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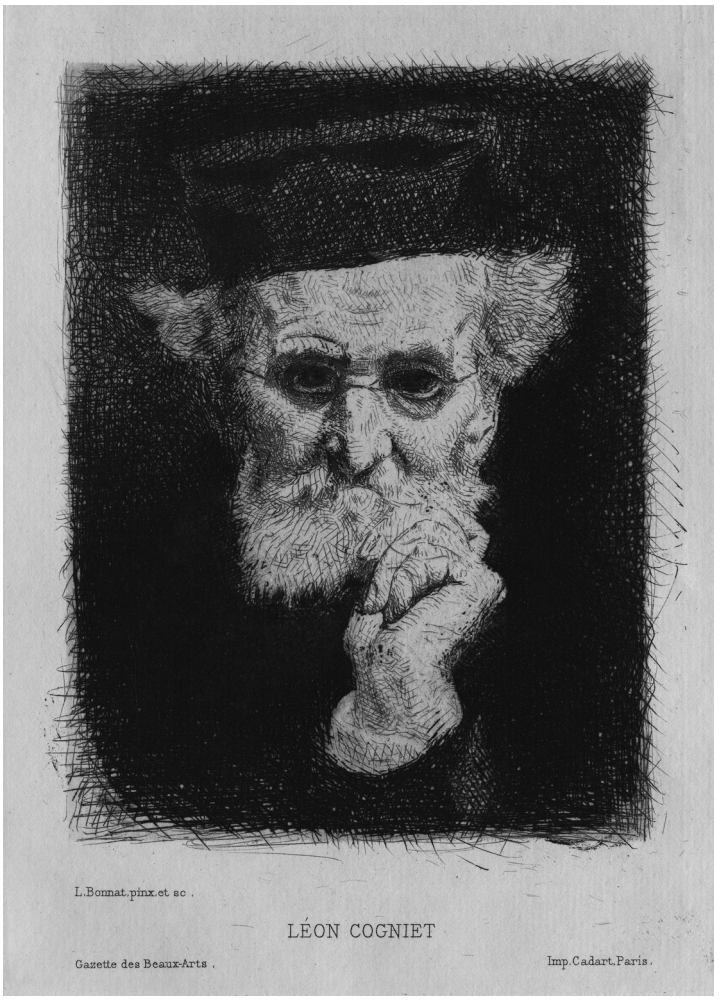
INTRODUCTION

Everyone knows that the exchange between teachers and students is partly a psychological encounter, including in the visual arts. How to approach this encounter as a historical proposition perhaps seems difficult, including in the visual arts. But that is what this book is about, notably for (mostly) French artists of the Romantic age and into the decades after. And notably as the relations that prevailed between teachers and students emerged in the nineteenth century as an abiding concern, including how those relations could go awry. Since much of this book considers stories told by teachers about students, and by students about teachers, perhaps it is helpful to begin with one that does both.

One of the obligations that fell to an artist elected to a chair at the Académie des beaux-arts, one of the five academies that made up the Institut de France, an exalted learned society charged with stewarding the nation's legacy in the arts and sciences, was to deliver an oration upon the death of their predecessor. On February 17, 1883, this honor fell to the Third Republic history painter, portraitist, and teacher Léon Bonnat (1833–1922). Bonnat had been elected to the chair previously occupied by Léon Cogniet, a prominent Romantic painter who had died in 1880 at the age of eighty-six and who, thirty years earlier, had himself been Bonnat's teacher. Only recently, Bonnat had completed a portrait of Cogniet, seated in a chair and dressed in studio garb, palette and brushes at his side, and his wizened face gazing out at the spectator. An etching after the painting, also in Bonnat's hand, saw wide circulation, particularly following Cogniet's death (fig. 1).[1] Not an etching after the whole painting, however. All we see is Cogniet's face, with his cap on his head and his hand under his chin. His eyes are deep black with just the hint of a pupil, while his shoulders and torso veritably dissolve into inky black. And although he seems very near, he gazes at us from somewhere impenetrable, as if addressing us from the other side.

Etching, painting, and oration collaborate in Bonnat's hands on behalf of a bond now definitively severed. But considering what Bonnat actually said about his teacher, this elegiac work was not uncomplicated. Cogniet had been appointed professor at the famous Ecole des beaux-arts in 1851, where he remained for twelve years. He had been teaching since the 1830s, however, and was said to have attracted many students drawn to his reputation as a liberal instructor. He also collaborated on an atelier for women, led principally by his sister and pupil Marie-Amélie Cogniet. Bonnat, for his part, arriving in Paris from Madrid, joined Cogniet's studio in 1854, remaining three years. But as he explained thirty years later, the experience left him disappointed. Cogniet, it seemed to Bonnat, did not take his role as instructor seriously. Whether he was bored, worn out, or sick was not clear, but he turned up infrequently: "I got to know him late in life, when, tired either due to his already long career or his very poor health, he rarely



1 Léon Bonnat, *Léon Cogniet*, 1881. Etching, 10 ¼ × 6 ¾ in (26 × 17 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art.

visited his students' studios." Whole months passed "without his eagerly awaited visit." This left Bonnat mightily irritated and downright bewildered: "I was very surprised by this neglect at the time, the abandonment that left us in a state of doubt, a state of indecision, and almost complete bewilderment as to how we should proceed with our work."[2]

Bewildered, disappointed, even abandoned—not a good memory of one's teacher. But as Bonnat explained, what he did not know then but knew later was that Cogniet's absence was purposeful. Not turning up was part of the teacher's pedagogy. For Bonnat, this was clarifying: "I have since realized that this abandonment was merely imaginary and most probably deliberate." Cogniet, Bonnat explained, wanted students to find

their own path. He believed that "discovering things for oneself" and "cautiously experimenting" was "the best way to learn." What is more, the teacher's absence promoted "mutual learning," that is to say, students teaching each other. "Above all," Bonnat explained, Cogniet did not want his pupils to imitate him. He "did not wish to impose the way in which he perceived, apprehended, and interpreted life upon his pupils."[3] Don't imitate me, Cogniet says. But how? Perhaps it seemed to Cogniet that, regardless of his resolve, he could not avoid imposing himself on his students, that it was involuntary on his part, and hence he needed to stay away. But probably, Cogniet meant the reverse. He stayed away because it was his pupils who sought to follow his example, yielding to a compulsion beyond their control. In either instance, the key point stands: Cogniet treated the exchange between teacher and student as a *psychological* space that the teacher must manage on his pupils' behalf, and manage most of all the authority that fell to him as instructor.

