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FRENCH REALISM
IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1848 REVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

Is there such a thing as realism in art? Is it possible to convey the truth through a work of art or is all art subjective and explainable only in terms of the artist's viewpoint? Can we even speak of realism as an artistic style or art form? These were the criteria that most concerned me while researching this thesis, and through the work I found many answers to my own questions which are helpful and relevant to my own art work.

The commonly held notion that realism is a 'styleless' or transparent style, a mere mirror image of visual reality is a gross simplification. The production of a work of art always involves the transformation of visual data to accomodate it to the flat surface of the canvas. The artist's perception is conditioned by the physical properties of paint and canvas, by his knowledge of technique and the aesthetic ideologies of the art world. It can be misleading even to speak of a school of realism such as that which emerged during the mid nineteenth century in France, for the concerns of the artists of this period varied to such a great extent.

It is very easy to be deceived by art which skillfully imitates the appearances of reality. But it is becoming more and more evident to us today that even a photograph or a clip from a news film can

only give a partial or often a misleading view of reality. The artist has the freedom to select his own subject matter and even if he faithfully represents this subject matter in a 'life-like' or 'realistic' manner the viewer may still be faced with a partial or incomplete view of reality. Many artists have been forced into compromising situations by financial necessity or by oppressive regimes such as that of Napoleon III of France from 1848, where they have had to create contrived or staged scenes containing messages of political propaganda for the regime. These paintings denied the truth completely, giving a blatant lie the appearance of reality.

Getting back to the question of realism or truth of content or of message in painting, there have always been artists, the brave few throughout the ages who have been motivated by a passion for sincerity, for telling the truth about society. In periods of stability and plenty, the truth can be rendered to the art public and gladly be accepted and admired as a glorification of society. But in times of political unrest and of oppression, the art audience, by virtue of the fact that they belong to the dominant class, do not want to hear the truth. The truth in such times hits too close to the bone, it reveals the injustices of their own dominant minority class at the expense of the masses. The ruling class in times of great decadence always becomes smaller, while the oppressed class becomes larger thus creating an enormous amount of wealth for the few but with this comes a greater sense of imbalance in society making the dominant class feel vulnerable and insecure. Artists who have revealed social imbalances and political unrest have never been

accepted by the elite art audience who do not want to be reminded of their own shaky position. Artists such as Gustav Courbet and J.F. Millet lived most of their lives in a state of great financial insecurity. Their work was slated by bourgeois critics and there was no market for it, making it extremely difficult for them to continue.

The Realism of mid-nineteenth century France came at a period of great political upheaval. Revolution followed revolution until finally the bourgeoisie, under the leadership of Napoleon III, took control. The regime was tyrannical shaky and insecure. This period was one of great social awareness among artists and writers who had been part of the revolution of 1848 where the working classes had united with the bourgeoisie to overthrow the landed class. The great democratic ideals which had united the people of France to fight for better social conditions, for a better life fell to pieces under Napoleons reign after his coup d'etat. But many artists could not forget their ideals and continued to express them and their disillusionment with Napoleons reign. They were persecuted by right wing critics and shunned by the art market for their efforts.

Artists such as Gustav Courbet, Honore Daumier and J.F. Millet searched for the truth in their work. Their search led them to discover new subject matter for art and to portray their subjects in a completely new way. Their techniques, the scale of their works, the new range and choice of content shocked the art audience of the day. Today, they are seen as the founders of a modern and contemporary way of looking at society, that is through the eyes of the ordinary working man and not through the eyes of

kings and queens, gentlemen and ladies.

In an effort to understand the art of the twentieth century and to understand what it means for art to have power and relevance for mankind, I turned to this period between the years 1840 and 1870. In studying this period I discovered how vulnerable is the position of the artist and how strong he must be if he is to retain his integrity. The Napoleonic regime did not admire honesty in the work of the artist. I will go on to describe later in this thesis the lengths to which the regime went to suppress those who honestly attempted to represent the truth of French society; the fact that a tiny elite were living off the wealth of the country at the expense of the majority of the French population, who existed in a state of desperate poverty. After combatting famine after famine, having been evicted from their farm lands by the bourgeoisie, the peasantry, which made up two thirds of the population of France, were living like stray animals on the brink of starvation. There was no limit to the time, effort and money the government was prepared to spend on disguising the facts. They developed an official form of realism, to rival the radical tendencies, bringing the arts into line with official ideology.

Why did I decide to write about this period? What is the relevance of all this for us today? I think that the age we live in today is similar to the age of Courbet, Daumier and Millet. Today, we also live in times of oppression and disillusionment. If we take a look around us, at the world at large, we see poverty, war and oppression, not only in places like

Africa, South America and the Middle East, but also to a lesser extent in our own country. This comparison of our own society with that of mid-nineteenth century France may take a stretch of the imagination for some, but it is obvious to me that the same type of class domination is going on in our society today, where we have the very few controlling vast amounts of wealth and very many people living on the verge of starvation. The sinister thing today is that this wealthy ruling class, which is fast becoming smaller and richer, is very hard to pin down. They control vast world wide corporations which are composed of various companies under trade names and titles which do not reveal the identity of their true owners.

For many people it is difficult to understand or see how this oppression works. This is because, as in Napoleon III's time, it is so well disguised and it is always difficult to assess history when one is fully immersed in the process of making it. It was easy for me to look back at mid-nineteenth century France and point out the exact methods Napoleon III used to control the media and the salons and to mould the perception of the artist into line with official thinking. It would take far more time than I have at my disposal to research what happened after Napoleon III, how other political leaders took up these very same methods and developed them to a very sophisticated and subtle level until we arrive at the type of media control that we have today.

Another reason which led me to choose this particular period was that it was a time of revolution. I think that today, although it may not seem quite so obvious, we are living in a time of great change and political

uncertainty. This is also a time of ideological change, a time of searching for new definitions of reality.

For art to be realistic, the artist must have a clear understanding of the structure of reality and a sense of the continuity between past, present and future. In the mid-nineteenth century, artists such as Courbet, Millet and Pissaro did believe in reality. They studied the findings of the developing sciences, which were then optimistic and hopeful and were being applied to all areas of research and study. They studied the theories of Karl Marx, Proudhon, of democracy and socialism. They did not mystify the world, slice it up into fragments or try to make it vague and unexplainable as did Manet, Degas and the later realists. They believed in reality and in truth and they believed in a future for mankind. At this time there were many artists, who, through disillusionment and shortsightedness, abandoned their earlier ideals and went to work for the State.

Today, I think that this sense of disillusionment with reality is very deep rooted in our society. People don't care to believe in any form of reality any more. Everything seems too huge, too mysterious, too unexplainable. People have been so influenced by the negativity of the media, which is becoming more and more powerful, by educational systems that rarely equip people to deal with modern life, that they have entered into a state of confusion and have given up trying to comprehend themselves or the world around them. They are blown around with the wind like lost ships at sea. This is why the state of the arts is in such confusion. No two artists or critics will agree on what art is, what it should aim towards, so therefore,

it is impossible for a school or tradition to develop, for artists to build upon one another's findings and ideas in order to create something powerful, relevant and effective for mankind.

At the onset of the Realist movement, artists and critics came together to define and speak out their views on art, their aspirations and discoveries. As in all other areas of life, leadership and consensus are vital to any flourishing or progressive movement. I feel that at the moment there is an attempt among artists to redefine their position in relation to the world at large but it is only just beginning.

Many of the early realist writers, artists and critics sought to revitalise the centuries old artistic goal of accurate and truthful recording of the world around them and to give this goal contemporary relevance. When they painted, the realists chose themes that would touch a common chord with the largest number of viewers. They were frequently attacked by right wing critics for the crudeness of their painting techniques and for their choice of subject matter; the idealisation of historical imagery in favour of

CHAPTER 1

THE FOUNDATION OF THE REALIST MOVEMENT

CRITICAL DEBATE

While Realism certainly cannot be described as an organised school, it was the dominant art movement from 1840 to the 1870's, 1880's. In fact, a general aesthetic theory of Realism applicable to all members of the group was never seriously advanced. Edmond Duranty wrote of the early Realists in 1856, "Realism is the opposite of a school. To speak of a 'school' of Realism is nonsense, Realism is a frank and total expression of an individuality that attacks precisely the conventions and imitation of any kind of school. A realist is completely independent of his neighbour; he renders sensations that his nature and temperament lead him to feel when he confronts something." ¹

Many of the early realist writers, artists and critics sought to revitalize the centuries old artistic goal of accurate and truthful recording of the world around them and to give this goal contemporary relevance. When they painted, the realists chose themes that would touch a common chord with the largest number of viewers. They were frequently attacked by right wing critics for the crudeness of their painting techniques and for their choice of subject matter; the eliminating of historical imagery in favour of

recording the world around them. The debate that grew up around all this helped to promote and clarify new ideas. Many writers and artists shared the same aims and aspirations for the new art. There was much discussion and lively interest created for a realist art form that would serve the democratic interests of the 1848 revolutionaries.

In a review of the Salon of 1833 Gabriel Laviron first laid down the concepts that would later be redefined and developed by the art critics Theophile Thore, Jules Antoine Castagnary and others into what would become known as Realism. Laviron was known for his involvement in the July Revolution of 1830 and for his democratic views. He called for art to be made available to all the people. This could be accomplished if artists recorded only the visible world instead of allegory and literary allusion that were accessible to only a few. He urged artists not to copy slavishly from nature but to render the particular character of each thing one wants to represent and to develop a national art through the careful recording of regional characteristics. He openly advocated using earlier masters as models for contemporary imagery.

Along with Laviron, Thore believed that art and society were closely allied and that the "new art" must shift its emphasis from allegory and history painting to the life of man, if it were to be understood by everyone. Like Laviron, Thore sought out those artists from the past who could serve as models for the new painters. There had always been realist painters and their work had to be studied and understood before the new art of the

mid-nineteenth century could be founded. He advised painters to examine the works of Carravaggio, Ribera, Velasquez, Murillo, the Le Nains, Chardin, the Dutch and Flemish painters such as Rembrandt and Vermeer in their use of familiar themes and their willingness to paint the common people.

Champfleury helped to popularise the ideas of Laviron and Thore and writers such as Max Buchon and Pierre Dupont in a pamphlet entitled *Le Realisme* 1857. Champfleury's dislike of art based on the historical past and his promotion of the artistic possibilities in themes of humble life had a profound influence on Realist painters. He recognised at an early date the importance of the Le Nains as the forerunners of Realism. He praised realist painters, notably Francois Bovin, and emphasised the social content in his still lives and family portraits. His enthusiastic support of Gustav Courbet and his understanding of the painters achievement was almost singular, at a time when Realism was often seen as a threat to Salon standards and to middle class values. In describing *The Burial at Ornans* Champfleury wrote, "I must say that the meaning of *The Burial* is striking, intelligible to all; that it is the representation of a burial in a small town. The triumph of the artist who paints individuals is seen in the way he can respond to the ultimate observation of each, in the way he chooses in this manner a type which everyone will believe they have known and which will make them remark 'This one is true to life; I have seen him'."

