

French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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Jean-François Millet, *Waiting*, ca. 1853–1861

Artist	Jean-François Millet, French, 1814–1875
Title	<i>Waiting</i>
Object Date	ca. 1853–1861
Alternate and Variant Titles	<i>L'Attente; Tobit and Sara watching for the Return of Tobias; Tobie</i>
Medium	Oil on canvas
Dimensions (Unframed)	33 x 47 15/16 in. (83.8 x 121.7 cm)
Signature	Signed lower right: J. F. Millet.
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 30-18

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Catalogue Entry

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Waiting shows a poignant scene from the book of Tobit.¹ The aged Anna looks into the distance in the hope of seeing the return of her son, Tobias, who had departed

months prior to recover a debt. Her husband, Tobit, who is blind, emerges from the doorway of a stone cottage, his mouth open, his right foot hesitantly extended, and his left hand grasping the door lintel nervously to steady himself. Alongside, a ginger cat on a stone bench arches it back, perhaps yawning after a late afternoon nap, or perhaps, as its straightened tail suggests, hissing at an unseen creature in the foreground. At one side of the house, several sheep peek their heads through a fold directly adjoining the living space of their owners. In the distance, crows have come to roost on trees silhouetted against the light of the setting sun. Jean-François Millet's picture highlights his abilities as a colorist through accents such as the red of Tobit's waistcoat, the turquoise moss on the doorjambs and ground, and the far-off clouds, tinged with pink. The artist's red-brown imprimatura layer also forms an important and visible element in the final composition, notably in the face and hands of Tobit.

Waiting demonstrates Millet's often overlooked interest in religious subject matter, which reappeared intermittently throughout his career. Millet came from a Catholic family background and often cited quotations from the Bible in his correspondence. His religious

beliefs are not fully clear, but he probably remained a Catholic (although non-practicing) until his death. He was certainly always drawn to the poetry of biblical narratives. One of his earliest known works is a painting of Saint Barbara (1841; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Angers) while his final, unfinished commission was for a large-scale project representing the life of Saint Geneviève in the Pantheon in Paris.² Although the biblical story of Tobit takes place in Nineveh in the Middle East in the eighth century BCE, Millet sets his story in contemporary rural France, an approach that he had previously adopted in his *Harvesters Resting (Ruth and Boaz)* (1850–1853; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). In the Nelson-Atkins painting, Anna and Tobit wear heavy woolen laborer garb, while Tobit's frayed red waistcoat suggests the family's poverty. The stone cottage is very similar to that in which Millet grew up in the hamlet of Gruchy on the Normandy coast.³ In setting a biblical scene in the contemporary world, Millet was following the same strategy adopted by one of his favorite artists, the Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1525–1569), five of whose pictures were in his paintings collection.⁴ He also knew Bruegel's work through reproductions. Note, in particular, that Tobit, with arms outstretched, very closely resembles the third figure from the left in Bruegel's *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind* (Fig. 1).⁵ The red accent of his waistcoat as well as the rest of his costume—especially his gaiters and rounded are also similar to those of protagonists in Bruegel's *Wedding Banquet* (1568; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), a painted copy of which Millet owned.⁶ *Waiting* indicates Millet's alignment with a tradition of religious painting that was very different from the more Italianate, idealized mode of religious imagery practiced by academic artists such as William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905).



Fig. 1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind*, tempera on canvas, 34 x 61 in. (86 x 156 cm), Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples

According to Millet's friend and early biographer, Alfred Sensier, the genesis of *Waiting* lay in a very personal narrative.⁷ Millet's mother, in poor health, wrote to him in the early 1850s, urging that he return to his birthplace of Gruchy to see her. Preoccupied with his financial affairs and artistic ambitions in Paris and Barbizon, he did not do so, and in April 1853, his mother died. Millet was apparently overcome with remorse and, as a way of dealing with his pain, sketched out this painting as a kind of memorial to his mother, seeing her yearning for his return paralleled in the biblical story.⁸ Millet's preoccupation with the Bible at this time is also evident in a journal entry by Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) from April 16, 1853: "In the morning, Millet visited me. . . . He speaks of Michelangelo and the Bible, which is, he says, more or less the only book he reads."⁹ Sensier noted that Millet worked on the picture in 1855 when the composition "was laid out and in a very advanced stage of the first draft."¹⁰ For unclear reasons, Millet put *Waiting* to one side and returned to it several years later in 1860, when it was listed in a contract of works, drawn up on March 14 of that year, for the Belgian dealer Arthur Stevens.¹¹ Its significance in Millet's output is indicated by the fact that it was given a price of three thousand francs, the highest of all the paintings listed in the contract. On May 2, 1860, Millet told his close friend, the landscape painter Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867), that he was "working like mad" on the picture.¹²



Fig. 2. Jean-François Millet, verso: *Study for "Waiting" (The Parents of Tobias Awaiting his Return)*, ca. 1853–1854, charcoal and pastel on blue-gray paper, 10 5/8 x 12 in. (27 x 30.5 cm), Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Edward L. Tuohy, 1959.³¹



Fig. 3. Jean-François Millet, *Standing Woman Seen from Behind*, ca. 1860, black conté crayon on paper, 12 9/16 x 10 3/16 in. (31.9 x 25.8 cm), Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris, RF 11255

Millet's picture is underpinned by at least twenty preparatory drawings. In one compositional study from 1853 to 1854 (Fig. 2), the artist struggled to find a satisfactory pose for Tobit, who is rendered twice, here carrying his stick in his left hand with his right arm outstretched. At the bottom left, extended on the ground, is an animal, prefiguring the cat in the final painting. Yellow lines of pastel suggest the sunset. Other drawings focus on individual elements in the picture. In an impressive study done circa 1860 (Fig. 3), Millet experimented with Anna's left arm in two different positions: shading her eyes against the sunlight and resting on her knee for support. Ultimately, he decided on the latter pose in order to emphasize her age and infirmity. In developing the pose of Anna, Millet used a local model, Adèle Marier, née Moschner (1841–1895), a rural woman then in her late teens. Adèle later recounted her memories:

M. Millet had known me when I was very young. I was eighteen years old when he asked me to model for him: "Adèle," he said to me one day, 'will you pose like your father?' I accepted immediately. What would I not have done for so good a master? Then he brought me to his

studio and put on my head a white cowl decorated with a black band, as we wore in times past for going to evening gatherings. . . . On that occasion, I posed for the wife of Tobit. The painting was called Waiting.¹³

This testimony also indicates that Millet used Adèle's father as the model for Tobit. Another drawing, a study of hands (Fig. 4), shows Millet's interest in the use of gesture to communicate fully the helplessness of his blind protagonist. It contains three sketches of Tobit's right hand, tightly grasping his cane, flanked by two of his left hand fumbling at the doorjamb.