Whether any of this was actually on Cogniet's mind is not quite the question. The anecdote is mostly about Bonnat—his expectations as a student, and even more, how he recalled them now that he was himself a teacher. And from this point of view, the story has still more to say. The lack of direction, the casual manner in which Cogniet approached the job—all this must have been frustrating from the point of view of Bonnat's own bildungsroman, as if his own coming of age as an artist was less purposeful than haphazard. But the tale also contains something darker. Thirty years down the road, Bonnat explains with relief that Cogniet's failure to turn up was all part of the master plan. But what if Cogniet neglected his students because, as Bonnat feared, he just didn't care? With his teacher now in the grave, Bonnat rewrites the scene. The year is 1883, but we may be confident Bonnat has been turning this question over in his mind for decades—a pupil may forget the totality of what they were taught, but they never forget the experience of being instructed. Bonnat rewrites the scene because the alternative was intolerable. Intolerable, not simply because he paid his fees and expected actual instruction. Intolerable because instruction is an affective experience most of all. Intolerable, in other words, because Cogniet's absence left Bonnat feeling undesired, a prospect so disturbing that it was of enormous relief to realize that although absent, indeed, because of that absence, Cogniet had been thinking of him all along!

We owe the phrase "imitation is suicide" to American Transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in his 1841 essay "Self-Reliance" called on every person ("every man," Emerson wrote) to "be his own star"—to take himself "as his portion." For moral education, there could be no greater purpose, just as the alternative was perilous: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion."[4] The artists discussed in this book were less readers of Emerson than heirs to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but his call that they take themselves as their portion was on point. The chapters that follow have a lot to say about how practices of

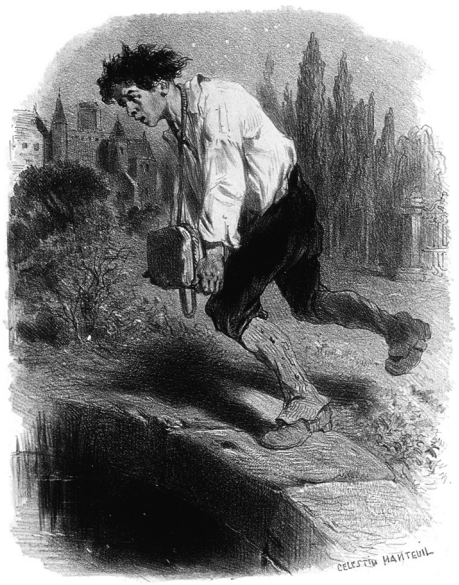
imitation might be transformed in an effort to make each artist "their own star." Such concerns would prove especially intractable in the visual arts, where imitation not only structured social behavior but operated as a core attribute of art theory and practice. For example, in the so-called theory of imitation, so often debated and discussed in art academies. But also in the most granular aspects of instruction, for example the common practice of learning to draw by copying other works of art, including reproductions. And intractable because when it came to making a student their own star, the principal obstacle might be the pupil's tendency to imitate their teacher. A concern, to recall Bonnat's anecdote, that was not bottom-up but top-down. It fell to teachers precisely to discourage such imitations, in short to set students free.

The Scene of Instruction

Frequently mythologized if less often interrogated, the encounter between students and teachers emerged in nineteenth-century art as newly charged terrain. For students, to be sure, but also for teachers, as if each was now obliged to recalculate the character of the relations that obtained between them. The encounter was both real and imagined. Sited in the studio across actual practices of instruction, it was also spoken of and rehearsed, retained and transformed in memory, in short, what we might term a "scene." Harold Bloom spoke of the "scene of instruction," or as he also called it, the "primal scene of instruction" in *A Map of Misreading*, published in 1975 and part of a famous suite of studies that explore the dynamics of authority and priority in the English-language poetic tradition.[5] His phrase refers to Freud's notion of a primal scene, developed by Freud in 1914 in his analysis of Sergei Pankejeff, better known as the "Wolf Man," whose account of a childhood dream led Freud to posit that Pankejeff had witnessed his parents having sex, perceived at the time as an act of violence. Needless to say, allusions to primal scenes now circulate very casually in modern criticism, typically absent of any reference to childhood sexuality or to personality development, as in the case of the present pages. For my part, and to stay with the visual arts, I borrow the phrase to underscore the potently psychic character of an interpersonal encounter at once sited in the studio but also retained in and reshaped by memory. An encounter, indeed, not only remembered and imagined, but spoken of, interrogated, and evoked across a large body of criticism, recollection, and reminiscence, which is one reason why we may write its history. Right away, let us underline that such scenes did not necessarily entail conflict, and outright disasters were perhaps rare. Nevertheless, even scenes idealized in memory as serene were affectively charged, and hence must be interrogated as precisely idealized. And let us add, too, that other approaches to interpersonal imitation have been still more relevant for these pages, notably the philosophical anthropology of René Girard. Not by accident did *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, first published in 1961 and the earliest iteration of Girard's mimetic theory, target the mythos of Romantic singularity, whose cult of spontaneous and unmediated desires rested, in his account, on a spectacular self-deception.[6]