REALISM AND SCIENCE

It is hard today to realise the scope of the scientific revolution in the nineteenth century, so many of its discoveries by now have been absorbed without question into our automatic assumptions about the world. Scientists of the mid-nineteenth century were revealing more and more about reality, past and present. There seemed to be no limits to the discovery of what could be known about man and nature. In the last century Science was more optimistic, more ambitious and more universal in the scope of its aims than are the various specialised disciplines today. The aspirations of realism are out of fashion among artists today who in fact question the very existence of any single, unequivocal reality at all. These doubting questions have led to the idea of the world of art as independent from the world of reality which artists are beginning to question once again. For 19th century man, Science provided direct knowledge of reality and man could only know what science could know. Both Comte and John Stuart Mill were concerned to make all areas of human experience the subject of exact empirical science based on that which was observable. The Realists applied objective investigation of the external world to their art. They made truth the aim of art, truth to perceived and experienced reality.

Fustel de Coulanges in his La Cite Antique of 1864 gave impetus to the advance of impartial historical method in the study of the past, to the study of history free from theories, ideas and wishful thinking, based on careful scrutiny and critical analysis of the documents and factual evidence of the

period. Theophile Thore founded the discipline of art history as a scientific enterprise. George Sand said in 1869 that, "Politics will continue to be absurd until it becomes the province of Science".²

To realist writers and artists, the natural sciences seemed to offer a precedent for the stripping away of the clothing of illusion from the base of reality. Realism was of course attacked for its reduction of the human situation to that of the experimental laboratory. Critics likened the procedures of the Realists to those of the new scientifically objective and mechanical methods of the photographer. Baudelaire condemned the photographer and his mechanical, scientific impassivity as a threat to genuine artistic creation.

The Realists certainly did use photographs as an aid to capturing the appearance of reality. Courbet used photographs for his Portrait of Proudhon and for his Painters Studio. Manet used photographs for his Execution of the Emperor Maximilian and Degas, more than any other Realist, looked upon the photograph not merely as a means of documentation but rather as an inspiration.

Constable said that he tried to forget that he had ever seen a picture when he sat down to paint from nature. Monet said that he wished he had been born

blind and then suddenly received sight. They were stressing the importance of confronting reality afresh and consciously stripping their minds of secondhand knowledge and ready-made formulae. Realists regarded convention and schemata merely as crutches and not as necessary components of art, and furthermore, crutches which could be dispensed with. Ernst Gombrich has shown that Constable's cloud studies of 1821 to 1822 are partly based on engravings by the 18th. century water colourist Alexander Cozens.³

Constable relied on Cozens pre-existing schemata not simply as ready-made formulae but as 'aides memories' or 'aides recherches' for his own more precisely observed representations. His cloud studies were also influenced by the classified cloud forms of the meteorologist Luke Howard.⁴

Realists such as Degas chose unusual themes such as the ballet girl or the housewife bathing herself for the reason that the subject matter was less known and so it was easier to see these subjects with a fresh eye without the danger of falling back on well worn prototypes. The new democratic ideas stimulated a wider range of subject matter. Ordinary people such as merchants, workers and peasants in their everyday functions began to appear on a stage formerly reserved for kings, nobles and heroes. A true understanding of past and present was now seen to depend on a scrupulous examination of factual information free from accepted moral or metaphysical evaluation.

TRADITION AND CUSTOMS

The discipline of folklore, like its sister discipline of social anthropology, was rooted in 19th. century evolutionary theory, particularly the concept of unilinear evolution popular at the time. Peasants, their religions, superstitions, stories, songs, artifacts and tools were seen as relics from a previous stage of social evolution. Folklorists believed that they were recording their own past. Beethoven and Bartoli incorporated peasant songs in their music. Painters and printmakers depicted folk costume and peasant types. These images were first resisted. Painting of all the arts was always considered to have the most noble aims and for most European art lovers there was little nobility in peasant life. Yet, with the steady increase in circulation of studies in scientific naturalism, travel books and collections of folk tales and folk costumes, the peasant came to be seen as the closest of all European men to nature, and nature was the new aesthetic for art.

Leopold Roberts Girl of Procida of 1822 was one of the first paintings to reveal the customs and costume of the peasantry. This idealised Italian peasant was painted in neo-classical style but her pose and setting deny her the contemporaneity of later works. Robert wrote, "... I was struck by these Italian figures by their remarkable customs and ways, their picturesque and uncouth clothing. I set out to render this as truthfully as possible but above all with the simplicity and nobility which one cannot help noticing in the Italian people and which is a trait inherited from their ancestors." ⁵ Robert used ancient Rome and the Roman nation as a means of

NOTES:

elevating the peasant to the category of high art. He devoted many canvases to scenes of religious and pagan ritual in Italy. The Madonna dell' Arco set the stage for the elevation of genre painting to the level of Salon history painting. Despite the fact that a great deal can be learnt from Robert's work of the clothing and customs of the Italian people, Robert did not reveal the hard facts in his paintings - that the Italian peasant lived in poverty and disease.

Camille Corot brought the tradition to new heights in his paintings of costumed Italian peasants. The primary quality of Corot's single figures is their melancholy and listlessness which is very distant from Roberts dancing and celebration. "Where Robert placed the Italian peasant confidently in the Paris Salon, Corot, whose pictures were also exhibited in the Salons, created dream filled worlds for a nation suffering severely from the 'mal du siecle', the disease of modernism.....Corot followed an isolated path of his own." ⁶

Ernest Herbert, another French painter of Italian peasant genre, depicts the truth of Italian life. His Malaria, which was exhibited in the Salon of 1851, deals frankly and simply with the disease of the Roman peasantry. The lifeless figures, sad and desolate, are set in a deathly landscape, so often described by 19th. century travel writers. These ravages of human life were left unpictured until the time of Herbert. His work prepares the way for Realism. His disease-ridden peasants are both beautiful and classical without being ideal.

NOTES:

¹Gabriel P. Weisberg, The Realist Tradition/French Painting
Drawing 1830 - 1900, p.1

²Linda Nochlin, Realism, p.42

³Ibid., p.18

⁴Ibid.

⁵Richard P. Bretell and Caroline P. Bretell, Painters and
Peasants in the Nineteenth Century, p.15

⁶Ibid., p.22

CHAPTER 2

POPULAR THEMES AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

CONTEMPORANEITY AND REALISM

The Realist insisted that only the contemporary world was a suitable subject for the artist since as Courbet put it " .. the art of painting can only consist of the representation of objects which are visible and tangible for the artist" and the artists of one century were "basically incapable of reproducing the aspect of a past or future century".¹ Even artists who kept to subjects of the past were profoundly influenced by considerations of factual accuracy. History and value, history and faith, which had been inseparable in mythological painting and in religious painting were torn asunder. History painting became more factual and the chronological range expanded. Fernand Commons', The Stone Age, Geromes Louis XIV and Renoirs Le Moulin de la Galette are examples of this expanded historical sense and they all attempt to place the daily life of a given historical period in a convincing, objectively accurate milieu.

Courbet said that, "Each epoch must have its artists who express it and reproduce it for the future. The history of an era is finished with that era itself and with those of its representatives who have expressed it".²

As Realism evolved the demand for contemporaneity became more rigorous. Confronting the concrete experiences and appearances of their own times, with a truthful and serious attitude and the use of fresh, appropriate imagery, was the only valid approach to creating an art of their own epoch. Artists turned to the neglected areas of modern life, to the lot of the labouring poor, both rural and urban, the daily life of the middle classes, the railroad and industry, the modern city. Realists explicit goal was the analysis of and the depiction of contemporary life.

POPULAR THEMES AND SOURCES

The outpouring of poetry, prose, songs, social treatises on the poor, and statistical studies on urban society during the nineteenth century provided models for the artists depiction of the social ills of society. The songwriter Pierre Dupont encouraged humanitarian instincts through verses that reflected the growing social consciousness of the time. Novelists such as Honore Balzac, George Sand, Eugene Sue used the social problems of the country as a basis for their fiction. Champfleury provided documentation to support his novels and to authenticate the scenes in which his stories were laid.

Mechanised production allowed for the broad circulation of books and newspapers to a growing reading public, providing a ready source for current events and interests which included exposes of the nation's social ills.

Books, not only exposed the social evils, but often went so far as to provide reasons for them. In the 1820's the Journal des Débats examined the rate of suicide in the cities. 'A Frégiers des classes dangereuses de la population dans les grandes villes et des moyens de les rendre meilleures' offered explanations for social unrest and for the marked increase in urban crime. Edouard Ducpétiaux's De la condition physique et morale des jeunes ouvriers et des moyens de l'améliorer exposed the plight of child labourers and suggested ways that these conditions might be alleviated.

Another widely read source was the Physiologies, studies of nature and various kinds of people. Some contained engravings as well as text and recorded certain types of characters distinctive to city and countryside. These provided model books for the Realist painters.

The Compilations Cris de Paris were another source of inspiration for artists. These collections of pictures with brief captions first appeared in the 13th. century⁴ and included prints of street industries, vendors and artisans that could be referred to or used as models by artists. The most famous of these was Bouchardons Etudes prises dans le baspeuple ou les cris de Paris, published in 1737. They provided historically accurate and readily accessible details of dress, customs and characters that supplemented the vocabulary of the Realist painters.

Several of the early realists; Jeanron, Bonvin and Ribot had themselves been printmakers and their familiarity with these volumes can be detected in

- (1) their early drawings and paintings. Bonvins early drawing of a woman scouring
- (2) a copper cauldron, for example, relies heavily on Bouchardons engravings.

He uses a similar figure placed dramatically close to the foreground of the

- (3) picture, deeply involved in her work. Bonvins drawing of a woman sweeping was
- (4) suggested in part by Bouchardons use of a similar model. Theodide Ribots
- (5) Petit Laiture is also based on traditional conography as is Manets Ragpicker which was probably influenced by the model found in Les Francais peints par eux-memes.

Craftsmen, whose trade had been handed down from generation to generation were

- (6) a favourite Realist subject. The Woodworker at his Lathe, drawn by Léon Lhermitte, and The Tinker by Alphonse Legros are two examples from this tradition. Their workmen reflect a somewhat Romantic view of a labourer's life.

POPULAR TYPES

The early realists drew from the popular prints and engravings of the day. They borrowed from traditional iconography in dealing with popular types and characters. They did not simply portray these familiar figures in a picturesque or sentimental way but with a compassion and increasing awareness of their social context. They revealed their poverty and their vulnerable position at the bottom level of a class structured society. After the 1848 Revolution the goal of realism became more directly related to the social conditions of the times. Realists affirmed the right of the lower classes

to artistic status. Stone breakers, ragpickers, beggars, street walkers, laundresses, miners and milkmaids began to appear in paintings and novels not just as picturesque background figures but at the centre of the stage.

