



FRADELLE: THE ARTIST WHO WAS GIVEN HIS SON'S NAME

François Grosjean, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

above: Milton dictating *Paradise Lost* to his daughter (Exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, 1817, and at the British Institution, 1818)

opposite top: Portrait of Fradelle by Moses Haughton

opposite bottom: The cloister of the Carthusians at Rome, built by Michelangelo (Exhibited at the British Institution, 1817)

A few years ago, my British aunt told me that one of our ancestors was a Franco-English painter by the name of Fradelle. My curiosity was piqued as I share the dual cultural heritage that was his; in addition, I have spent many years of my life as a linguist studying people who lead their lives with two or more languages, just as my ancestor had. With the kind help of my art historian colleague, Professor Pascal Griener, I started to amass information about Fradelle, painter and portraitist. His life was indeed intriguing culturally, linguistically and artistically.

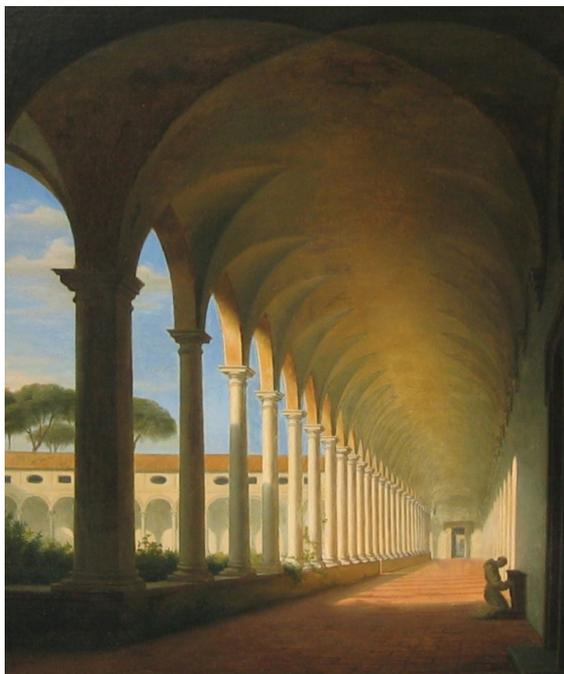
Fradelle was born in Lille, France, in 1778, and was a student of Joseph-Benoît Suvée at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris during the French Revolution. He left for Italy in 1808 where he started specialising in the domains that were to make his reputation: religious, literary and historical subjects. In 1816 he arrived in England and for the next twenty years or so his work was in demand. He exhibited thirty-six

paintings at the British Institution and eleven at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. His works were bought by such notables as Lord Holland, the Earl of Egremont, Lord Northwick, and the Duke of Leuchtenberg. Today, his *The Earl of Leicester's Visit to Amy Robsart at Cumnor Place* is exhibited at Petworth House and his *Othello* relating the story of his life to Brabantio and Desdemona is part of the Royal Shakespeare Company Collection. Several engravings of his paintings can be found at the National Portrait Gallery and the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris).

Although Fradelle returned to France in the 1830s for a few years, he made London his permanent home where he had clearly been given a place in the art world. His last years were difficult though: his wife, Sarah, was ill and his artistic genre was no longer in demand. In an 1850 letter that I found at the Getty Research Institute, he writes that the 'new generation' was not interested in older painters. He was hardly painting anymore, he

writes, and was making a meagre living by teaching perspective and drawing at the Putney College for Civil Engineers. Fradelle died in 1865, fifteen-years after his wife; he is buried next to her at Kensal Green Cemetery.

As I was preparing to close the Fradelle file, I received his death certificate and suddenly realised that a quite extraordinary identity switch had taken place over the years. Every biography I had obtained, every description I had read, gave his name as Henry Joseph Fradelle. But there, on the death certificate, the name I read was



Henri (Marie) Jean-Baptiste Fradelle; and the person who had gone to the registry to declare his death was Henry Joseph Fradelle! Who was who then? Who was the artist that I had read about? I dug deeper (e.g. I obtained a copy of the birth register in Lille in 1778 as well as Fradelle's will) and realised little by little that there were in fact two Fradelles, the father, Henri Jean-Baptiste Victoire Fradelle (1778 - 1865), and the son, Henry Joseph Fradelle (1805-1872). (Note that the 'Marie' in Fradelle's name on his death certificate was a mistake). In his letters and his will, Fradelle, the father, speaks of his son who was trained as an artist but who had various other professions (he was an infirmity secretary at one point). In the 1850 letter already mentioned, Fradelle writes that his poor son had great difficulties making ends meet as an artist. Note also that the Kensal Green Cemetery register lists the two Fradelles, father and son.

So what triggered this identity switch by biographers who have systematically given the son's name to the father? This is where a bit of linguistic reasoning comes in. Some early biographers probably anglicised 'Henri' to 'Henry', a not uncommon step for someone who was part of the London scene for so many years. In addition, they probably mistook the first middle initial 'J' to stand for 'Joseph', a more frequent possibility than the very French 'Jean-Baptiste'. Note also that the sequence 'Henry Joseph' was not unknown to them as the son had tried to make a career for himself in the middle of the century. Once one biographer had made the mistake, a snowball effect took place and little by little, Fradelle became known as Henry Joseph Fradelle!

I have been active over the last three years informing the art world about this error in identity and attempting to rectify things. The Getty Union List of Artist Names has made the necessary modifications as have other databases. At the level of biographies, the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography has rewritten the Fradelle entry. This is the case also for the Thieme and Becker entry. Various museums and public galleries have been informed (The British Museum, The Courtauld Institute, The National Portrait Gallery, etc.) as have major auction houses. A survey of the web shows that changes are starting to appear but a complete change will take some time. There remains the problem of whether the son, Henry Joseph, produced any works that are still present. Based on the dates and the fame of the father, the very great majority of the works on record, if not all of them, are most certainly by Henri Jean-Baptiste Victoire Fradelle and not Henry Joseph Fradelle.

The author would be interested in receiving any information concerning Fradelle's work that is not readily available. Please write to him at: francois.grosjean@unine.ch