For nineteenth-century artists, the perils contained in such self-deception lay at a particular historical crossroad. Of course, the relations between teachers and students in the visual arts have always been affective terrain. But the establishment of public art schools as normative for artistic education helped give those relations new shape and urgency, especially as guilds and similar corporate structures were either abolished or dissolved. Where previously such corporate structures had regulated relations between master and pupil, nineteenth-century Europe witnessed the nearly complete "academization" of the artist's education, as Nicolas Pevsner wittily put it in 1940—in fact, a global development.[7] This book is not a history of art instruction, however. To stay only with France, such important topics as the reform of the curriculum of the Ecole des beaux-arts, instruction in private studios beyond elite institutions, the shifting demographics of art students, and the role of the state and institutional governance, have seen significant attention from scholars and remain mostly in the background. On the other hand, these pages have profited from new literature that centers, as the phrase goes, on student experience, for example Séverine Sofio's historical sociology of women's artistic formation, along with other work around artistic training and formation in the Romantic era and beyond.[8] But to reiterate, our attention in these pages falls less to how instruction was organized than to how it was spoken of and remembered, and, for that matter, not restricted to students. At the risk of repetition, I make the case for the scene of instruction as a historical artifact that was both real and imagined—a primordial site of vocational formation that, for students and teachers alike, was so saturated with psychic energy that disentangling reality from recollection is sometimes not possible and no longer the point.

Mostly I treat artists trained in Paris, although not necessarily French. And we could undertake a similar analysis in other art-making capitals, that is to say, wherever academies of art enlisted young men into studios explicitly to train for prizes for which the vast majority had little chance. In France in particular, however, the global prestige of its studios charged relationships between teachers and students with particular virulence. Famously, no teaching studio was more charged than that of Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), particularly as relations unfolded with a brilliant first generation of disciples, a critical site of male artistic sociability and topic of Thomas Crow's landmark study of 1995.[9] We will have occasion in the chapters ahead to consider the putatively fraught inheritance of David and his school. But underline the word putative, because efforts in the Romantic age and beyond to wrestle with David's legacy say much more about shifting conceptions of authority in the teacher-student exchange than they do about how David or his peers actually taught. At the same time, the bonds of filiation explored in these pages exceed the dynamics of any single teaching studio. They comprise both men and women, both artists who are known today and many more who are not, both "pupils of" and "teachers of," along with still other agents who found themselves, in one manner or another, entangled in such bonds. To put it more strongly, the decline of artisanal and corporatist ties allowed the work of desire to colonize the scene



2 Célestin François Nanteuil, *The Suicide*, 1830s. Lithograph, 8 ¼ × 6 ¾ in (21 × 17 cm). Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA.

of instruction as one of its homes. And this was perhaps never more evident, to call up the second theme of this book, than when that scene was ruptured. In this regard, Emerson's phrase has special relevance to these pages. It was not what he meant, but he probably would have responded "just so." Namely, "imitation is suicide" was not just a metaphor.

Scenes of Self-Destruction

Whether more artists took their lives in the nineteenth century than at other times is not easy to establish, but also not quite the point. Rather, we know more about them because suicide was more openly analyzed and discussed, particularly as physicians in the early nineteenth century made the case for suicide as a form of mental illness, an understanding that helped draw back the veil of religious and moral prohibition. Reports of suicide also saw vastly expanded public coverage, notably in the columns of the *faits divers*, a famous invention of the French press that, from the 1830s onward, supplied readers with a daily diet of crimes and calamities experienced by ordinary persons, outside the sphere of politics or major events. Such *fait divers* were rapidly assimilated into visual culture. *The Suicide* by Célestin François Nanteuil (1813–73), dated to the 1830s, features a young man about to drown himself in a public park, a setting that underscores the sense of modern urban incident (fig. 2). Similar depictions circulated widely into the next century, often scenes of drowning, often in the Seine, and often women. No anonymous suicide saw greater resonance after the 1880s than that of "the unknown woman of the Seine"—*l'inconnue de la Seine*, whose plaster mask, allegedly made at the Paris morgue and widely reproduced, saw legendary currency among artists and writers into the 1930s.[10] It seemed no accident that this Mona Lisa of drownings, as she was tagged, was said to have been an artist's model and was perhaps victim of a fatal desire born in the studio—although whether she took her own life or fell, whether the mask even belonged to a drowned woman, or anything else about her, is simply unknown.

Suicide prevailed in the Romantic age as a cultural, philosophical, and literary artifact, a privileged, even exalted attribute associated with elite natures in the arts and in politics. The topic has seen an abundant literature and we could call up any number of prestigious examples, but to evoke two bookends relevant to our own analysis, we could

to cite the contagion said to have been unleashed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's epistolary novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* of 1774, or the suicidal impulses detailed by the youthful Napoleon in his journals, published in 1842 and widely discussed. Needless to add, visual artists were understood to be vulnerable to this philosophical malady, a susceptibility amplified by the insecure character of an artist's career, and particularly as religious and state patronage declined and larger and larger numbers of artists sought careers in an expanded marketplace.[11] Once again, whether more artists took their lives in the nineteenth century than in previous eras is something we don't know. But not only did their suicides attract public attention, they did so because they were artists. A career prone to derail was an occupational hazard, traceable as it seemed to a historic transformation that saw artists trade the security of religious and corporate ties in favor of an all-embracing vocation that was at once elite, marginal, and newly unstable.