- (7) Francois Bonvin's The Young Savoyard, painted in 1845, is a significant work of this period. It depicts an urchin counting his pennies and typifies the many homeless children turned out of their native regions to fend for themselves or in gangs in the streets of French cities. These beggars increased the already critical problem of poverty in France and highlighted the need for a social welfare program. The tradition of the petit savoyard making his way to Paris was well established in social history, literature and the visual arts as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Petit Savoyard of Antoine Watteau may have originated this tendency in 1708.⁵ The young immigrants often found work sweeping chimneys, assisting in building trades or in various seasonal jobs. They were often exploited by cunning entrepreneurs who forced them to turn over whatever money they received in return for lodging and food which were very minimal. Sometimes parents were forced to send their children on to the streets or hired their children out in seasonal work for a fee. Gabriel Decamps (1803 - 1860) did many lithographs showing savoyards at street entertainment. The early versions sentimentalised the youths, with large open eyes, playing on the viewer's sympathy. Bonvin's treatment of his youth was sympathetic and intimate yet with only the slightest suggestion of Romanticism. Bonvins small canvas was among the first of those created by Realist painters that identified the petit savoyard as a symbol of menial work.

Bonvin's canvas is also a perfect example of the small genre compositions that initiated the realist movement during the the 1840's. The simple pose of the child hunched over his coins, the flat backdrop and the fact that he was allowed no eye contact with the viewer, lessened the sentimentality that earlier renditions might have suggested. The second pair of shoes, the meagre lunch of an apple and a piece of bread and the few coins bring into focus the intent but servile figure. In disquieting simplicity Bonvin has captured the ambience of solitary impoverished childhood.

The proud and resolute ragpicker was a popular type that Realist artists represented quite frequently. The lithographs of the 1840's immortalised the ragpicker as an outcast from society, condemned to exist on the refuse (8) of a changing world. Bonvins rendering distinguishes the ragpicker from the beggar emphasising what he knows to be the truth about this figure.

By placing the figure against a simplified background, Bonvin accentuated the form, shading one section of the composition and throwing the figure into sharp relief. Thus the pensive expression of the solitary figure creates a mood of dignity.

(9) Theodule Ribot's Little Milkmaid of the 1860's also relied on popular tradition, especially songs, poems and fables. The milkmaid from the country, accompanied by her dog and cat while making her rounds in the city to sell the farm surplus was a customary sight. She reveals the innocence of childhood but retains the stance and attributes of the well known engraved image. The influence of the Spanish masters of the 17th. century is apparent in this painting.

Ribera and Velazquez were appreciated by the Realists not only because of their themes but because of the way they painted. The rich blacks, whites and greys evident in the works of the Spanish masters were used frequently by the Realists to effect subtle interplays between forms. Ribot's images with their simple themes and earthy, tactile style, combined with the well-established sources to achieve an unusual integration of visual presentation.

- (10) Ribot's Guitar Player reflects the concern during the mid 1860's on the part of many writers for the dying tradition of the street performer, who had been banned from earning his living from passers-by by the new regulations of the Second Empire. Ribot's painting documents the wandering minstrais dressed in costumes of the Middle Ages with long capes and plumed hats. They had provided a welcome respite for the masses confined to the bleakness of city existence. His composition The Returns draws an obvious parallel (11) with Edouard Manet's The Fifer painted about the same time. Ribot cast his oboe player in a shadow, obscuring his outline, while Manet chose a starker presentation, silhouetting his performer against a light flat background. Ribot's figure is cast in dramatic lighting which draws attention to the coins he is carefully counting out. This absorption emphasises his dependence upon his day to day performances for his livelihood, unlike Manet's Fifer, which is truly a product of the 19th. century in both form and content. Ribot's composition draws on painting techniques from the 17th. century which serves to reinforce the age old tradition and evokes a melancholy for the familiar figure who was gradually disappearing from the streets of Paris.

The misery and poverty of Philippe Auguste Jeanrons

childhood, his association with radical secret societies that advocated social change after the July Revolution of 1830 were apparent in his preference for direct realism based on observation of urban social types. It is difficult to assess his work as many of his canvases have not survived. Critics of the time noted his profound sympathy for the working class. His Man in a Top Hat is probably one of many sketches depicting types from revolutionary and urban environments. The staunch figure wears his cape flung over one shoulder so that the knife tucked into his leather apron is revealed. The clenched fist and determined jaw convey the attitude of commitment to the cause of the working class. His style is direct and he has abandoned traditional methods of draughtsmanship for a rough, crude application of thick charcoal that achieves a forthright description of the personal truths he championed.

REVOLUTION AND PAINTING

The February Revolution of 1848 overthrew the monarchy and replaced it by a Republic that was made up of a confused and accidental alliance of classes. The alliance on which the Revolution was built began to break up and the question of universal suffrage became a battle between the left and the right. By the middle of June, the right had mustered their forces to put and end to the National workshops. They were out to crush the plan to nationalise the railways. The whole of Eastern Paris, the domain of the working class, rose out against the Republic in June but the insurrection was beaten by the bourgeoisie. By June 26th. the workers of Paris were defeated and silenced, the shootings and deportations, the repression of the press and political organisations had begun.

By August 1848 there had been signs of revolt in the provinces and the great battle between right and left for peasant allegiance began. In December Louis Napoleon was elected as the first president of the Republic. As the Left grew stronger in the countryside Napoleon became more and more a man of the right. In 1851, after his coup d'etat Napoleon offered the return of universal suffrage at the price of a dictatorship. The crisis in the country had deepened. Land hunger, usury and debt, falling prices, evictions and disputes over common land and forest rights fueled revolution. Part of the provinces refused the bribe of dictatorship and took up arms against Napoleon's coup d'etat. None of this lasted however. It was too local, too short of arms and organisation to take on the State. The revolt was crushed by the army, a plebiscite voted yes and the second empire began.

THE ART OF THE 1848 REVOLUTION

The versions of the June days depicted by Adolphe Leleux and Ernest Messinier both preserved the anxiety and the terror of the period. The revolt of the workers was essentially against the whole middle class of landlords, bankers and employers. The mood of the June days was one of fear, both sides were confused. The bourgeoisie again assumed power and repressive policies were (17) instituted against the working class. Leleux's The Password depicts a checkpoint manned by the lower classes of Paris and the camaraderie established among colleagues defending their beliefs. Leleux selected specific types for his revolutionary figures, an unkempt figure with ruffled beard and uncropped hair, a street urchin and a youth. Their features are gaunt, their

makeshift uniforms ragged and dirty, indicating their poverty. The face of the street urchin is a face hardened by work, a youth grown old amid the rubble of his environment. His figures have been intimately identified and sensitively depicted, many artists portrayed the revolutionaries as the anonymous rabble of the streets. The disturbing thing about the painting is that the barricade is scattered and the action is over. Three men whisper a password while other men lie like rubbish on the street, ready for the common grave. The scene is emptied of conflict and heroes. The artist was not making a judgement in favour of either side. He records a revolution emptied of meaning and value and gives us, on purpose, a picture without heroism. Leleux was a limited painter. He started from the cliché and he rarely got beyond it. He was normally a painter of Breton and Spanish scenes. But for once the clichés do not hold him. The image is derived from Liberty Guiding the People but has gone sour. There is no victory, no animation, hardly any movement at all. The three men are visible and separate, this was an achievement. Not many painters or writers gave faces to people in the nineteenth century.

In the year 1848 Ernest Messionier was made captain of artillery in the National Guard to help crush the June insurrection. He ordered the firing of a cannon at the barricade but when he saw the firsthand effects of his action he gained insight into the falseness of his position and the nature of the conflict that the right glamourised as a struggle for law and order.

- (18) Missionier's depiction of The Barricade was based on this experience which jolted him from his early complacent works. He planned to exhibit the work in the 1849 Salon but memories of the event were all too fresh and he was persuaded to withdraw it. When it was shown finally the following year it had lost its power. Critics on both left and right were overcome by its detached realism which reduced dead people to the state of inert paving stones and treated the entire scene like a pile of refuse. The critic, Sabatier, related the matter of fact attitude of the painting to that of certain historians who coolly recorded statistics of victims of some catastrophe in one sentence and then quickly passed to the next with some trivial anecdote.⁷ Peisse, the Conservative, declared that the work prevented an aesthetic distance, that its realism kept thrusting itself at the spectator.⁸ A Fourierist critic in 1851 wrote "What is most crucial in this painting is that, because of the indecision and lack of energy or effects, we are obliged to look at it for a long time, detail by detail. It is not possible to see it in one glance and pass on".⁹ It is not that the bodies are out of focus that makes them difficult to see at one glance, but that they are seen with an even clarity, like the stones around them in impartial detail. Neither left nor right could see any ideological content with which they could identify in the painting. Men are all equal here, there are no guns and swords, no leaders and no slogans. The anonymity of the people is a created sameness, the result of violence and not a 'natural' fact. These men are not anonymous, they are scrupulously

painted in minute detail, every body has a weight of its own and has died in its own private agony. The bodies become anonymous only because they are confused with each other, because they have been killed and have fallen together in a heap.

Despite his own conservative disposition, Messionier penetrated one of the social deceptions of the dominant class. He neither heroised nor morally downgraded his victims. The Messionier of The Barricade was a potential threat to the second Empire's ideology and had to be brought back to the fold.