Fig. 4. Jean-François Millet, *Study of Hands*, ca. 1860, black conté crayon on paper, 12 9/16 x 10 3/16 in. (31.9 x 25.8 cm), Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris, RF 11255

Millet exhibited his picture at the 1861 Salon together with two other pictures, the *Large Sheepshearer* (1860; Hokugin Galerie Millet, Toyama, Japan) and *Porridge* (1861; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Marseille). Although he used the nonreligious title *Waiting*, he identified the religious source by including a quotation from the book of Tobit (10:7) in the Salon *livret* (handbook): "The mother of Tobias hurriedly left her house every day looking about her on all sides and taking all the paths by which she hoped that he might come back, from whence she might see him from afar when he returned."¹⁴ Millet,

fearing that his picture would be “skied,” lobbied for its display at a favorable height at eye level. He sought, in particular, the support of the government official Philippe de Chennevières, who oversaw picture hanging. As he wrote to Sensier: “If M. Chennevières can have *Tobit* placed at the height of the picture rail and in a place having some light, that would be excellent.”¹⁵ The numerous notices that the work received in the press indicate that it had been well placed and was easily viewable.



LA MÈRE DE TOBIE GUETTANT LE RETOUR DE SON FILS.
M. Millet traite la Bible en réaliste. A la bonne heure, si M. Courlet se décide à aller à transporter ses paysans d'Orléans en patriarches d'Israël. — Le talent si profondément sympathique de M. Millet pour sa peinture de ces sortes d'enseignes.

Fig. 5. Félix Nadar and Henri-Alfred Darjou, *The Mother of Tobias Watching for the Return of Her Son* (*La Mère de Tobie Guettant le retour de son fils*), published in *Journal Amusant* 286 (June 22, 1861), Cabinet des Estampes et de la Photographie, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

Waiting was the most controversial of Millet's three entries at the Salon. The painting attracted some praise from Millet's supporters.¹⁶ The young critic Théodore Pelloquet noted that the work was marked by “a touching spirit, by a melancholic and tender feeling one cannot forget.”¹⁷ The artist's old friend Théophile Thoré-Burger noted that Anna was “masterfully constructed” and that “the pose of the old man [Tobit] is extraordinary, from head to toe.”¹⁸ However, the picture was the subject of repeated attacks by critics who found Millet's treatment demeaning to the elevated biblical narrative. Some attacked the artist's use of contemporary figures. Léon Lagrange wrote that the two protagonists looked like they were waiting for a bus at Barbizon.¹⁹ The satirists Félix Nadar and Henri-Alfred Darjou caricatured Millet's “realist” laborers, exaggerating their ugliness (Fig. 5). Others also criticized his formal approach. Paul de Saint-Victor cited the

“caricatural awkwardness” of his subjects and, moreover, compared Millet's subversive treatment of the biblical theme to the “commercial religion” and “vulgar theology” of recently founded Mormonism.²⁰ Another critic, the comtesse de Rethel, wrote simply of “these awful paintings.”²¹ The artist himself apparently remained undeterred by such criticism, noting that “if I wore high heels, I might find it made the road rather heavy, but with *sabots* I think I can get out of the mire.”²² *Waiting* may have encouraged Edouard Manet (1832–1883)—whose realism represented an urban counterpart to Millet's rural subjects—to paint a similarly agitated cat in his famed *Olympia* (1863; Musée d'Orsay, Paris).²³ Millet would go on to exhibit his controversial *Man with a Hoe* (1860–1862; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles) at the next Salon, in 1863.

After being sold to Stevens, *Waiting* crossed the Atlantic, possibly as early as the 1860s, and was in the Boston collection of Henry Sayles until at least 1882.²⁴ In 1891, New York philanthropist and banker George Ingraham Seney sold the painting at auction for \$40,500 (or 202,000 francs), evidence of the very high prices for Millet's work at that time.²⁵ Its tender subject was compared in the auction catalogue to the artist's *Angelus* (1857–1859; Musée d'Orsay, Paris), which had sold the previous year for a world-record sum of 553,000 francs.²⁶ *Waiting* was subsequently praised by British painter Walter Sickert in 1923 as “a great classic of universal and eternal interest.”²⁷ In 1930, the painting was one of the first objects to be purchased by the Nelson-Atkins, three years before the museum officially opened. Harold Woodbury Parsons, art adviser to the museum, described the picture as “an unexpected marvel, one of Millet's most famous and most moving masterpieces.”²⁸

Simon Kelly
February 2018

Notes

1. Tobit chapters 4–6, 10, 11, especially 10:7, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition. Catholic and Orthodox traditions include Tobit as part of their canon of scripture, but it is noncanonical for Jews and Protestants. In chapter 11, after Tobias returns from collecting the debt, he restores his father's sight with a cure provided by the angel Raphael. For an overview of this painting, see Simon Kelly, “Jean-François Millet's ‘Waiting’: a ‘realist’ religious painting,” *Burlington Magazine* 151, no. 1274 (May 2009): 298–305. For

