

A Royal Affair

When VMFA acquired Barye's sculpture *Stag Brought Down by Two Greyhounds* in 2005, the lot included a series of letters alluding to the involvement of the Parisian attorney Adolphe Royer in a scandal surrounding the royal family. One of the letters reveals that the duke of Orléans gave the bronze to Royer in March 1840 as a token of his gratitude for the lawyer's discretion and diplomacy in ensuring the dissolution of the love affair between the duke's younger brother, the duke of Nemours, and a ballet dancer from the Paris Opera.

Rumors about the prince's relationship with the luminary Albertine Albrier had become a source of humiliation for the royal family. King Louis-Philippe had arranged for the duke of Nemours's marriage to the German princess Victoria de Saxe-Cobourg-Kohary, and he requested the allotment of public funds from the French parliament for the couple's wedding celebration and household expenses. The perceived legitimacy of the king's ascension to the throne had depended upon his swearing an oath to uphold the Constitution of 1830, which ensured that the power of the July Monarchy would be restricted by parliamentary decision-making. A rejection of his appeal by the parliament would significantly diminish the popular regard for his political authority.

Royer ultimately convinced Albertine to end her relationship with the young prince quietly and spend a period in London at the expense of the royal family until after his wedding. He also recovered the love letters that the two had exchanged. His intervention in the affair amounted to considerable damage control for the royal family's public image. After Albertine returned to France, she never saw her royal lover again.

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