1

THE SCOURER

by Francois Bonvin



2

ECUREUSE

by Edme Bouchardon



3

WOMAN SWEEPING

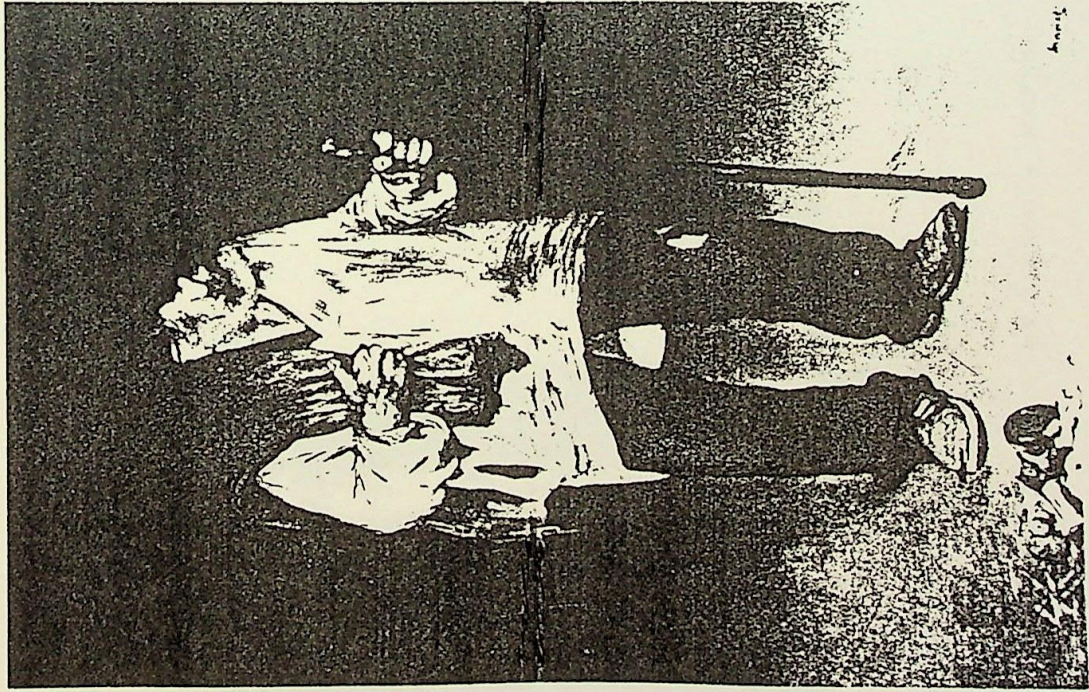
by Francois Bonvin



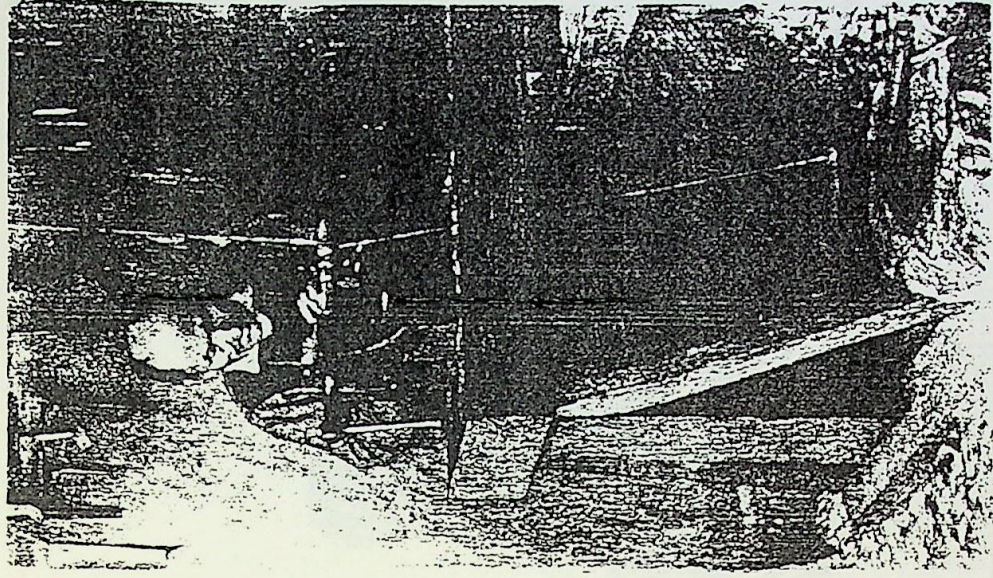
4

BALAYEUSE

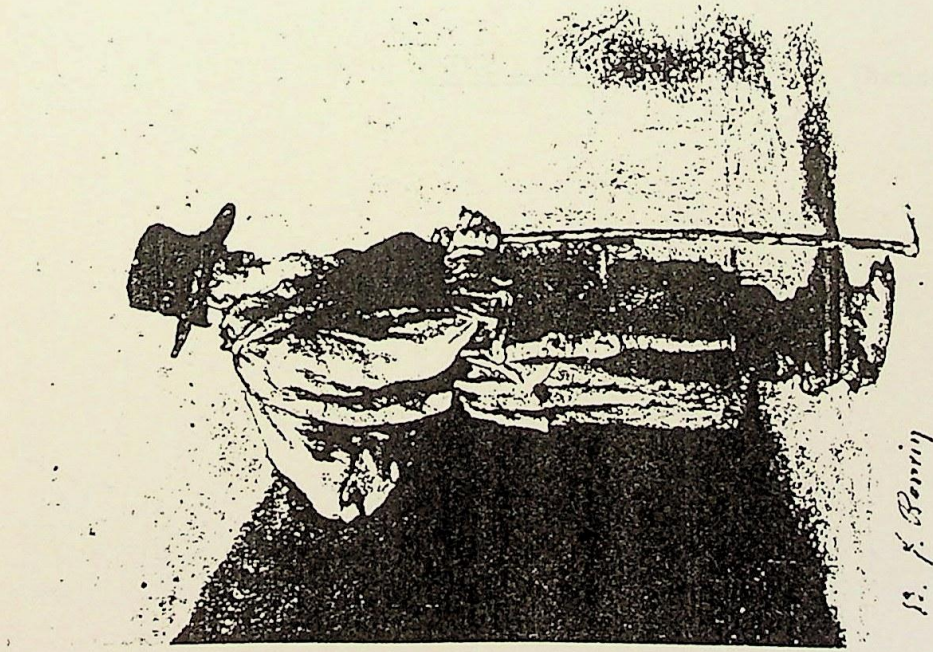
by Edme Bouchardon



5 RAGPICKER by Edouard Manet



6 THE WOODWORKER AT HIS LATHE by Leon Lhermitte



8 THE RAGPICKER

by Francois Bonvin

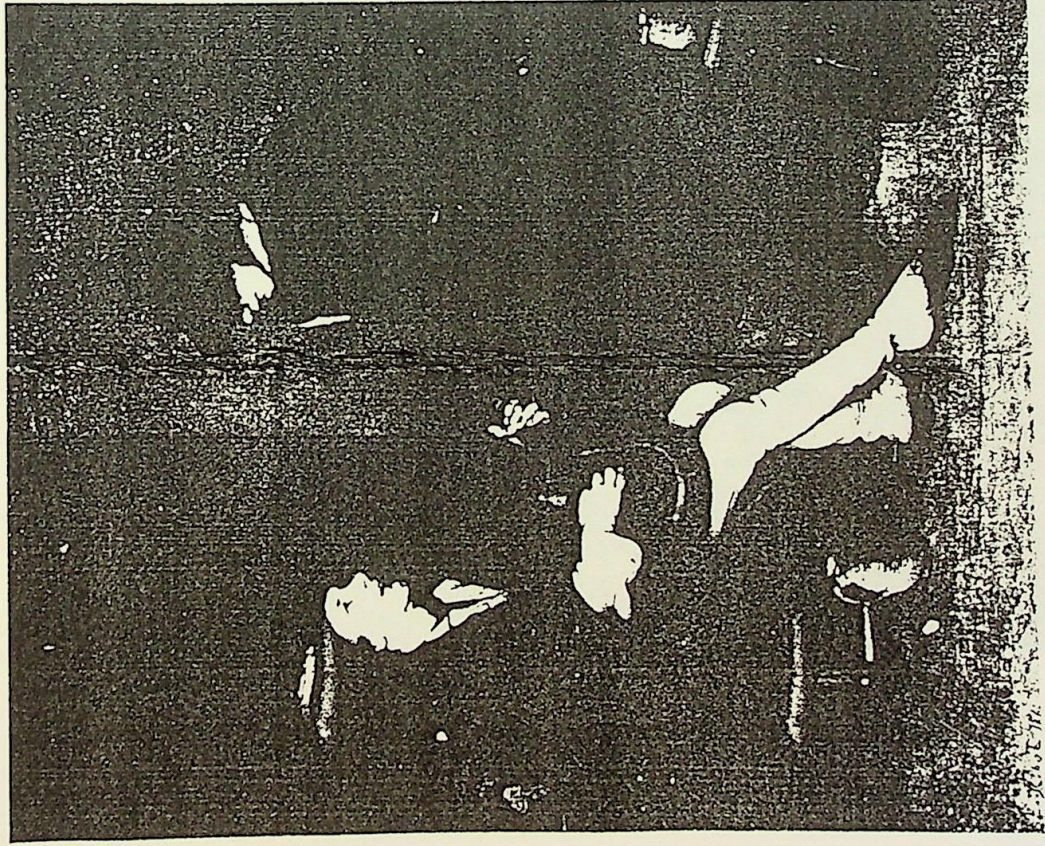


7 THE YOUNG SAVOYARD

by Francois Bonvin

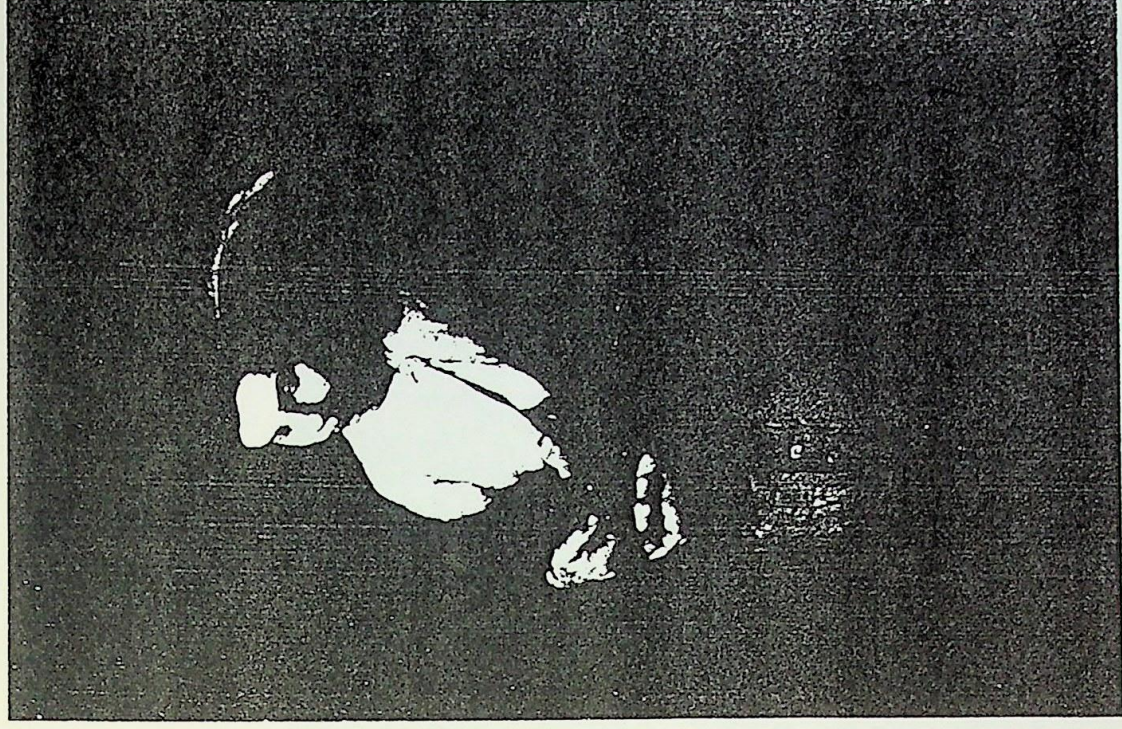


9 THE LITTLE MILKMAID by Theodule Ribot



10

THE GUITAR PLAYER by Theodule Ribot

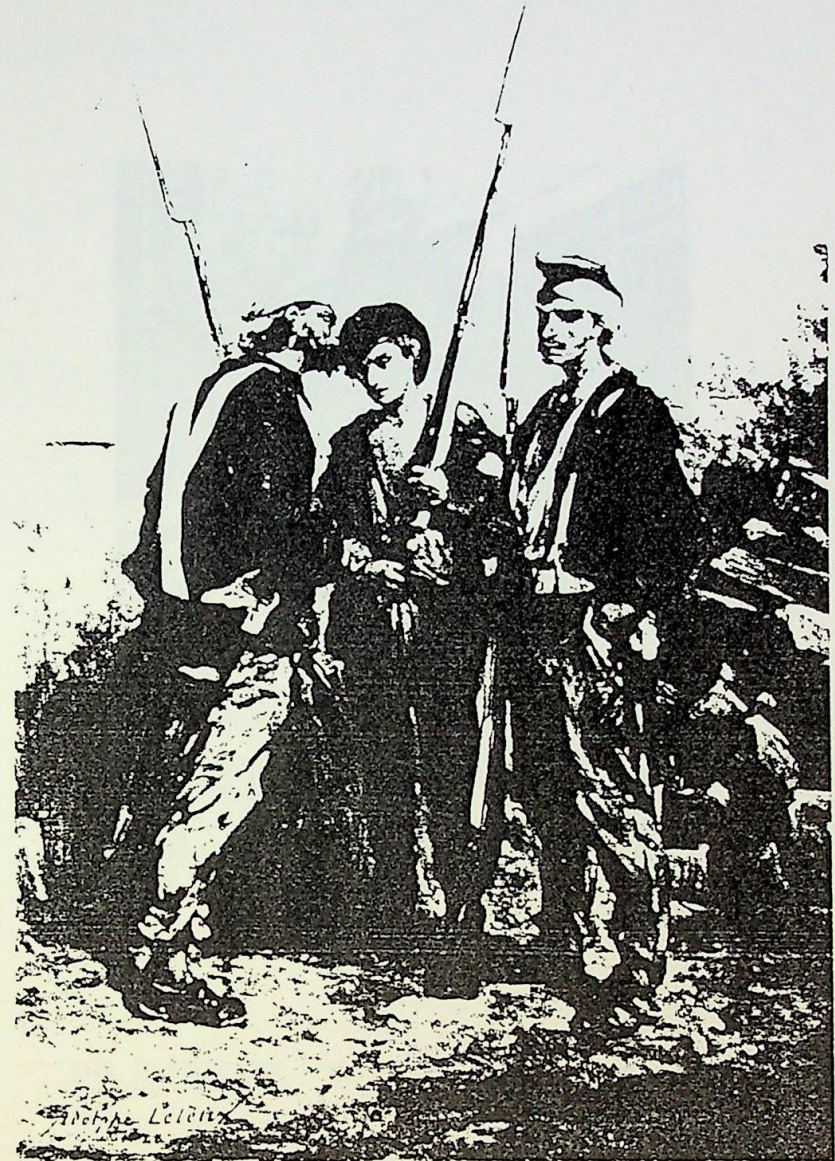


11

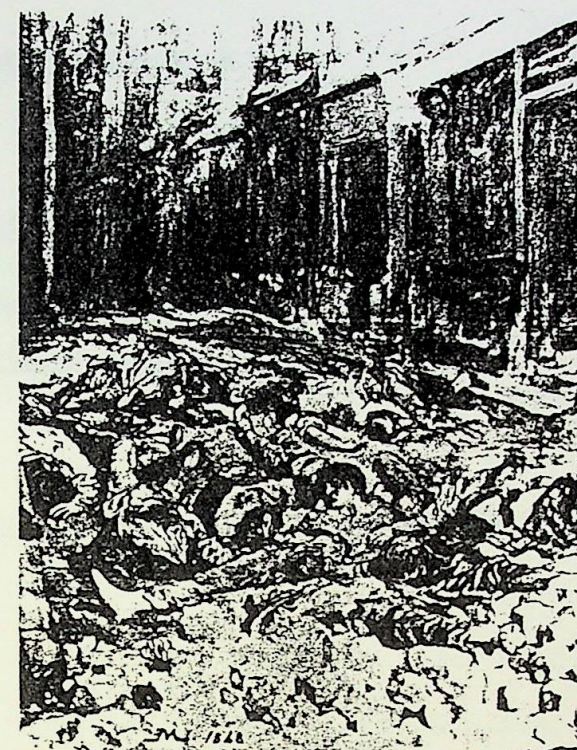
THE RETURNS by Theodule Ribot



12 THE FIFER by Edouard Manet



17 THE PASSWORD by Adolphe Leleux



18 THE BARRICADE by Jean Louis Ernest Messionier

NOTES:

¹Linda Nochlin, Realism, p.25

²Ibid, p.28

⁴Weisberg, The Realist Tradition, p.6

⁵Ibid, p.42

⁶T.J. Clark, The Absolute Bourgeois, p.18

⁷Albert Boime, "The Second Empire's Official Realism" in Gabriel P. Weisberg, The European Realist Tradition, p.103

⁸Ibid.

⁹T.J. Clark, The Absolute Bourgeois, Artists and Politics in France 1848 - 1851, p.28

CHAPTER 3

OFFICIAL REALISM

Robert Bazucha in his essay Art and the Social History of nineteenth century France outlines Gabriel Weisberg's theory that realist artists can be divided into three groups.¹ The first group is comprised of those who, like Courbet, were regarded as dangerous because they painted the social injustices of bourgeois society. The second group were those who, like Jules Breton, occasionally painted social themes but were never regarded as a threat to the social order. The third group included men like Antigna and Pils who used the realist mode to paint official propaganda and in the process formulated an official realism palatable to the bourgeoisie and the Government.

Bazucha points out the fact that the Realist style itself so often closely approximates to the way we see things with our own eyes or in a photograph that we must resist looking at realist painting as though it were an open window into the truth of life in nineteenth century France. In this chapter I will be dealing with the official art policy of Louis Napoleon and his government, which was to create an art form which could be used for

their own propagandistic purposes and which would crush all other radical art forms. No artist working during this period was able to escape the effects of this policy.

THE OFFICIAL ART POLICY OF THE SECOND EMPIRE

In his essay The Second Empire's Official Realism by Albert Boime, he outlines a theory about the conspiracy organised by the Bonapartist regime to fashion a visual style appropriate to its own ideology.² Louis Napoleon and his administration won over a younger generation of painters and encouraged the rise of alternative realist styles to rival the radical forms which came to be seen as a threat to the regime. Through Salon criticism and high influence they managed to blunt and neutralise the realist style of the left. Many conservative scholars in the past were unwilling to admit the extent of government influence on the rise and spread of the avant-garde. In fact, the second Empire comprised of a number of highly creative conservatives who ingeniously dealt with the visual arts and who left a lasting imprint. Individuals such as the Comte de Morny, the Duc de Persigny, the Comte de Nieuwerkerke, Romieu, Courmont and the Emperor himself took active part in shaping the art of the Second Empire. No artist then working was immune from the impact of their stewardship.

The Emperor and his followers supported the rise of realism for various reasons. Romanticism and Classicism were regarded by critics and artists as old fashioned. Their leaders, Delacroix and Ingres, had fallen out of favour with the ruling class because of their identification with the Legitimist and Orleanist parties. The positivist and scientific industrialist policies adopted by the regime were sympathetic to the rise of innovative realist forms such as photography and the genre paintings of the Neo-Greeks. And above all, the Emperor's aim was to communicate with a broad constituency. To do this, he needed a direct form of visual communication. The Salon pictures of his civil and military exploits were frequently lithographed.

By the 1850's, the administration had developed a fairly coherent art policy, which it invoked for propagandistic themes such as the Crimean War and civil events such as the Emperor's visits to the flood victims of 1856.

MEDIA CONTROL

As soon as the Great Exhibition of London ended in 1851 Louis Napoleon projected one on a similar scale for Paris. He planned to add a new category to it, an art section. In this he hoped to find a visual equivalent to the industrial and agricultural innovations of the Regime. The government