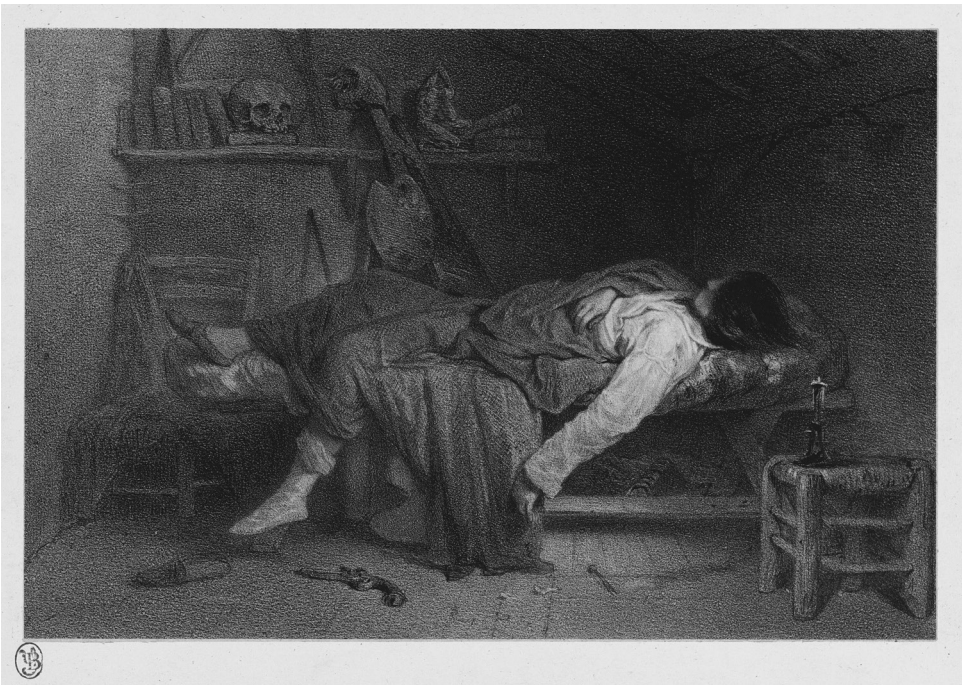
Imagery on this theme is substantial—another kind of scene frequently rehearsed in nineteenth-century artistic biography and illustration. Bitter, ironic and, by the fin de siècle, perhaps contrived, as in the case, for example, of *Art, Misery, Desperation, Madness!*, painted around 1880 by the Belgian Jules Blin, born in 1851 and about whom exceedingly little is known (fig. 3). Contrived, because frustration seems so abundantly indexed: the artist overturns a chair, knocks a painting off the easel, breaks his palette in two, smashes a plaster cast, throws down his brushes, and stomps on a painting before reaching for his gun. Nevertheless, what these pages do not propose is to treat such scenes as recapitulating a broadly Romantic mythology of the outsider, failed, or neglected artist. They are not just ironic imagery but urgent, richly imaginative modes of meaning-making mobilized in text and illustration and touching on the most intimate levels of artistic experience, its terminus most of all. And although catalyzed by real events, whose terminus might not be so clear. Take the case of *The Suicide*, by Orientalist painter Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803–60), completed in late 1835 or 1836, and also reproduced as a lithograph (fig. 4). A man lies on a bed, a pistol and a note lying beneath his outstretched arm. In the background, we see a palette, an easel, a small figurine, and some books, testimony of the vocation that had once fueled this man's ambition but finally drove him to death. As it happens, Decamps's setting of disillusion was prompted by the death of Swiss painter Léopold Robert, one of the most successful painters in Europe, who took his life in March 1835. Decamps's account in no way resembles Robert's scene of self-destruction, but that seems not to have mattered to the dramatist and politician Etienne Arago, whom the press reported as owning a drawing for (or after) the painting called precisely *The Death of Robert*.[12] The fact that Decamps's *Suicide* looks nothing like what happened to Robert is as interesting art-historically as if it did, a point we will have ample opportunity to rehearse.

Such fatal denouements shaped readings of an artist's work, last works of art most of all. Léopold Robert offers a case in point, but for now, take the example of the Napoleonic portraitist Robert Lefèvre, who in October 1830 slit his throat at the age

3 Jules Blin, *Art, Misery, Desperation, Madness!*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 57 ½ × 45 ½ in (146 × 115 cm). Musée des beaux-arts de Dijon.

of seventy-five. Afflicted, we are told, with a persecution complex, Lefèvre took it as a sign that the end was near when, during the riots that July, a stray bullet pierced his studio window on the Quai d'Orsay, tearing a hole through his *Apotheosis of Christ* as the artist sat at the easel. Following his death, the painting was sent to the museum in Caen with the hole still visible—and it was still visible when his biographer relayed the tale in 1902 (the painting was presumed destroyed in 1944).[13] The bullet, of course, was no such sign, except that for Lefèvre it seemed exactly that, at least as those around him struggled to understand how circumstances converged on the artist to impel such a violent denouement. A last painting served in this regard as a privileged artifact. It could seem to bear a message or to give uncanny testimony, as if artist and work were knit together in mysterious union as the curtain fell.