- more about Millet, see Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet raconté par lui-même*, 3 vols. (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1921); Robert Herbert, *Jean-François Millet*, exh. cat. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975); Alexandra R. Murphy et al., *Jean-François Millet, Drawn into the Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); and Chantal Georgel, *Millet* (Paris: Citadelles et Mazenod, 2014).
2. Millet only made drawings for this commission, which, after his death, was awarded to Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898). See Alfred Sensier, *La Vie et L'Œuvre de J.-F. Millet* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1881), 361.
 3. Kelly, "Jean-François Millet's 'Waiting,'" 300.
 4. The five works by Bruegel the Elder in his paintings collection were *The Gardeners* (*Les Jardiniers*), *The Skaters* (*Les Patineurs*), *A Kermis* (*Une Kermesse*), *Works of Mercy* (*Les Oeuvres de Miséricorde*), and *Village Festival* (*Fête villageoise*). See *Succession de Madame Veuve J. F. Millet. Dessins, Tableaux et Gravures par J. F. Millet* (Paris: Hôtel Drouot, April 24–25, 1894), 51–52. These paintings have not yet been identified and, despite Millet's belief in their authenticity, were undoubtedly copies made after the work of Bruegel the Elder.
 5. This source was first noted by Robert Herbert in his essay "City vs. Country: The Rural Image in French Painting from Millet to Gauguin," *Artforum* 8, no. 6 (February 1970); repr., Robert L. Herbert, *Millet to Léger: Essays in Social Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
 6. See "École de Brueghel, *Wedding Banquet* (*Le Repas de Noces*)," in *Succession de Madame Veuve J. F. Millet*, 52.
 7. Sensier, *La Vie et L'Œuvre de J.-F. Millet*, 137.
 8. "Il ébauchait une scène où deux vieilles gens interrogent le ciel, cherchant à reconnaître à l'horizon une forme humaine au milieu des splendeurs d'un soleil couchant" (He was sketching out a scene where two old people scan the sky, trying to recognize a human form on the horizon amidst the splendors of a setting sun). Sensier, *La Vie et L'Œuvre de J.-F. Millet*, 137. Soon after he began his work, an Alsatian collector, Frédéric Hartmann, showed interest in buying the painting. See Louis Campredon to Millet, February 3, 1854, Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques, Aut. 2416.
 9. "Dans la matinée, on m'a amené Millet. . . Il parle de Michel-Ange et de la Bible, qui est, dit-il, le seul livre qu'il lise ou à peu près." Eugène Delacroix, *Journal de Delacroix*, ed. Paul Flat and René Piot (Paris: Plon, 1893), 2:160–61. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
 10. "L'année 1855 fut assez heureuse pour Millet. . . L'Attente . . . fut dessinée et très avancée du premier coup." Sensier, *La Vie et L'Œuvre de J.-F. Millet*, 161.
 11. Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet raconté par lui-même*, 2:73.
 12. See Millet to Théodore Rousseau, May 2, 1860, Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques, Aut. 1897. Sensier wrote that Millet "executed" the picture in 1860. "En 1860, il exécute la Tondeuse, l'Attente, la Femme qui fait manger son enfant" (In 1860, he executed the Mower, the Waiting, the Woman who feeds her child); Sensier, *La Vie et L'Œuvre de J.-F. Millet*, 206. Although Millet began the work in 1853, as already noted, it is probable that he continued to work on the picture until he exhibited it at the Salon in 1861. Moreau-Nélaton dated the picture to 1861; Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet raconté par lui-même*, 2:1–2.
 13. "M. Millet m'avait connue tout petite. J'avais dix-huit ans quand il me prit à son service: 'Adèle,' me dit-il un jour, 'veux-tu poser comme ton père?' J'acceptai tout de suite. Que je n'aurai-je fait pour un si bon maître? Alors, il m'emmena dans son atelier et me mit sur la tête un capuchon blanc orné d'une bande noire, comme on en portait jadis pour aller aux veillées. . . Cette fois-là, je posai pour la femme de Tobie. Le tableau s'appelait *L'Attente*." H. Petitjean, "Le Modèle de Millet," *Le Figaro* 44, no. 270 (September 27, 1898): 3.
 14. "La Mère de Tobie 'sortait avec empressement tous les jours de sa maison, regardant de tous côtés et allant dans tous les chemins par lesquels elle espérait qu'il pourrait revenir, pour tâcher de le découvrir de loin à son retour.'" *Explication des Ouvrages de Peinture, Sculpture, Gravure, Lithographie et Architecture des Artistes Vivants, Exposés au Palais des Champs-Élysées le 1er Mai 1861*, exh. cat. (Paris: Charles de Mourgues Frères, 1861); repr., in H. W. Janson, ed., *Catalogues of the*

Paris Salon: 1673–1881, vol. 42, *Paris Salon de 1861* (New York: Garland, 1977), 271.

15. "Si seulement M. de Chennevières peut me faire placer le Tobie à hauteur d'appui et dans un lieu ayant quelque lumière, ce sera déjà très beau." Millet to Sensier, April 23, 1861, quoted in Sensier, *La Vie et L'Œuvre de J.-F. Millet*, 215.
16. For a more extensive discussion of the critical reception of the painting, see Kelly, "Jean-François Millet's 'Waiting,'" 302–05.
17. "un caractère touchant . . . un sentiment mélancolique et attendri qu'on ne saurait oublier." Théodore Pelloquet, "Salon de 1861," *Le Courrier du Dimanche* (June 2, 1861): 5.
18. "magistralement charpentée. . . . La mimique du vieil aveugle est extraordinaire, de la tête aux pieds." T[héophile] Thoré, *Salons de W. Bürger, 1861 à 1868* (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1870), 1:98.
19. Léon Lagrange, "Le Salon de 1861," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 11 (July 1, 1861): 63.
20. "une gaucherie caricaturale" and "la théologie grossière des Mormons . . . cette religion commerciale . . ." Paul de Saint-Victor, "Salon de 1861," *La Presse* 26 (June 25, 1861): unpaginated. Saint-Victor continues: "il y a du *mormonisme* dans le tableau de M. Millet: c'est ainsi qu'un peintre du Lac Salé comprendrait et représenterait les scènes de la Bible" (there is Mormonism in Mr. Millet's painting: this is how a Salt Lake painter would understand and represent the scenes of the Bible).
21. "Ces affreux tableaux." Comtesse de Rethel, "Exposition de peinture de 1861," *Journal des Dames et des Demoiselles* 17, no. 12 (September 1861): 191.
22. Translation by Helena de Kay, in Sensier, *Jean-François Millet. Peasant and Painter* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1880), 145. The original is recorded in Sensier, *La Vie et L'Œuvre de J.-F. Millet*, 217: "Si j'étais chaussé d'escarpins, je pourrais trouver que cela embarbouille un peu le chemin, mais, avec des sabots, je crois que je m'en tirerai."
23. The paintings by these two artists (since their names both began with M) were shown in the same room in 1861. See Kelly, "Jean-François Millet's 'Waiting,'" 301.
24. For more information on Sayles's art collection, see Edward Strahan and George Barrie, *The Art Treasures of America: Being the Choicest Works of Art in the Public and Private Collections of North America* (Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1879), 93–94.
25. Seney's earliest known date of ownership was October 27, 1886, when he lent the painting to *Exhibition of Oil Paintings at the Reception in Honor of the Representatives of the French Government Attending the Inauguration of the Statue of Liberty*, which opened that day. For more information on Seney, see Henry Clews, *Fifty Years in Wall Street* (New York: Irving, 1908), 162–67; and John A. Garraty, *American National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19:638–39.
26. *The Catalogue of Mr. George I. Seney's Important Collection of Modern Paintings* (New York: American Art Association, 1891), 286.
27. Walter Sickert, "French Pictures at Knoedler's Gallery," *Burlington Magazine* 43, no. 244 (1923): 40.
28. See Harold Woodbury Parsons to J. C. Nichols, NAMA trustee, April 23, 1930, NAMA curatorial file.