needed artists co-operation to produce paintings suited to their ideals. The Comte Nieuwerkerke was appointed president of the jury for admissions and other key members of the imperial administration were added to the jury which contained the usual number of loyal artists.

Napoleon wanted to appeal to the masses. He set out to forge a new ruling class from a broad spectrum of society and to indoctrinate a younger generation to replace the perverted minds of those who took part in the Revolution of 1848. His administration controlled the press by direct and indirect means until the end of the regime. Journalists were hired, papers secretly subsidised, brochures published and speeches written to influence public opinion and to measure the public's reaction to government policy. The government suppressed opposition cartoonists such as Daumier while it made effective use of propagandistic cartoons for posters in election campaigns. It is not surprising that Daumier turned increasingly to painting after 1852.

The regime reorganised the Moniteur Officiel, the official newspaper, by reducing its subscription rate and thereby increasing its circulation, making it a rival of several popular journals. It employed outstanding writers such as Gautier, Champfleury, Feullet, Mousaye and Sainte-Beuve. The government also gained control of Le Pays, Le Consitutionnel, and La Patrie.

Napoleon even provided for an opposition press to create the illusion of democracy, ensuring that they were not too radical.³ The Comte de Morny advised several of his friends who were key shareholders of Le Siecle and La Press, the opposition papers, about the advantages of government co-operation and as a result they avoided all direct attacks on the government.

Napoleon was close to republicans and leftists like Lerons, Reynand and Proudhon, using them as a liaison with the opposition. Proudhon held a number of key offices in the government and it was through friendships such as this that many writers of the left were snared into writing pamphlets for the government.

In an age when the main form of communication was the printed word, the pamphlet was a favourite weapon in indoctrination. The government marshalled the forces of the press to give the pamphlet maximum publicity. If reaction to an officially inspired pamphlet was overwhelmingly antagonistic the government would immediately withdraw press support and if necessary seize the pamphlet. Napoleon's cunning ways were based upon his recognition of the medias success in molding biases, opinions and stereotypes.

The extortionate plans of the government were not limited to control of

the press but extended to the whole of literary production. This attempt was masterminded by Sainte-Beuve, an avid supporter of the Second Empire. Sainte-Beuve exploited the state of disarray of current literature and encouraged the Emperor to provide the focus and direction necessary to mould it. He stressed the advantages of introducing the imperial prize for both poetry and prose and he promoted the growth of an alternative realist style, absorbing rival organisations and neutralising the potential opposition.

The pattern of cultural hegemony that was emerging at this time was also manifesting itself in the realm of popular culture. The administration suppressed the public singing of what they deemed to be subversive songs, like the Marseillaise and Caira. At the same time, it promoted its own tunes like, Le peuple francais a Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. The government also censored drama, blocking an opera about the Fronde, scheduled for the Academie de Musique in 1852 because of its expressions of revolt. It insisted that a presentation of the history of France at the Theatre de la Porte, Saint Martin be revised. The director went over the head of the original author and accepted a new ending showing Napoleon I distributing the Eagles on the Champs de Mars.⁴

GOVERNMENT PATRONAGE

The major institutional vehicle of communication in the arts was the government sponsored Salon exhibition which was intimately connected with the press. Often reviews were assembled into a pamphlet and sold on the market. Most of the art critics were talented writers who belonged to the presse litteraire, which was directed by Sainte-Beuve and enjoyed close connections with the regime. Among them were Moussaye, Gautier, About, Chesneau and Saint-Victor. In the Salon of 1852 the government appointed half the jury members and for the Exposition Universelle of 1855 it named the entire panel. Succeeding salon Juries remained entirely official. Trying to gain the support of the younger generation, the Medal of Honour, valued at 4,000 francs, was designed specifically for young talent in 1853. In 1855 the Emperor founded a triennial prize of 20,000 francs to be awarded "to the work best capable of honouring the State". That year he awarded 40 Legion d'honneur decorations, 240 medals and 222 Honorable Mentions in an attempt to win over the artistic community.

