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Eugène Delacroix, *Journey to the Maghreb and Andalusia, 1832. The Travel Notebooks and Other Writings*. Translated by Michèle Hannoosh. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. xiv + 200 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography and index. \$34.95 US (pb). ISBN: 978-0-271-08334-6

Review by Thomas Dodman, Columbia University.

In a lecture given to mark last year's Delacroix exhibition at the Met in New York, art historian T. J. Clark invited the audience to "plunge into the middle of a fight," the "melee of men and animals" that is Delacroix's 1855 *Lion Hunt* (a massive canvas, larger still than his famous *Liberty leading the people*, sadly reduced to a fragment by fire in 1870).<sup>[1]</sup> For Clark, this chaotic scene of combat and "total entanglement" between fallen horse, rider, and lion, captures something of the enigma in Delacroix: the enfant terrible of romanticism who announced modernism as he shied away from modernity. Delacroix's precocious discontent with civilization lies also at the heart of David O'Brien's recent reassessment of the painter's later works, tellingly titled *Exiled in Modernity: Delacroix, Civilization, and Barbarism*.<sup>[2]</sup> Like so many other young artists of his generation ill at ease with material progress and fascinated by man's darker side, Delacroix longed to see "primitive" forms of civilization with his own eyes. He got his opportunity in 1832 when, aged 34, he accompanied the count de Mornay on a diplomatic mission to Morocco, then a key player in France's fledgling attempt at securing a colonial footing in neighboring Algeria. Delacroix spent six months in total touring the Maghreb (mainly Morocco but with brief visits to Algeria as well) and southern Spain. He kept detailed records of his travels, both in writing and sketches that would provide a well of inspiration for his later works--from the *Lion Hunt* to his numerous studies of "Oriental" characters and scenes.

This volume is the first complete translation of Delacroix's writings from his ardently desired trip to see the "Orient" firsthand, and not "with the eyes of others" (p. 3) as he had until then. It includes transcriptions of four notebooks that Delacroix kept during his journey as well as two articles written several years after the trip: "Memories of a Visit to Morocco" and "A Jewish Wedding," which was published in 1842 to coincide with his *Jewish Wedding in Morocco* exhibited at the Salon the previous year. Also included are various marginalia, notes, and supplementary manuscript materials. These texts are expertly translated by Michèle Hannoosh, whose editorial work on the project cannot be commended enough (she has already edited the French edition of Delacroix's *Journal*). Hannoosh's lengthy introduction helps situate the texts and teases out their main points of interest. To help orient the reader, she has also included a history of the manuscripts themselves (useful for anyone wanting to do further

research), biographies of the main characters, a glossary of Arab terms, a bibliography, and an index. Most of all, she has painstakingly annotated the writings and provided helpful cross-referencing between them. This is as much a work of devotion as it is one of scholarship.

The notebooks make for a fascinating read and will be of interest not only to specialists of Delacroix and Orientalism, but also to scholars of French colonialism in North Africa and travel writing more in general. Delacroix brought a keen eye and wrote avidly about what he saw in Tangiers and elsewhere in Morocco. There is an ethnographic quality to his descriptions of people (men and women), buildings, landscapes, scenes of daily life, details and events that caught his attention, etc. Many of these he illustrated with delightful sketches and aquarelles, some of which are reproduced here (they are all listed as editorial notes). Delacroix's overwhelming excitement is palpable throughout the notebooks, from the first glimpses of Tangier—"I thought I was dreaming. I had so often wanted to see the Orient..." (p. 60)—to his touring its narrow streets and attending a lively Jewish wedding. He is struck by the diversity of people, languages, clothes and colors that make for a distinctly cosmopolitan society where different communities coexist in harmony *and* tension. Predictably enough, women often draw Delacroix's attention, beautiful and tantalizing behind the plain outer walls encircling ornate inner courtyards (he is especially seduced by Jewish women). Similarly, Delacroix admires the vigorous manliness of Arab horse riders, describing at length a horse fight that clearly stuck with him (it surpassed anything he had ever seen in Gros or Rubens and presumably inspired Delacroix's subsequent fascination for horse painting, such as in *Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha* [1863]). During a month-long excursion inland to the Imperial capital Mekinez (to meet Sultan Abd Al-Rahman) Delacroix further tasted the thrill of being in a warzone, surrounded by "cavalry charges" and a sometimes-hostile population (following an attack he laconically notes: "My terror. We run away" [p. 85]). "Only the south can produce such emotion" (p. 74), he muses, acknowledging the primitive, raw energies he feels all around him. He repeatedly compares Arab men favorably to Ancient Romans, contrasting their simple lifestyles with the consumerism and artificiality of modern Europeans. They know nothing of the anxiety experienced by those who are slave to "everything new"; instead, "their obliviousness [...] accounts for their tranquility and their happiness. [...] Their beauty takes revenge on our know-how" (p. 109).