Technical Entry

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Fig. 6. Detail in raking illumination of *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861), showing remnants of the right tacking margin

Jean-François Millet executed *Waiting* on a plain-weave canvas that was commercially primed with a white or off-white ground. Although the tacking margins have been largely removed, fragments of the foldover edges on the lower right and upper left indicate that the width of the painting is close to original (Fig. 6).¹ While Millet frequently painted upon pre-stretched canvases, the dimensions of *Waiting* appear to be of non-standard format, with the closest size being a no. 60 *figure* canvas (97 x 130 cm).^{2,3}

Over the ground layer, Millet applied a reddish-brown wash to the left third of the primed canvas (sky and foreground) and a brown wash beneath the cottage at right, imparting a warm tonality overall. The reddish-brown wash, in particular, plays an integral role in the final painting, as Millet used this toning layer to produce the glow of the setting sun that filters through the trees and reflects off the road and grass (Fig. 7). Glimpses of these preliminary washes were also left exposed at the edges of the figures, a characteristic trait of Millet's technique that has been noted elsewhere.⁴

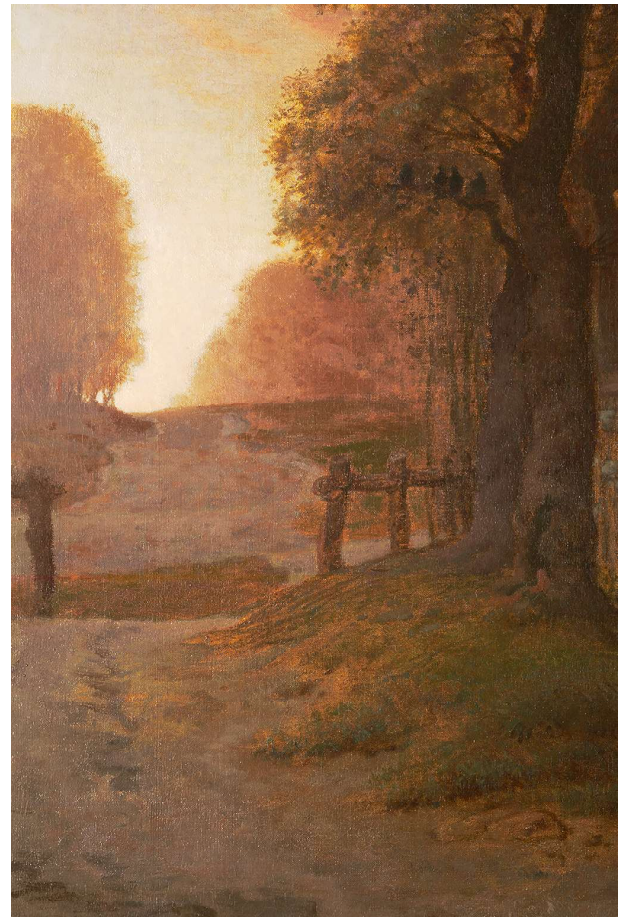


Fig. 7. Detail of *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861), showing the use of the exposed reddish-brown wash to create the glow of the sunset filtering through the trees and reflected off the road

Underdrawings of black chalk, charcoal, and “crayon gras”⁵ have been encountered on other works by the artist,⁶ and a similar loose sketch may lie beneath the paint layers of *Waiting*. Under the stereomicroscope, an underlying black material is visible at the edges of the tallest tree and among the vertical marks within the window (Fig. 8).⁷ In keeping with his known working method, Millet began to define more accurately compositional elements with fluid brown paint (Fig. 9), and some of these paint strokes remain visible at the edges of the angled roofline, stone steps, and bench, to name a few. Major elements may have been developed further with a lay-in of light, shade, and mid-tones; for instance, the underlying gray on Tobit's chin and cheeks is likely associated with this ébauche stage of the painting process (Fig. 10).⁸



Fig. 8. Reflected infrared digital photograph of the window ledge, *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861)



Fig. 9. Detail of the painted lines around the stone bench, *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861)