In 1857 the government embarked upon a major series of commissions illustrating its eventful military and civil conquests and required for this a style capable of reproducing faithfully the dress and customs of the epoch. The year of 1863 was a landmark in the definitive formulation of the

governments art program and ideology. At the awards ceremony of that year the Minister of the Beaux-Arts, Vaillant, advised all artists to take risks for the sake of original ideas. He told them that, "invention is one of the most precious qualities of art!"⁵ In November 1863 the government issued an official decree against the Academy and the classicism it preached. The reforms emphasised the need for innovation and originality and the need to unite art and industry. It introduced ateliers and modern workshop techniques to the program of the École des Beaux Arts. It now played a direct part in administrating its pedagogical program and seized the occasion to install three of its favourite artists in the newly founded studios of the École; Gerome, Pils and Cabanei. Four months before this decree Chesneau had published an article in the Revue des deux mondes to prepare the public for the reforms. Chesneau argued that art must be freed from the stultifying control of the philosophic mentality which he defined as the celebration of 'moral reality' over 'material reality'. He favoured not pure materialism but materialism tempered by idealism. He pleaded with artists to experiment with realism.⁶

VISUAL PROPAGANDA

A generation of military painters emerged during this period, their ultimate aim being to aggrandise the Emperor.

Chesneau described the military paintings as in the Exposition Universelle of 1867, "Today our battle painters are less artists, that is beings endowed with passion and sensibility than chroniclers, editors of military bulletins. They report the facts and nothing but the facts".⁷

The soldier of the Second Empire could no longer be visualised as either a classical warrior or a delirious conqueror, he was regarded as a pawn in a class match who had been moved into position on orders from remote head-

- (19) quarters. In the Salon of 1864 Messiaen's Battle of Solfrino was singled out as the most distinguished work. It depicted the Emperor, posted in front of his general staff studying the battle like, as the critic About suggested, ".... a cold blooded player studies his chessboard".⁸ Napoleon stands at a safe distance from the battle, his position is not very heroic.

The Colonialist aspirations of the regime were explained in such works as

- (20) Gerome's Reception of the Siamese Ambassadors by Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie at Fontainebleau 27th. June 1861. The painting depicts the powerful Siamese delegation as a group of servile primitives overwhelmed by the pomp and splendour of an advanced European culture. This meeting highlighted a trading and political treaty signed by both France and Spain. This work typifies an aspect of official realism that Boime terms myopic realism⁹ - painstakingly detailed but ringing false in the whole. The painting is complex and reveals a

(30) thorough knowledge of traditional ceremonial and processional events. It is comparable in some ways to Courbet's Burial at Ornans. Both represent official rites, are based on portrait studies and convey the indifference and even the boredom of certain participants. Both paintings avoid artful groupings and a central thematic and psychological focus. Courbet's realism while less exacting is more convincing as a whole in its capacity to recreate an immediate reality. The two artists looked at reality from opposing ideological perspectives, Gerome meeting the demands of the dominant elite, projecting absolute power, while Courbet analysed the structure of authority and pointed to class differentiation. Gerome did not question the structure of control with which he identified. It is a well known fact that he nearly went mad trying to satisfy the demands of various officials who wanted to be placed as close as possible to the imperial throne. Gerome was one of the original members of the Neo-Greek movement which contributed to the Empire's campaign to neutralise the radicals.

The Second Empire's sense of insecurity was marked by strenuous attempts to identify with the great dynasties of the past. Gerome exhibited his Colossal Age of Augustus in 1855. The painting is based on stages of Roman hegemony over the peoples of Northern Africa, the Near East and Asia. Clearly the figure of Augustus was based on the Emperor Napoleon himself with whom he was often identified in official propaganda.

- (21) Light hearted satirical painting such as Hamons The Human Comedy, shown in 1851, enjoyed popular success. The focus of the picture is an outdoor puppet show, the Theatre Guignol at the Champs-Elysees, where Love is hanged, Bacchus is thrashed and Minerva amuses the curious onlookers. The onlookers include Homer, Dante, Diogenes, Alexander, Socrates and Aeschylus. It mocks classicism by reducing its eminent protagonists to frivolous juveniles entranced by popular culture. While Hammon attacked authority in this painting it was safe and non-political side of authority that he struck at, which did not threaten it.

Hammons Neo-Greek realism was consciously exploited by the administration to counterbalance the radicals. Gautier wrote of the Neo-Greeks "... their diversion has been very useful and their part in the victory merits a title too honourable to ever let them be forgotten or ignored".¹⁰ The critic also referred to Toulmouche in this context. Toulmouche's Forbidden Fruit exhibited in 1865 reflects the transition of his style to modernity while keeping the artificial character and upper middle class pretensions of the Neo-Greek style. Toulmouche advised Monet to study under Gleyve, his own master. We cannot ignore the role of the Neo-Greek movement in early impressionism (which often depicted fashionably dressed women in moments of leisure) or more importantly the importance of the ultimate impact of the patronage of the Second Empire on the second and third generations of Realists.

One of Napoleon III's favourite propaganda devices was the 'whistle stop' tour throughout the countryside, a novel idea made possible by railway expansion. He often appeared where leftist opposition was strong. Local officials would organise gala celebrations and fireworks. Napoleon would review the troops and distribute government subsidised gifts to the poor. Official realism was used to publicise these events.

The Salon of 1857 contained innumerable battle scenes commemorating the victories in Crimea. It also contained many examples of the Emperor's visits to regions hard hit by the flooding of the Rhone and Loire rivers, revealing him as a victorious leader abroad and a compassionate ruler at home. Many semi-independent painters such as Antigna painted such subjects when they sensed a sure sale.

- (22) Bouguereau's Entrance of the Emperor at Tarascon. 14th. June 1856
manifested perfectly the taste of the regime. From a myopic point of view everything is rendered convincingly and accurately, but the Emperor dominates the scene. The flood victims run to him as saviour and his Christ-like role is accentuated by the spire of Tarascon cathedral.
- (23) Isidore Pils was commissioned by the government in 1852 to paint Soldiers Distributing Bread to the Poor, a work meant to portray the military in a

friendly light in the wake of the coup d'etat. Pils soon established his reputation with a series of realist battle pictures ordered by the government, revealing the most recent military operations like trench warfare, artillery emplacements and sophisticated logistics.

Pils Prayer at the Hospice was also based on the theme of government charity in institutions administered by religious orders.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE SECOND EMPIRE'S VISUAL CONTROL

JULES BRETON

Jules Breton is a singular example of the government's impact on individual artists. Breton was identified with the Revolution of 1848 and in his early work he focused his attention on the plight of the poor. He exhibited Misery and Despair in the Salon of 1849 and Hunger at the following Salon, where Millet's Sower and Courbet's Stonebreakers were also shown. By 1852 he had come under the influence of the Neo-Greeks, Gerome and Toulmouche. He came into contact with the Comte de Morny who encouraged him to prepare his Gleaners for the Exposition Universal of (24) 1855. Jules Breton's Gleaners won him critical approval and his first Salon prize in 1855. His work was represented eighteen times in the Universal Exposition of the same year. He was the first realist painter

to be honoured with membership of the Institut de France in 1886. In the Salon of 1859 Breton's Recall of the Gleaners won a first class medal and was purchased by the Emperor. Millet's Woman Tending Her Cow was attacked by critics in the same Salon.

Robert Bazucha makes a comparison between Breton's Gleaners and Millet's (25) Gleaners revealing the reasons for Breton's popularity and the rejection of Millet's work.¹¹ Firstly Breton's paintings are pleasant to look at. His women are pretty and more appealing to the taste of the bourgeoisie. Millet's have weathered faces and hardened hands. Millet commented, "Breton always paints the village girls who will not remain there. Breton depicts gleaning as a social occasion including playful children helping with the work. Millet sees it as hard and painful, his figures work in isolation".¹²

The effects of Millet's painting was disturbing to many critics whereas Breton's made them feel reassured. Breton presents a picture of an integrated well ordered society. The village steeple is present in the background as the women and children work under the gaze of the male figure of civil authority. Family, church and state form an eternal triangle. Breton's style epitomises the contemporary style associated with realism whereas Millet's Gleaners has a timeless, even classical quality to it. By contrast Millet's Gleaners seem marginal, even

outcasts of society. In the distance the harvest boss oversees the collection of the harvest from which they are excluded. Millet omitted so much from his painting that the critic Jean Rousseau wrote, "Behind these three gleaners outlined on the leaded horizon are the pikes of popular uprisings....." ¹³

At the time when Breton was painting this picture, the practise of gleaning was the subject of discussion in parliament. Although he must have been well aware of the harsh criticism of the practice by the press and politicians, he remained immune to the threat to the tradition which gave the poor the right to collect the remaining grain from the wheatfields after harvest.

Breton spent two years preparing the canvas in his native village Courriers, which is the setting for the painting. Courriers lies 33 km from Lile in the heart of the most urbanised area of rural France. Despite the fact that the region was famous for its abundance of farm products, the famines of 1846 and 1847 caused widespread poverty in the region. The farm workers were paid according to the amount they harvested and the disastrous grain harvest in 1854 caused great anxiety. ¹⁴ It was at this time that Breton was painting the Gleaners. It is impossible that Breton could have missed these facts and yet he did not record them.

Breton's father was a comfortable peasant farmer. He made his money from

various jobs such as rent collecting, tax collecting, a judge de paix, manager of the family brewery and an investor in forest property. In his book Image of the People T.J. Clarke discusses the emergence in the 1840's of what he calls "a distinct bourgeois myth of rural society", ¹⁵ masking the reality of social and economic conflict in the countryside, the myth projected rural society as a unity, a one-class society in which peasant and master worked in harmony. Courbet's imagery was considered offensive or dangerous precisely because he pulled away the mask.

The meaning behind Breton's images appears to be that life in Courriers was harmonious, that relations between man and nature, between landlord and peasant flowed smoothly. The atmosphere is free of anxiety or hardship. In other words Jules Breton was a realist purveyor of the bourgeois myth of rural society.

The fact of the matter was that the poor and indigent of Courriers were not pretty and Breton knew it. He recalls in his memoirs that he saw them when they came to his grandmother's house to beg "I felt an eternal contentment at overcoming the fear which the raggedness of the poor and especially the sight of physical deformity caused in me, fear that in special cases extended to horror". ¹⁶

Research on the medical condition of 19th. century army conscripts substantiates the fact that these people were dirty and ragged, diseased and crippled.