As Hannoosh notes in her introduction, while Delacroix's orientalism is never in doubt in these writings (and is regularly reaffirmed in prejudices he shares with his contemporaries), it also proves to be more nuanced than is generally allowed for. There is in fact an argument to be made for this trip having caused a partial rupture in Delacroix's thinking about the Orient, suffice it to point to the marginalizing of the female nude in his painting (and contrast the relatively chaste female figures in the oriental harem of *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* [1834] to the highly eroticized female bodies in *The Death of Sardanapalus* from 1827). As Hannoosh suggests, Delacroix's awakening to the "Orient" mirrors his ambivalence towards European civilization and finds a structural hinge in his own little crisis of representation of sorts, or at least his recognition of the impossible adequacy of description to images. Just as his notebooks alternate words and sketches, so does the painter-writer grow frustrated with the shortcomings of words: "The end of every description is always an acknowledgement of the impossibility of describing" (p. 17) Delacroix notes, acknowledging the unbridgeable duality folded within the word "peindre" ("to paint" and "to depict" or "describe"). Clearly, Delacroix's memories of his journey were primarily pictorial, and when reflecting upon them a decade later he noted a similar shortcoming of words, now accentuated by the passage of time: "your

narration always falls short of your feelings [at the time]" (p. 25).

Yet ten years on, Delacroix also saw benefits to revisiting his trip at a distance, for "the more recent one's memories are, the harder it is to leave things out when writing them down. [...] Conversely, at a certain distance from the events, the narrative will gain in simplicity what it would seem to lose in richness of detail and minutiae" (p. 25). The "Memories of Morocco" and "A Jewish Wedding" capture this crystallization of memory beautifully, offering more focused retellings of scenes from the notebooks, expanded and dramatized where deemed necessary for narrative purposes (for example in the aforementioned horse fight, or in his first glimpses of Tangier from the ship). One thing that clearly stuck out to Delacroix in the ten years following his trip was the dreadful impact of French imperialism in North Africa. In the "Memories" he lashes out at the destruction inflicted by the French on Algiers, where "picturesque" buildings appropriate to local mores and climate were unceremoniously torn down to make way for wider avenues. He is especially horrified at the sight of Moorish cemeteries being ransacked with "barbarous hard-heartedness" (p. 40-3). At a time when other Frenchmen turned a blind eye to the "unfortunate necessities" of French imperial grandeur, Delacroix did not mince his words against the "mob of civilized men who were taking the place of the Arabs," and he barely sought to apologize for his "little digression [...] if it wounds our national pride" (p. 42-3).<sup>[2]</sup> But Delacroix was no more interested in celebrating the "primitivism" of colonialism's victims *per se*, for what he had found in the Orient was something more primal about mankind as a whole: "men who are more men than we are, who combine the simple, vigorous feelings of a young civilization with the most diabolical guile and sordid vices that seem the result of corrupt societies." Traveling between the Maghreb and southern Spain, Delacroix found out that the Orient was not that different after all: "Traveling in Spain, you can appreciate the extreme similarity of these two lands, or rather of this one land obviously divided by the sudden incursion of the sea" (p. 31) (a geological process ostensibly proven by the "stranding" of a colony of monkeys on Gibraltar). What he ultimately found confirmation of during his six months travelling in foreign lands, was that the Other lay within: "when I saw the Moroccans again in Paris, my heart beat as though I were seeing my own brothers" (p. 43-4).

## NOTES

[1] MetFridays - "Delacroix: To Observe and Imagine" Part Two (11/14/2018): <https://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/lectures/delacroix-2>

[2] David O'Brien, *Exiled in Modernity: Delacroix, Civilization, and Barbarism* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018)

[3] Alexis de Tocqueville, "Essay on Algeria" [1841], in *Writings on Empire and Slavery*, edited and translated by Jennifer Pitts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 80.

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