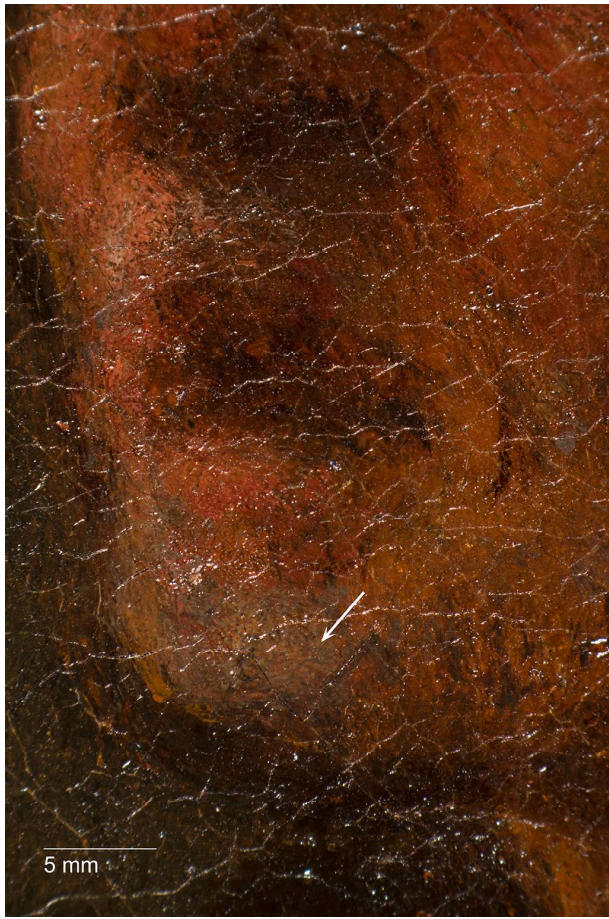


Fig. 10. Photomicrograph of underlying gray paint on Tobit's face, *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861)

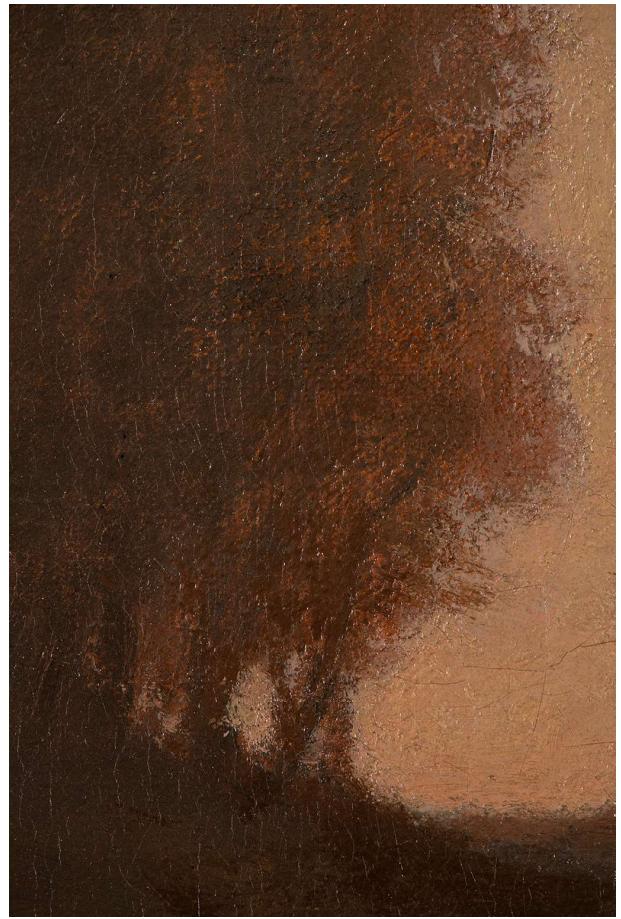


Fig. 11. Detail of the trees at upper left, *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861)



Fig. 12. Detail of the foreground, *Waiting* (ca. 1853-1861)

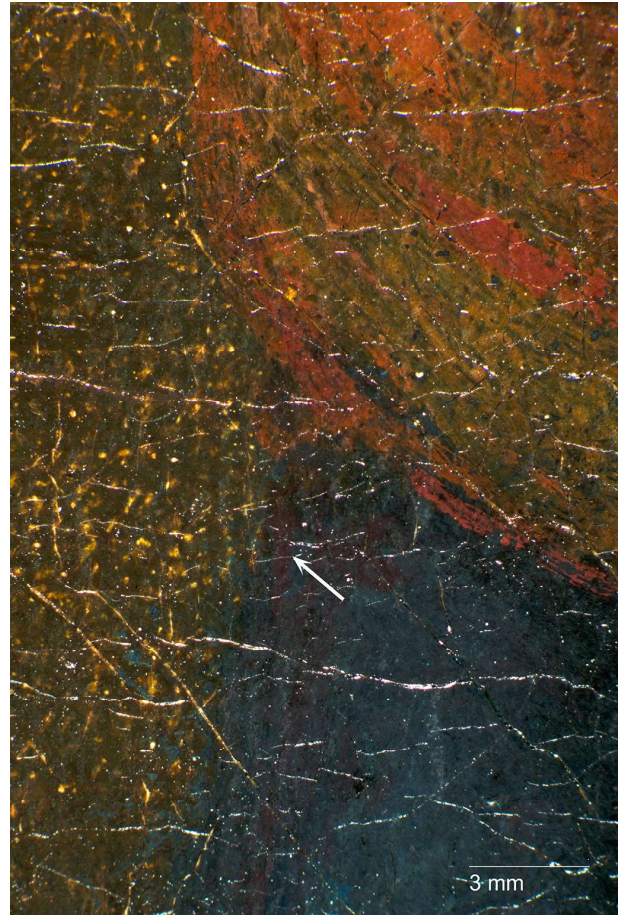


Fig. 13. Photomicrograph of *Waiting* (ca. 1853-1861), showing the bright orange and pink outlines on Anna's proper left hand and a transparent red-purple stroke at the edge of her skirt. The image is slightly overexposed to more easily view the faint red-purple paint.