These outcasts of society depended on gleaning in fields and forests for survival. Few of them looked like Breton's bride and child of the bourgeoisie whom he portrayed in the Gleaners. Breton's earlier work, in contrast, reveals a social commitment, a search for the truth. In Paris in 1849 he produced Misery and Despair and Starvation, scenes from the life of the urban poor. It is significant that in his later years as the strength of the bourgeois regime grew that he changed his tune to comply with their demands. His art was a denial of the reality of life in Courriers. As Bazucha puts it, "Denial is a common physical defense against feelings of guilt and anxiety, and there were plenty of signs of it among the bourgeoisie during the 19th. century. Breton recorded gleaning in his native village through a distorted vision".¹⁷

FRANCOIS BONHOMME

Francois Bonhomme had strong ties with the left in his early years,¹⁸ suggested by the images he created at the time of the 1848 Revolution. His popular lithograph showing the Invasion of the National Assembly by the Radicals Blanque, Barbes and Huber, exhibited in 1849, was one of these. At one time he wanted to publish a series of worker images under the title Soldiers of Industry in which he focused on the the individual characteristics of factory or mine workers. La Brichole was a picture based on child labour, the bricole signifies the carrying strap which children working in mines used to carry the heavy loads of ore or coal. The frieze

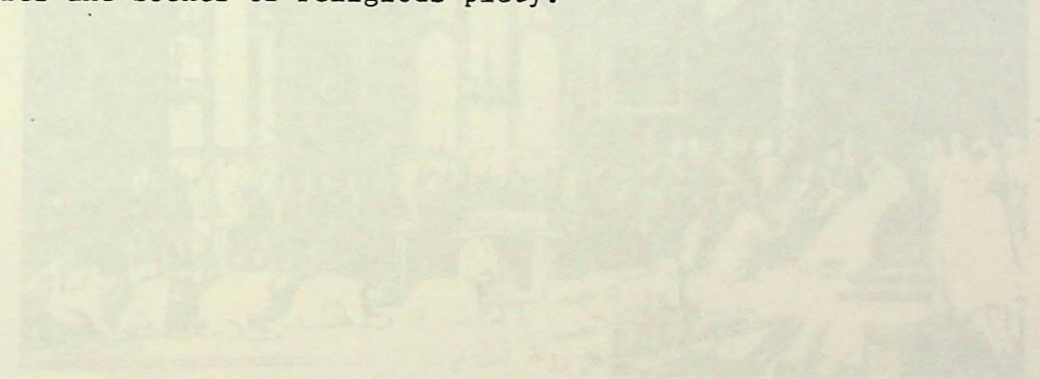
like arrangement of his figures is similar to the arrangement in Courbet's Stonebreakers. The same angularity in movement and positioning of the figures is evident although it is the naivete of Bonhomme's style that imposes the distinctive ruggedness upon the young workers. His Republican ties became undermined by the repressive measures of the Second Empire and after 1851 he tempered his liberalism to become the official painter of the new industrial economy. His success was due to his ability to carefully record the rapid industrialisation in France. This style combined accuracy of detail with the picturesque. He painted not the destruction of nature by industrialisation but the triumph of man over it. Bonhomme worked for a capitalist named Schneider who believed that the poor would be helped through a collaborative relationship between industrialist and worker. Schneider transformed the bankrupt provincial town of Le Creusot into a thriving manufactory that cared for its workers who toiled in its mines and factories. His ideology was realised in a kind of paternal capitalism and Le Creusot came to symbolise the triumph of imagination fired by the energy of an enlightened Capitalist.

After 1870 however the workers lot deteriorated and strikes disrupted Le Creusot. Bonhomme's optimism was dissipated and he died embittered and impoverished. His works went out of fashion and were destroyed or hidden away because of the very changes he helped to record. His surviving works reflect a propaganda that can now be seen as inherent in the revitalisation (28) of French industry during that era. His work at Le Creusot concentrated on recording machinery and factory structures; he no longer painted close

ups of individual workers but showed them either swallowed up in the vast expanse of industrial terrain or as insignificant appendages to the mechanical apparatus of the factory interior.

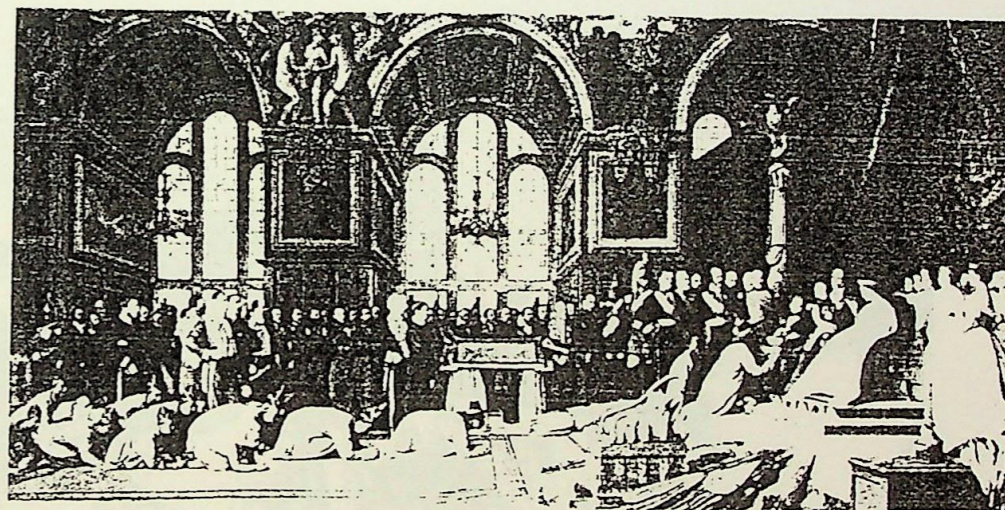
FRANCOIS BONVIN

Francois Bonvin is another example of a painter who came under the influence of the ideology of the regime. He established his reputation for compassionate studies of poor people and sympathetic portrayals of paternalistic institutions for socialising the poor. He was in close touch with Courbet and Champfleury before the coup d'etat. After 1852, when the Emperor personally commissioned him to paint *L'ecole regimentaire* for the Palace of Saint-Cloud, Bonvin displayed increasing loyalty to the Bonapartist regime and the stoicism of his best work declined. He turned increasingly to still lifes and scenes of religious piety.

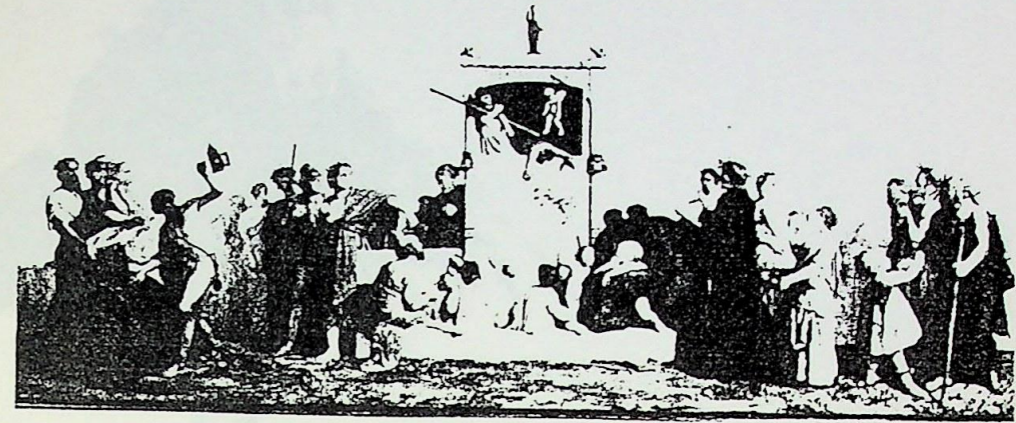




19 THE BATTLE OF SOLFRINO by J.L. Ernest Messinier



20 RECEPTION OF THE SIAMESE AMBASSADORS by Jean Leon Gerome



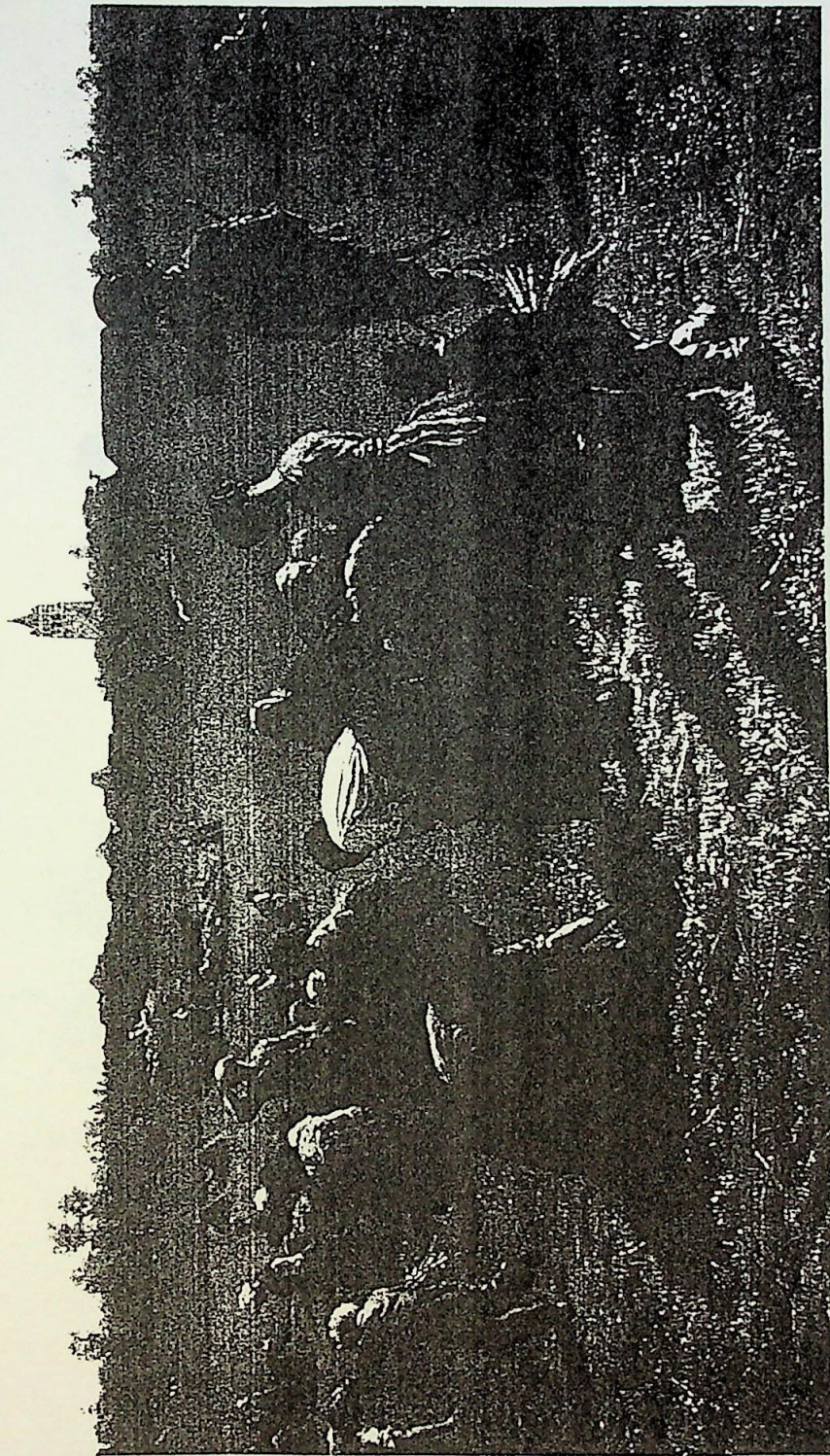
21 THE HUMAN COMEDY by Jean - Louis Hamon