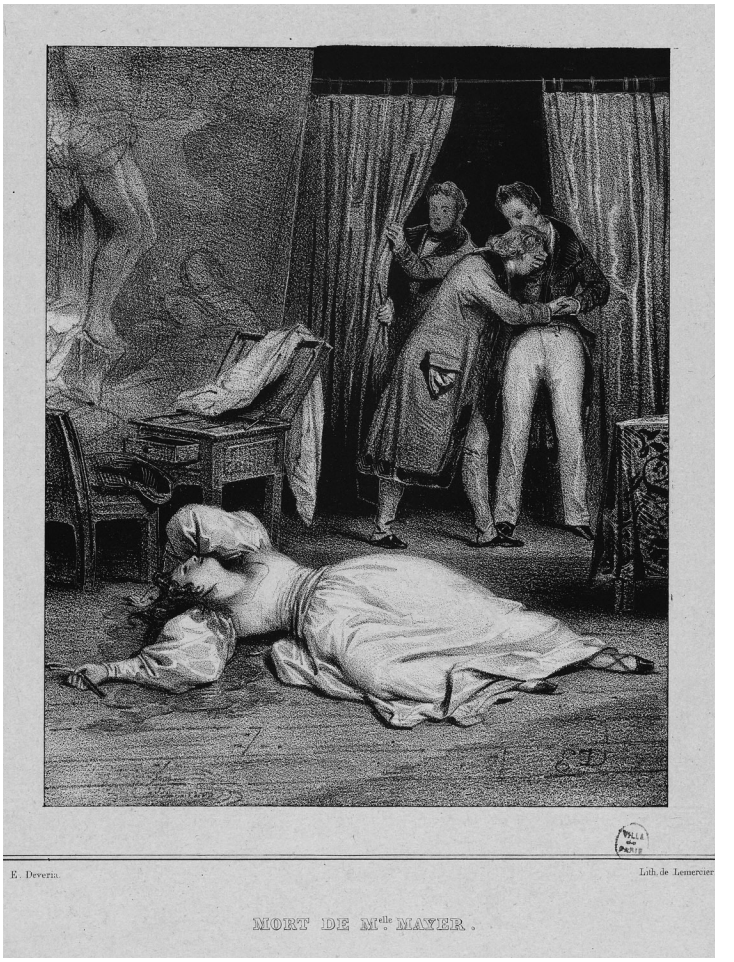
In May 1821, painter Constance Mayer slit her throat at the age of forty-seven in the living quarters of her partner Pierre-Paul Prud'hon (1758–1823). Mayer was also Prud'hon's collaborator and his former pupil, circumstances that invariably shaped accounts of her career and her death. There is more to say about how this legendary catastrophe was written into nineteenth-century artistic biography, but in the present context let us single out the role assigned to a work of art.[14] Painter and illustrator Eugène Devéria (1805–65) portrayed the fatal scene in a lithograph published a decade later in the Romantic periodical *L'Artiste* (fig. 5). Here, Prud'hon discovers Mayer lying on the floor in a pool of blood, his razor in her hand. Behind her, we can just make out his unfinished *Crucifixion*, on which Prud'hon had been actively working, and which he was said to have completed in elegiac consolation before passing away two years later. Perhaps Mayer herself was at work on the painting before she felt an untimely temptation. One wonders if Mayer has taken the razor from his desk—we are meant to notice the open drawer, although why a shaving razor would be kept there is unclear. At any rate, Devéria's portrayal is fiction, even the placement of the *Crucifixion* is imagined. One of the most copied paintings of the Romantic era, it was not in the apartment where Mayer took her life, but in Prud'hon's studio nearby (fig. 6). Whether Devéria knew that does not matter, although details circulated widely. He



4 Eugène Leroux, after Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, *Le Suicide*, 1846. Lithograph on chine collé, 5 ½ × 8 ¼ in (14 × 21 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

understood the painting needed to be on scene. Prud'hon's *Crucifixion* is witness to the catastrophe, designed to carry the trauma and already enlisted to serve as his spiritual companion to the tomb.

The idea of works of art as embedding such messages might ring disciplinary alarms. No limit of art historical energy has gone into dismantling the proposition that an artist's interior life drives the meaning of their work, most of all in the case of suicides.[15] Ground zero for this proposition is without a doubt Vincent van Gogh's *Crows over Wheatfield*, painted in Auvers-sur-Oise in July 1890, and which has been said to betray a sense of menacing, anxious instability, just as the last painting of an artist on the cusp of suicide should. Explanation in this regard has been abundant, to the point of overdetermining the painting's iconography: originally exhibited as *Wheatfield with Black*



5 Eugène Devéria, *Death of Constance Mayer*, 1831. Lithograph, 14 ¼ × 10 ½ in (36 × 27 cm). Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

Birds, from around 1914 the birds were termed crows, "undoubtedly to emphasize the painting's morbid symbolism," as Carel Blotkamp has noted.[16] In 1946, Meyer Shapiro developed an account of *Crows over Wheatfield* as a neurotic defense by an artist on the verge of disintegration, an "arithmetical order of colors and shapes" designed to "resist decomposition." Other psychoanalytic and broadly psychological accounts flourish into the present. Never mind that *Crows over Wheatfield* was not Van Gogh's last painting, as we are repeatedly advised in the modern art historical literature—and not least of all by the museum where the painting hangs, as if the fallacy needs refuting with every visit.[17]

We are understandably skeptical about treating works of art as able to be unlocked with a pathographic master key. And while the present pages do not undertake explanations of this kind, they do attempt to write some of their history. And testimony, let us recognize, could seem stranger still. Poverty was the message of the double suicide portrayed by Octave Tassaert (1800–1874), whose *Unhappy Family* or *Suicide* saw a sensational reception at the Paris Salon of 1850, and which Tassaert would repeat a number of times, earning for himself the epithet "painter of misery" (fig. 7). The victims in this case were not artists, and to say anything more about the painting would lead us off track, although it is important to underline its allusion to a similar subject by Mayer—her own last painting, which Prud'hon would finish as both homage and consolation. Tassaert, for his part, after falling into obscurity, gassed himself in his seventy-fifth year, allegedly with the same stove he had depicted in his *Unhappy Family* three decades earlier. It was an irony that his few biographers did not fail to cite, one more example of the death-bed figuration that nineteenth-century criticism produced in abundance. And while it may seem far-fetched to imagine an artist taking his life by imitating one of his own paintings, we shall consider how a more famous artist, four decades earlier, was understood to have done just that.

