.

67. Léonce Pingaud, *La Jeunesse de Charles Nodier* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1977), 6–7

68. Nodier, *Les Barbus*, in Delécluze, *Louis David*, 446.

69. Letter from Nodier to Weiss, quoted in Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 75–76.

70. Neil McWilliam, *Dreams of Happiness: Social Art and the French Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 30, fn 98.

71. Levitine suggests the influence on the group of the book *Ardinghello und die Glückseligen Insel*, which portrays the history of a colony of artists on the Greek islands of Paros and Naxos. Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 77.

72. Both Nodier and Gleizes were influenced by Pythagoreanism, so this reference does not seem remote from the group.

73. Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror: Virtue, Friendship and Authenticity in the French Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Also, by the same author, "Fatal Friendships", in *French Historical Studies*, 31, 2008, 51–76.

74. Marcel David, *Fraternité et Révolution française* (Paris: Aubier, 1987). Concerning the revolutionary notions of friendship, I would like to thank the generous editors of *apricota* for their valuable insights and references.

75. Aurélien Robert, "Penser avec l'amitié", in *Penser depuis la frontière. Ateliers de recherche*, Conference at the École des Beaux Arts Nantes Saint-Nazaire, March 20, 2018 (text provided by the author). See Jean-Claude Fraisse, *Philia. La notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique. Essai sur*

un problème perdu et retrouvé (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1975).

76. Kenneth Loiseau, *Brotherly Love: Freemasonry and Male Friendship in Enlightenment France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

77. Robert, "Penser avec l'amitié," 10.

78. Nodier, "Les Barbus", 440.

79. Nodier would dedicate a laudatory and lamenting text to them in which he idealized both. "Deux beaux," Delécluze, *Louis David*, 76.

80. Delécluze, *Louis David.*, 92–93, fn.

81. Levitine claims that "either by chance or by purpose, the sect preserved its essential virtue of self-effacement." Levitine, *Dawn of Bohemianism*, 83.

82. Vaughan, *Artistic Brotherhoods*, 43. This continuity with the ideals of the 1830s is underlined by the emergence of a group of imitators led by one Monrose, who had let his hair and beard grow, and who around 1805 decided to go with his friends for an Ossianic workshop in the Bois de Boulogne, where they were arrested for lighting a bonfire in the wood. Delécluze, *Louis David*, 329–330.

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