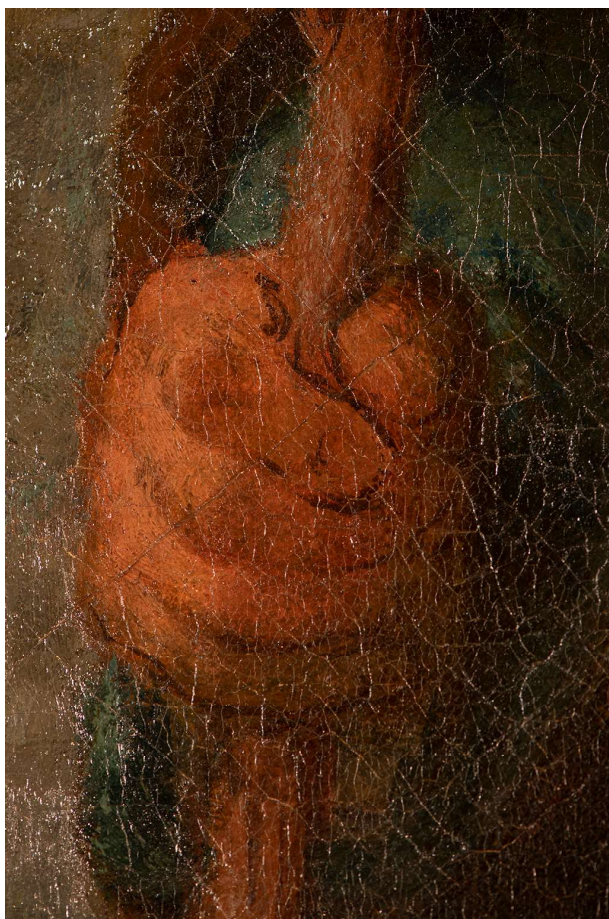


Fig. 14. Detail of the finely painted outlines on Tobit's hand, *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861)

Subsequent paint layers are thin and mostly opaque with wet-over-dry brushwork. The sky was rendered with opaque paint, and Millet's somewhat dry brush created a rough, indistinct edge that defines the border of the left trees (Fig. 11). Glimpses of sky in the form of pink, purple, and blue dabs are evident among the dryly painted, stippled leaves of the largest tree. The foreground consists of scumble-like applications in muted shades of brown and lavender with occasional touches of bright blue and violet. The stone cottage was similarly executed with loose, painterly brushwork that defines the stone around the doorway with greater detail than the rest of the wall. Somewhat dry paint applications on the building allow the preliminary brown wash to be visible. Stones in the foreground were efficiently painted with a few cursory, fluid brown outlines and opaque highlights, with the gray-brown of the foreground serving as the mid-tone (Fig. 12).

In contrast to the loosely painted foreground and cottage, Millet carefully rendered the figures and cat with fine brushes, ranging from 1 to 5 millimeters wide. Hatching strokes portray the texture of Tobit's cloak and mark the lavender highlights on Anna's bonnet. Vivid orange and pink paint strengthen the contours and highlights of Anna's hand (Fig. 13), forearm, and underdress, and similar touches of paint are present on Tobit's face and ear. When the painting is examined with ultraviolet (UV) radiation, a number of areas produce a pink and dull orange UV-induced visible fluorescence: Anna's hand and skirt as well as a few paint strokes in the lower right foreground, sky, Tobit's clothing, highlights of the cat, and the stone wall (left of the doorway). The color of the UV fluorescence suggests the presence of madder lake, a red that Millet is known to have favored.^{9,10} Additionally, transparent red-purple strokes outline the proper left side of Anna's skirt, marked with an arrow in Figure 13, and touches of magenta are present in the shadows of Tobit's face. In the final stages of painting, Millet strengthened forms with additional outlining strokes, for instance along Tobit's legs and proper right hand (Fig. 14).

Millet made a number of small corrections as he developed the composition, an aspect of the artist's process described by conservator Stéphanie Constantin: "Millet seems to have had to search for the exact outlines of his motifs on the definitive support. It is what he himself called 'weeding-out' his composition."¹¹ These minor adjustments are apparent with infrared reflectography and the naked eye: shifting the window ledge (Fig. 8), cropping Tobit's proper right foot, raising Anna's hem, repositioning the cat's head and front legs (Fig. 15), and slightly widening Tobit's blue coat (proper left side). A more significant compositional change occurred in the central placement of Anna. X-radiography, infrared reflectography, and the presence of underlying blue paint associated with her dress confirm that Millet repositioned this figure twice, moving her toward the center of the canvas (Fig. 16).^{12,13} Two silhouettes, located 6.3 and 14 centimeters from the proper right edge of the figure, repeat the angle of her back and the contour of her dress.



Fig. 15. Detail showing a slight repositioning of the cat's head and legs, *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861)

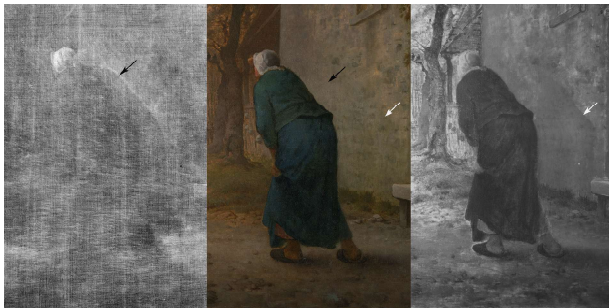


Fig. 16. Radiograph detail (left), normal illumination detail (center), and reflected infrared digital photograph detail (right) of *Waiting* (ca. 1853–1861), revealing the two former positions of Anna. White arrows indicate the contours of the right silhouette, and black arrows mark the second silhouette.

Both the design of the modern stretcher and the technique of the wax-based lining verify that the painting was treated sometime after entering the Nelson-Atkins collection in 1930.¹⁴ The lining has caused some weave interference, and a small area of canvas delamination is apparent on the upper right. Stretcher cracks and an extensive craquelure have formed across

the paint surface. During a past cleaning, a natural resin varnish was fully removed from the sky, but unevenly thinned in other areas, perhaps in an attempt to protect thin washes that are inherently more vulnerable to solvent cleaning. In 2007, a saturating layer of varnish was added, and careful retouching was applied to address distracting age cracks and a small amount of pinpoint-size abrasion.¹⁵

Mary Schafer
June 2022

Notes

1. Creases and small fragments of the original turnover edge are present on the lower right and upper left edges, and there appears to be a sliver of the turnover at the bottom edge (right side).
2. Millet frequently used standard-format canvases for his painting supports. See Stéphanie Constantin, "The Painters of the Barbizon Circle and Landscape Paintings: Techniques and Working Methods" (PhD Diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 2001), 152.
3. David Bomford, Jo Kirby, John Leighton, and Ashok Roy, *Art in the Making: Impressionism* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 45–46.
4. Constantin, "The Painters of the Barbizon Circle and Landscape Paintings," 251.
5. The use of "crayon gras" here likely refers to a grease pencil or lithography crayon. For a discussion of the six categories of wax-based drawing media (colored pencil, grease pencil, lithographic crayon, wax crayon, oil pastel, and paint stick), see Margaret Holben Ellis and M. Brigitte Yeh, "The History, Use and Characteristics of Wax-based Drawing Media," *The Paper Conservator* 22 (1998): 48–55.
6. Constantin, "The Painters of the Barbizon Circle and Landscape Paintings," 226–28.
7. When the painting was studied under the stereomicroscope and with infrared reflectography, only two areas—vertical strokes within the window (center of the top edge) and the outer edges of the tallest tree—revealed potential drawn lines. This black material appears to lie on top of the ground where it is covered by the artist's preliminary washes.