No surprise, last paintings of suicides figured in nineteenth-century fiction. Master Frenhofer, enigmatic protagonist of Honoré de Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece*, dies after burning his pictures. Balzac leaves it for the reader to decide whether Frenhofer took his own life, but the story, first published in 1831, was revised in 1837 with two recent artist suicides in mind.[18] And let us underline the pedagogical character of the novella, which tells the story of young Nicholas Poussin coming to apprentice himself to a master, supported by a lover and model for whom his art is a rival. Emile Zola, unsurprisingly, avoids ambiguity: in *The Masterpiece* of 1886, Claude Lantier hangs himself in his studio before the unfinished picture that destroyed his marriage and drove him mad. But to stay in an instructional key, we could cite the fatal denouement of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's 1833 novel *The Studio of a Painter*, whose redolent portrayal of Romantic atelier culture stages a double catastrophe across tropes of sexual difference. The novel concludes with a young German artist, Yorick, shooting himself at the funeral of Ondine, whom he met in the atelier of her uncle (Desbordes-Valmore's uncle was himself a painter). No last painting, but Yorick gives Ondine lessons, and that is where the trouble starts. Her desire catalyzed, she is excluded

6 Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, *Christ on the Cross*, 1822. Oil on canvas, 109 ½ × 65 ¼ in (278 × 166 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

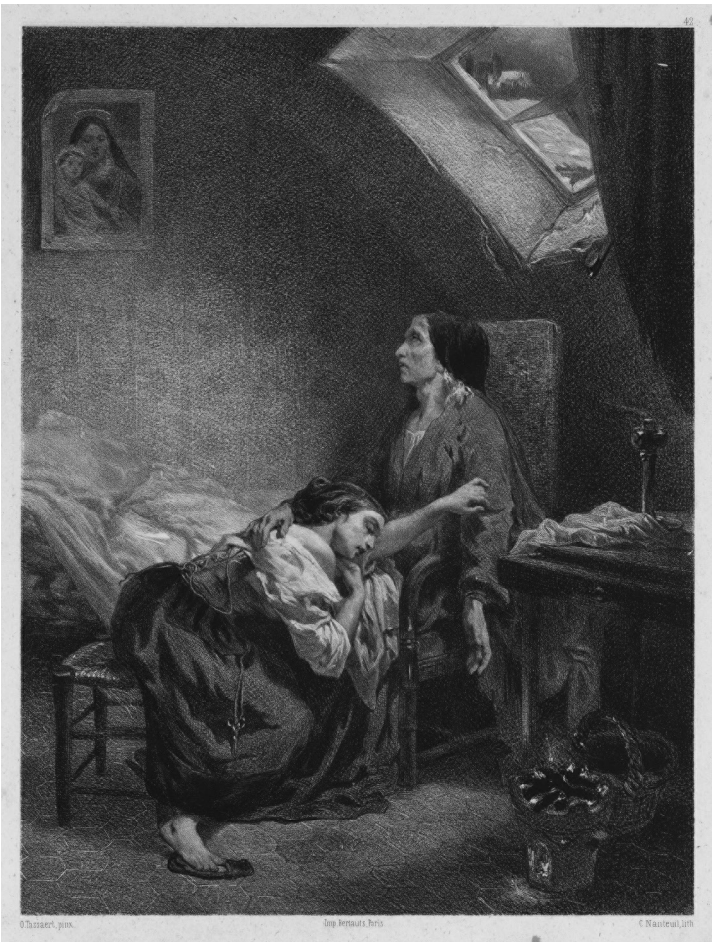
from the fraternal community of students and effectively dies of that exclusion.[19] I return to Desbordes-Valmore's tale only in passing, but we will not have to search the pages of fiction to see how desire nurtured at the scene of instruction could seem to derail. Disasters befell artists all the time, but not until the Romantic age did they often seem traceable to what happened when students and teachers met. And "seem traceable" is the operative phrase, since the conviction that education was at fault, or that it was something education could even fix, arose from a changed understanding of how education operated. "Seem traceable" is the operative phrase, too, because those disasters might date to long after an artist's student days were over.

Enacted Biographies

Some of the artists discussed in these pages were well-known; many others are barely known at all. Typically, I explore their careers across the rich and varied corpus of nineteenth-century art writing. Not only Salon criticism and other exhibition reviews, but artistic biography, reminiscence, obituaries, and still other forms of writing that circulated across a vastly expanded national and international press. The public character of an artistic career was also nourished by a vastly expanded corpus of illustration, a multifaceted visual economy that included images of artists in their studios, reproductions of their work, varied settings of artistic sociability, and still other artist-centric themes that circulated across media. Engraving, lithography, wood-block printing, etching, photography, and photomechanical reproduction formed part of a "complex polyphony," in Stephen Bann's phrase, that saw numerous types of reproduction operating side by side, jostling for ascendency.[20] Accordingly, in many cases I illustrate not works of art sent to the Salon or other exhibiting venues but reproductions, which is how the public often encountered such works of art in the first place. And in some instances, we know how such reproductions were acquired and displayed, not simply among elite collectors but in everyday use.

Across this great archive, fact, fiction, rumor, and hearsay unite in a way sometimes impossible to delaminate. Impossible not only because we don't possess sufficient

documentation, but because artists lived such fictions as their own. I borrow the phrase "enacted biography" from Austrian psychoanalyst and curator Ernst Kris and future Warburg Institute librarian Otto Kurz, whose *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*, first published in 1934, explores how legendary topoi and formulae were transmitted into (mostly) ancient artistic biography. Their text also bore the subtitle, *A Historical Experiment*, a phrase to keep in mind as we consider how artists in the nineteenth century navigated roles at once assigned to them but also embraced as their own. I return to Kris and Kurz's ideas later in this book, notably in connection with a famous story about art education. For the moment, it is worth signaling that the felicitous phrase "enacted biography" occurs in their book only once, and a singular location indeed: the very last words of their text, as Kris and Kurz speak of mapping



7 Célestin-François Nanteuil, after Octave Tassaert, *Suicide*, c. 1850–62. Lithograph on chine collé, 17 ¼ × 12 ¼ in (44 × 31 cm). Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

so-called biographical formulae onto the work of the unconscious, a psychoanalytic project they declined to pursue in the compass of their volume, but that Kris himself went on to develop in several future studies.[21]

Some of the conventions I surface are long-standing, but in contrast to Kris and Kurz, I do not seek out their origins or make the case for their persistence over the *longue durée*. And if often such conventions operated on nineteenth-century artists unconsciously, I do not assimilate their operation to the work of the unconscious, or onto any specific artifact or complex of modern psychoanalysis, whose machinery is largely absent from these pages. Rather, I focus on the agents themselves and the purposefulness of their conduct, even as their intentions may have been inchoate or invisible to themselves. Writing in the early 1950s, Kris cited as an example of enacted biography how only recently, an artist had adapted a classic legend of artistic discovery "as an account of his own youth."[22] That such legends were lived, internalized, and experienced by artists as their own is for us precisely the point, which means not treating them as stereotypes, conventions of art criticism, or distortions that we must dislodge, rehearse with skepticism, or trace back genealogically. From education to the tomb, across lives lived and works of art meant to be seen, artists embedded such topoi along the arc of their own experience—experience not necessarily calculated or premeditated, in other words, precisely enacted.

Ondine, a student of her uncle and protagonist of Desbordes-Valmore's *Studio of the Painter*, perishes at the novel's conclusion following her exclusion from the fraternal community of male artists in her uncle's studio. Whether Desbordes-Valmore based her character on anyone she knew, we don't know. But the role she assigns to Ondine speaks to the efforts by women artists in the Romantic age to navigate such scenes in the face of systemic constraints, deeply rooted gendered conventions of artistic formation, and bonds of artistic filiation further entwined across family and marriage. We may not possess the ritualized, elegiac, publicly circulated statements like those prepared by Bonnat on behalf of his teacher Cogniet. But other forms of evidence can help bring those scenes unexpectedly into view, as in the case of several of the calamities explored in this book. Efforts by critics, biographers, and others to ascertain the cause—and sometimes to assign blame—raised the curtain on the role played by other agents beyond teachers and pupils classically conceived but no less linked by pedagogical bonds. One particular disaster mobilized a group of female artists to both manage and disguise the rupture across gendered tropes of artistic conduct that would be rehearsed in French and European art writing long after their deaths. Tropes expressed, for example, in the understanding that, should a female artist undertake a decapitation, the stakes must be personal.

This book is divided into three parts, each comprising two chapters and with a narrative that is both thematic and chronological. From the first part to the last, we pass from the historical to the curricular, from catastrophes to efforts to avert them. I begin with the suicide of Léopold Robert, who, after training in Paris in the studio of

David, launched a successful practice in Rome and Florence before relocating to Venice in 1832, where he took his life three years later. My discussion is loosely organized around the reception of a putatively last painting understood to speak of the crisis that overtook him. And while several reasons would be adduced to explain Robert's sorrow, I marshal this large body of reasoning along a pedagogical axis. Said to have died from desiring too much, Robert seemed the victim of a disabling dynamic traceable to his academic formation, a crisis entirely characteristic of a Romantic painting career but one that Robert was held to experience with catastrophic intensity. As it happens, this disabling condition would be paired with another danger apparently set in motion when teachers and students met. Only this one saw him exchange roles from student to teacher along an erotic axis that shaped accounts of both agents, long after their deaths.

Chapter 2 also focuses on a last painting understood to give testimony. Testimony, in this case, of a teacher-student relationship gone bad—very bad, we should say, since the great Napoleonic battle painter Antoine-Jean Gros was sixty-four when he took his own life in June 1835, by which point his old teacher had been long in the ground. Once again, I explore some of the commemorative practices put in place following Gros's suicide, including efforts on the part of his students and followers to visualize the event, along with similar efforts to repair a scene of instruction that Gros himself had violently severed. This was not a straightforward task, given that Gros's last painting (in fact, three of them) seemed to speak, more than anything, about how the artist had betrayed himself most of all. As in the case of Robert, this calamity shone a light onto another agent ensnared in the dynamic, with lasting consequences for how her role was spoken of and understood. Her effort to navigate this fraught commemorative landscape would be supported by a small circle of artists and spawned an exceptional group of paintings and sculptures designed, as the phrase goes, to change the narrative.

What I don't do—for Robert, Gros, or for other artist-suicides discussed in this book, is account for or resolve the question of the actual causes of their deaths. That is a topic to be approached with discretion and humility. Readers may draw their own conclusions as to what reasons to adduce, but making such claims is not what this study is about. Rather, it is about the historical effort to explain. Such explanations were abundant as the reasons seemed unfathomable, a point we might put less historically than discursively. When it came to suicides, the work of explanation was abundant because the only explanation that might call an end to the search was by definition impossible to know. In other words, suicides put into play an unusual hermeneutic predicament. They launched an attempt to explain action that seemed definitively, indeed existentially, intentional, and yet where the agent's intention was definitively withheld, to adapt an argument developed by structuralist literary critic Ross Chambers, writing about suicide in Romantic letters.[23] For Robert and Gros in particular, this condition unleashed a veritable engine of meaning-making across cultural practice, much but

certainly not all in a pedagogical key. And it included diagnostic meaning-making, notably the famous "monomania," which saw wide adoption in Romantic cultural practice. And monomania, as it happens, for Robert and Gros both, helped reframe the question of "why" in the first place. In the search for intention, for motivation, the diagnosis helped make the point that motivation was not the point—an understanding already hinted at, none too subtly, by reading Emerson's phrase from back to front.