8. Constantin, "The Painters of the Barbizon Circle and Landscape Paintings," 225–28.
9. Helmut Schweppe and John Winter, "Madder and Alizarin," in *Artists' Pigments: A Handbook of Their History and Characteristics*, ed. Elisabeth West FitzHugh (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1997) 3:124.
10. Ch[arles] Moreau-Vauthier, *Comment on peint auhourd'hui* (Paris: H. Floury, 1923), 31, cited in Constantin, "The Painters of the Barbizon Circle and Landscape Paintings," 198.
11. Constantin, "The Painters of the Barbizon Circle and Landscape Painting," 227.
12. See film-based radiographs, no. 438, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, 30-18.
13. When traction cracks, now covered by retouching, were studied under the stereomicroscope, underlying blue paint associated with Anna's jacket and dress was visible. The repositioning of the figure is more readily apparent when these areas are viewed with the longer wavelength range of the Hamamatsu C1000-03 vidicon camera (1000–2200 nanometers).
14. There are no written reports or photographs associated with this early Nelson-Atkins treatment.
15. Mary Schafer, May 8, 2007, treatment report, Nelson-Atkins conservation file, 30-18.

Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945: The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, edited by Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2022. doi: 10.37764/78973.5.528.4033.

Provenance

Purchased from the artist by Arthur Stevens and Ennemond Blanc, Paris, by May 1, 1861 [1];

Henry Sayles (1834–1918), Boston, by 1878—at least May 1882;

George Ingraham Seney (1826–1893), New York, by October 26, 1886–February 13, 1891;

Purchased at his sale, *Mr. George I. Seney's Important Collection of Modern Paintings*, American Art Galleries, New York, February 13, 1891, lot 296, as *Waiting*, through Knoedler and Co., New York, by a private collector [2];

Jérôme Wheller, Chicago, by June 8, 1892 [3];

With Isidore Montaignac, Paris, by December 27, 1893 [4];

Purchased from Montaignac by Boussod, Valadon and Co., New York, stock books 13 and 14, no. 23270, as *L'attente*, December 27, 1893–December 22, 1894;

Purchased from Boussod, Valadon by Peter Arrell Brown Widener (1834–1915), Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, PA, December 22, 1894–November 6, 1915;

By descent to his son, Joseph Early Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, PA (1871–1943), 1915—at least 1921 [5];

With Arthur Joseph Sulley, London, by January 15, 1922 [6];

Half-share purchased from Sulley by Knoedler, New York, stock books 7 and 8, no. 15309, as *L'Attente*, January 15, 1922–May 1930 [7];

Purchased from Knoedler and Sulley by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1930.

Notes

[1] On March 14, 1860, Millet and Stevens signed a three-year contract, which stipulated that Millet would deliver his entire production of oil paintings and drawings to Stevens, in exchange for a fixed monthly stipend of 1000 francs. Included in the list of paintings to be given to

Documentation

Citation

Chicago:

Danielle Hampton Cullen, "Jean-François Millet, *Waiting*, ca. 1853–1861," documentation in *French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945: The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, ed. Aimee Marcereau DeGalan (Kansas City: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37764/78973.5.528.4033>.

MLA:

Cullen, Danielle Hampton. "Jean-François Millet, *Waiting*, ca. 1853–1861," documentation. *French*

Stevens "et Cie." was *Waiting*. See "Le prix des œuvres de J.-F. Millet," *Le Temps* 29, no. 10296 (July 14, 1889): unpaginated; and Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet, Raconte par Lui-Même* (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1921), 2:71–74. Stevens had entered into a partnership with the Parisian dealer Ennemond Blanc prior to the contract signing to reduce his risk; see T. H. Bartlett, "Barbizon and Jean-Francois Millet," *Scribner's Magazine* 7, no. 6 (June 1890): 742. It is not clear when Millet delivered *Waiting* to Stevens and Blanc, but he was still working on it in May 1860. At the latest, it was delivered in time for the *Salon de 1861*, which opened May 1.

[2] See letter from Edye Weissler, Librarian, Knoedler, to Simon Kelly and Meghan Gray, May 7, 2010, NAMA curatorial files. Weissler confirmed that Knoedler bid on behalf of a client at the Seney sale, but had no information about the identity of the client.

[3] The constituent's name is also spelt variously as "Wheler" and "Wheeler". We defer here to the spelling in the 1892 exhibition catalogue, *Cent Chefs-d'œuvre des Écoles Françaises et Étrangères (Deuxième Exposition)*.

[4] Montaignac was a Paris representative for the American Art Association and a representative of the "Paris connoisseurs". Montaignac may have owned the painting earlier. According to a journal article from December 1892, Montaignac bought the painting at the Seney Sale in 1891; see Montague Marks, "My Note-Book," *The Art Amateur* (December 1892). It is not clear if Montaignac had a working relationship with Knoedler or Wheller, or if he was acting separately. The Boussod, Valadon and Co. stock books indicate that Montaignac received a percentage of the *benefice* (profit) from their sale of the painting to Widener. See Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Goupil et Cie / Boussod, Valadon and Co. Records, Series II: Boussod, Valadon and Co. Stock Books (1875–1919), Livre no. 13 (1891–1895), p. 159, row 14, no. 23270; and Livre no. 14 (1895–1901), p. 46, row 3, no. 23270.

Charles Tyson Yerkes (1837–1905), Chicago, was also credited as a possible owner of the painting after the Seney sale; see Montague Marks, "My Note-Book," *The Art Amateur* 36, no. 105 (May 1897). Yerkes was a prominent Chicago art collector, and much of his art collection was well documented and catalogued. The painting is not included in his 1893 *Catalogue from Collection of Charles T. Yerkes*. Additionally, Marks also notes that many collectors were falsely credited with ownership of this painting. See Montague Marks, "My Note Book," *The Art Amateur* 4, no. 30 (March 1894): 98.