How to prevent those catastrophes is also what this book is about. The next two chapters explore visionary accounts of education designed to set the scene of instruction on purified terrain. The great Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix never had students in the traditional sense. But he had a lot to say about art education, mostly on the topic of tradition's authority, which, as he argued, often blocked the development of individual sentiment, particularly in the classroom and with David's allegedly hegemonic example serving as Exhibit A. In the 1850s, Delacroix became interested in a new, simplified method of drawing instruction designed to operate outside traditional art schools and structured, at least as he saw it, in a manner to overthrow the often-disabling character of a teacher's authority. On the other hand, what drew Delacroix to the classroom was not only the prospect of curricular reform. Rather, he was precisely drawn there. Generally speaking, the question of what a teacher wants is perhaps scandalous—a teacher's desire is something to be managed and controlled. But the answer is not (always) complicated: a teacher wants students. For Delacroix, that desire formed part of a close-knit set of concerns that came to dominate the artist in his last years and that we generally group under the umbrella of posterity. And while Delacroix did not have pupils in the classic sense, he did recruit collaborators who studied with him and learned his manner. And those collaborators, as it turned out, would offer him suitable terrain on which to act out.

Next, I turn to a body of idealizing imagery that restaged education as nature's way, imagery seemingly prior to and uncontaminated by tradition's authority. Nineteenth-century artists revived and illustrated many stories told by Giorgio Vasari and other early modern biographers. And from Balzac to Berlioz, they were joined by writers, composers, and pedagogues in a European-wide effort to bring the great text of old master biography to life. Perhaps no story told by Vasari saw greater favor than the childhood of Giotto, whom the elder painter Cimabue discovered drawing sheep while tending to his flock. From the Romantic age into the fin de siècle, the tale attracted a wide and impressive roster of visual artists working across media. Consistent with this book's theme, I explore what the tale seemed to say about artistic education. But consistent, too, with this book's attention to the specificity of artistic careers and agents on-scene, I am principally concerned with how artists leveraged this origin story on their own behalf. In many cases, little remains of those efforts but fragments and suggestion. Nevertheless, the sheer frequency with which artists seized on the tale offers a powerful demonstration of enacted biography at work, the tale of Giotto serving them as mythographic resource at key moments of crisis and transformation.

In the third and last section of this book, I consider what managing authority at the scene of instruction might actually look like. "I deny that art can be taught," Gustave Courbet proclaimed in late 1861, following the electrifying announcement in the press that the controversial Realist painter would open a teaching studio "under his direction." Courbet himself, however, was careful to explain that this new studio also meant "coming to terms with the word 'direction.'" Every artist, he insists, "must be his own master."[24] The studio collapsed after a few months, and it fell to an actual teacher to think through what Courbet's proposition might mean in practical terms. The pioneering art teacher Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran (1802–97) is chiefly remembered for designing a curriculum in support of artistic memory, which as Lecoq believed (and I will call him Lecoq henceforward), enhanced an artist's powers of observation and nurtured their individuality of manner. But Lecoq was also concerned with how memory could go wrong, for example, the memory of the teacher's work. Cogniet, according to Bonnat, in the face of similar fears, had suggested the teacher stay home; Lecoq, on the other hand, a true pedagogue, took the position that managing instructor authority was for the teacher job one. That understanding led him fundamentally to rethink practices of imitation in the classroom, and ultimately to rethink the very profession of art teacher.

The origins of his program lay in a Rousseauist, broadly liberal tradition of reform that enlisted education to the cause of human emancipation. Like Rousseau, Lecoq envisaged his curriculum as not only recuperative but prophylactic, that is to say, designed to protect students from external forces hindering their natural development. If the idea has a beneficent ring, it also led him down a fateful path. In his effort to protect his students, Lecoq called for a massive reengineering of teaching practice in the name of nature. Similar concerns around instructor authority belong front and center to liberal education across the board. The teacher, warned John Dewey, founder of the American progressive movement in education, is seldom a "transparent medium of access by another mind to a subject." Dewey's followers refigured the American schoolhouse as a child-centric garden, the process requiring them to carefully regulate the teacher's role.[25] Psychoanalytical theory envisions the relation between teacher and student as a potent psychic drama, the latter's fantasy of parental omniscience setting in motion a transference that teachers must manage and redirect. The 1960s and 1970s saw more radical efforts to curtail teacher authority. In *Freedom to Learn*, the psychotherapist Carl Rogers famously proposed to recast the teacher-student exchange into nondirectional "student-centered" encounters. Recent decades have seen many other interventions in educational theory that, in one manner or another, enlist the classroom on behalf of human emancipation. And no less invariably, attention falls on the authority wielded by the teacher as something to be managed, regulated, and sometimes abolished.[26]

Lecoq's genius lay not so much in posing the question as in what such concerns meant for actually teaching art. And with what success, to judge by the prestigious slate of artists who would cite his instruction. But since this book is about the disasters

that befell not only students but teachers, we should not be surprised that Lecoq's ideas precipitated a disaster of their own. To this day, art teachers struggle with whether they are "artists" or "teachers," a topic about which there is a large and anxious literature. And it was a topic about which Lecoq also had something to say. That he had to defend his choice of profession was a source of great frustration to him. Surely it should be precisely a matter of choice and inclination. Artist or teacher, there should be no judgment—no unspoken censure that leaves the teacher in secret shame and perpetually on the defensive. And yes, surely we must rally behind the art teacher's vocation—surely we must take the teacher "as their own portion," as Emerson phrased it. But the price of that portion turned out to be exceedingly high, calling as it did, at least in Lecoq's version, for teachers to quit making art altogether.

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