[5] Widener's eldest son, George Dunton Widener, died aboard the Titanic on April 15, 1912, so his second son inherited his art collection; see "Widener's Estate Intact for 70 Years," *The New York Times* 65, no. 21, 222 (November 23, 1915): 1. *Waiting* still belonged to Joseph Early Widener as late as 1921; see Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, *Millet, Raconte par Lui-Même* (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1921), 2:194.

[6] Sulley (1853–1930) was an art dealer and Widener's London agent.

[7] On January 15, 1922, Knoedler paid Sulley £14,000 for joint ownership of fourteen paintings from the Widener collection, including *Waiting*. See Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, M. Knoedler and Co. Records, Series I.A. (Painting, 1872–1970), Box 7, Painting stock book 7 (nos. 15140–17039, January 1921–December 1927), p. 27, row 9, no. 15309. It remained in their joint possession until May 1930, when it was acquired by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art; see Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, M. Knoedler and Co. Records, Series I.A. (Painting, 1872–1970), Box 8, Painting stock book 8 (nos. A1–A2680, January 1928–November 1943), p. 6, row 45, no. 15309. The work was formally acquired by the Nelson-Atkins on June 21, 1930.

Preparatory Works

Jean-François Millet, *The Parents of Tobias Awaiting His Return (L'Attente)* (recto and verso), ca. 1853–1854, charcoal and pastel on blue-gray paper, 10 5/8 x 12 in. (27 x 30.5 cm), Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Edward L. Tuohy, 1959.31.

Jean-François Millet, *The Prodigal Son*, 1856, charcoal on gray-blue stained paper, 27 7/3 x 18 57/64 in. (61.5 x 48 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Figure Coming Out of a Wood* (verso), nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 4 3/4 x 6 1/8 in. (12.2 x 15.5 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Study for Tobit or Waiting from 1861*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 2 1/2 x 4 3/4 in. (6.5 x 12.1 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Study for Tobit or Waiting*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 3 1/8 x 3 5/8 in. (8.1 x 9.2 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Study for Tobit or Waiting* (recto), nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 3 3/8 x 4 1/4 in. (8.6 x 10.8 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Half-figure of Tobit, for Tobit or Waiting* (verso), nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 3 3/8 x 4 1/4 in. (8.6 x 10.8 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Study for Tobit or Waiting*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 2 3/8 x 2 3/8 in. (5.9 x 5.6 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Study for Tobit or Waiting*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 5 x 4 in. (12.2 x 9.7 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Sketch for Tobit or Waiting*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 7 x 4 5/8 in. (16.9 x 11.7 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Peasant woman seen from behind, for Tobit or Waiting*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 9 1/2 x 5 5/8 in. (24.2 x 14.4 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *An Old Woman, in profile to the left, Looking through a Window*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 6 x 4 in. (15.4 x 10.3 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Two Figures on the Landing of a House*, nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 2 1/2 x 5 in. (6.5 x 12.7 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Woman Standing, Seen from Behind* (verso), ca. 1860, black conté crayon on paper, 12 9/16 x 10 3/16 in. (31.9 x 25.8 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Study of Hands* (recto), ca. 1860, black conté crayon on paper, 12 9/16 x 10 3/16 in. (31.9 x 25.8 cm) Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Man in a Doorway; Standing Man; Leg* (verso), nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 6 1/4 x 3 in. (15.8 x 10.0 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Femme, vue de dos, balayant, devant une maison*, nineteenth century, crayon on paper, 2 5/8 x 5 in. (6.7 x 12.5 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-François Millet, *Woman Standing, Seen from Behind, Looking into the Distance* (recto), nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 2 5/8 x 4 in. (6.7 x 12.6 cm), Musée du Louvre.

Jean-François Millet, *Alley of a Village* (verso), nineteenth century, pencil on paper, 2 5/8 x 4 in. (6.7 x 12.6 cm), Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Salon de la Société des Amis des Arts de Bordeaux, Galeries de la Société des Amis des Arts de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, March 20–May 18, 1869, no. 434, as *L'attente*.

An Exhibition of Contemporary Art Held Under the Direction of the Boston Art Club, the Boston Society of Architects, and the Schools of the Museum, also of the paintings shown by the Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, April 22–May 24, 1879, no. 118, as *Tobit and Sara watching for the Return of Tobias*.

Summer Loan Exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, May 1882, no. 32, as *Tobit and Anna looking for the Return of Tobias*.

Exhibition of Oil Paintings at the Reception in Honor of the Representatives of the French Government Attending the Inauguration of the Statue of Liberty, Union League Club, New York, opened October 27, 1886, no. 64, as *Waiting*.

Mr. George I. Seney's Collection of Paintings, Brooklyn Art Association, April 16–28, 1887, no. 45, as *Waiting*.

The works of Antoine-Louis Barye; also of Paintings by his contemporaries and Friends, The American Art Galleries, New York, November 1889, no. 573, as *Waiting*.

Cent Chefs-d'œuvre des Écoles Françaises et Étrangères (Deuxième Exposition), Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, June 8–July 29, 1892, no. 119, as *L'Attente*.

Exhibition of Nineteenth Century French Painters, Knoedler, London, June 26–July 21, 1923, no. 30, as *Tobie ou L'Attente*.

A Century of French Painting: Exhibition Organized for the Benefit of the French Hospital of New York, Knoedler, New York, November 12–December 8, 1928, no. 11, erroneously as *Le Mendiant Aveugle*.

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Raphael and America, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, January 9–May 8, 1983, no. 15, as *L'Attente (Waiting)*.

Jean-François Millet, The Bunkamura Museum of Art, Tokyo, August 10–September 23, 1991; Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, October 3–27, 1991; and Yamanashi

Prefectural Museum of Art, November 3–December 8, 1991, no. 35, as *Waiting*.

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Henri Page, "Salon de 1861," *Le Tintamarre* (June 9, 1861): 3, as *Tobie*.

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