22 ENTRANCE OF THE EMPEROR AT TARASCON by William Adolphe Bouguereau



Detail



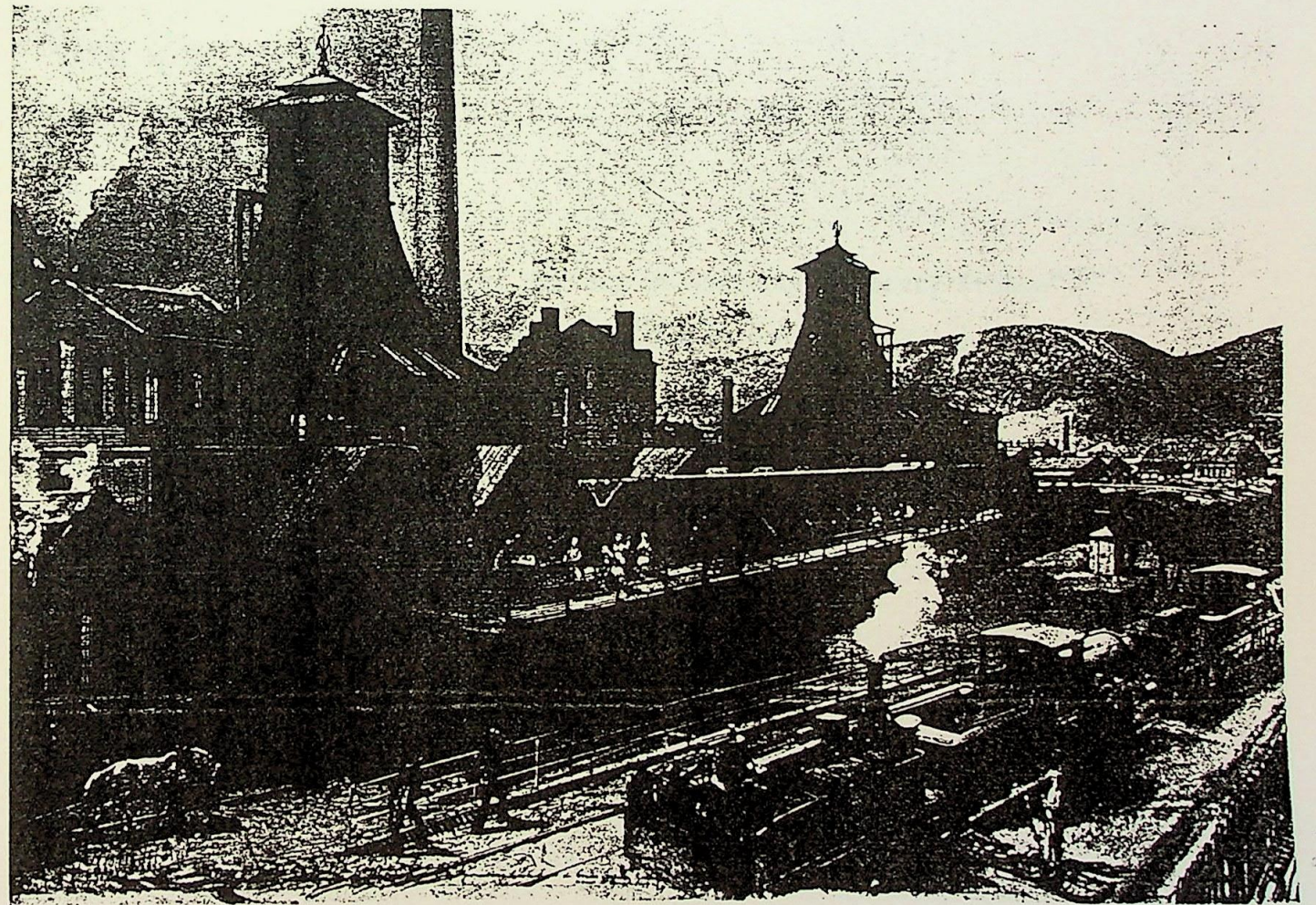
24 THE GLEANERS by Jules Breton



25 THE GLEANERS by J.F. Millet



26 LA BRICHOLE by Francois Bonhomme



28 ST. PIERRE AND ST. PAUL MINES AT LE CREUSOT by J.F. Bonhomme

NOTES:

- ¹Robert Bezucha, "Art and the Social History of nineteenth century France" in Weisberg, The European Realist Tradition, p.1
- ²Boime, "The Second Empire's Official Realism" in Weisberg, The European Realist Tradition, p.31
- ³Ibid, p.35
- ⁴Ibid, p.39
- ⁵Ibid, p.45
- ⁶Ibid, p.48
- ⁷Ibid, p.51
- ⁸Ibid, p.52
- ⁹Ibid, p.85
- ¹⁰Ibid, p.89
- ¹¹Bezucha, "Art and the Social History of Nineteenth Century France", in Weisberg, The European Realist Tradition, p.1
- ¹²Ibid, p.3
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴Ibid, p.5
- ¹⁵T.J. Clarke, Image of the People, p.150
- ¹⁶Bezucha, "Art and the Social History of Nineteenth Century France" in Weisberg, The European Realist Tradition, p.10
- ¹⁷Ibid, p.11

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The third group of painters that I would like to deal with here are those who were considered to be a threat to the regime. Painters such as Gustav Courbet attempted to reveal not just the symptoms of a diseased society but the very structure of society itself, the root cause of the illness of which it was riddled. Courbet's paintings, because of their scale and their subject matter were seen as a threat to the shakily re-established power of the bourgeoisie.

For Courbet and his supporters, Realism was 'democracy in art'. There are many images painted at the time of the 1848 Revolution to support this notion. Jeanrons Scene of Paris, with its starving workman pleading for bread for his family, Alexander Antignas canvases of floods, fires, dispossessions and beggary are devoted to the effects of disasters on the lower strata of society. Tassart's melancholic representations of suicides in attics, sickly, undernourished children and freezing orphans raised social issues and spoke out against the social injustices of the period.

Courbet's paintings were often socially inflammatory because of his unidealised, startlingly direct representations of contemporary lower class

subjects. His paintings did not have the small scale, patronisingly picturesque charm which had made genre painting of similar themes acceptable to right wing French art lovers. They appeared in the Salon of 1850 to 1851 and the very moment when the triumphant bourgeoisie were depriving these very lower classes of most of the advantages they had won at the barricades of 1848, Courbet's paintings, because of their scale, their size and their subject matter were seen as a threat to the shakily re-established power of the middle classes. As Castagnary wrote, "They had dissolved the National workshops, they had defeated the proletariat in the streets of Paris ... they had purged universal suffrage ... and here was that 'vile multitude' chased out of politics reappearing in painting".¹

GUSTAVE COURBET

Gustav Courbet was born in 1819 in the provincial town of Ornans. His father had risen from peasant status to becoming one of the provincial bourgeoisie. Ornans was a stratified town and the painter became aware of social barriers. As a result of this and because of Courbet's increased involvement with politics his rural images pose an insistent social quality. They gnaw at the traditions in society and for Courbet 'the common man' is seen in the context of all society and not in isolation.

Courbet arrived in Paris in 1840 and for the next 10 years he sold almost nothing, depending on his father for money. Courbet showed no interest in

the Ecole Realiste of the day. He came by realism in an unexpected way. It was to the popular art traditions of Holland, Spain and France that Courbet turned for inspiration and through the study of older masters like Rembrandt and Zurbaran he slowly devised a style of his own.

By July 1849 his career had taken a new turn. His After Dinner at Ornans received great recognition at the Salon. The state bought it and he received a medal. In September of the same year he retreated to his home town of Ornans to go back to his origins and paint the great trilogy of realism, the Stonebreakers, the Burial at Ornans and the Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair. In Courbet's Dinner at Ornans there is an absorption of the styles of such painters as Rembrandt, Velasquez and in particular the brothers Le Nains. Champfleury described the Le Nains style "They sought reality even in their clumsy way of putting isolated figures in the middle of the canvas; in this way they are the fathers of our present day experiences, and their reputation can only grow it does not much matter to me if a figure is not in the right perspective or if at the back of a room it looks a quarter of a mile away".² What he describes in 1862 are the qualities that Courbet seized in 1849. Courbet's paintings are not parasitic on tradition however, in them he handles the paint with confidence, seizing the essentials of the Le Nains and discarding the detail. As soon as Courbet found the right subject matter, the problem of style and technique which had perplexed him for a decade was resolved in the space of months.

In the After Dinner Courbet paints himself, his father and his friends, not as faceless actors and acts but as specific faces at a specific occasion. Central to Courbet's realism was the fact that he saw the commonplace not in the life of other people but in his own life. He located his work in his own town, family, customs and institutions, he sees the obvious. His paintings are his autobiography, where his friends gather by the fire, or the town gathers at a graveside and where events that have been practiced over and over again are nonetheless specific.

There are plenty of paintings of ritual in existence but they are all clearly (30) animated by some form of religious experience. In The Burial at Ornans Courbet has painted worship without worshippers. The occasion is one of religious experience, but instead of the usual signs and symbols of mystery, there is a coldness of expression in the individual faces and in the composition as a whole. There is a sense of distraction and inattention among the mourners and the red faces of the beadles and the gestures of the two old men at the graveside are almost grotesque.

The composition is stiffened and simplified so that the two components of the scene are each displayed with the greatest clarity. The format is derived from that of the popular print such as the famous Degré des âges with its procession from childhood to senility.

Courbet has gathered the townspeople of Ornans, more than forty five life size figures in a great frieze over eight yards long. He has arranged the

figures in a long row following the conventions of popular art, but these conventions have been animated and reorganised. The monotone of black is accented just enough to keep it alive and active against the faces, the faces are etched in even light against the mass of black below them. The long line of heads has been intelligently broken into clusters of light against dark, making the various groups distinct.

The image deliberately avoids emotional organisation. There is no single focus of attention, hardly a single face save the gravediggers is turned towards the priest and the line of heads at the right of the picture looks away from the coffin and the crucifix. There is no exchange of glances and save the few faces that are buried in handkerchiefs, the faces are impassive, the eyes seemingly focused on the air, we cannot tell their state of mind. Champfleury described the painting as a simple recording of provincial life. Buchon called it a new Dance of Death. Critic after critic questioned the meaning of the painting, they were offended by its lack of openly declared significance. The Burial seemed to hide its attitudes behind endless contradictions, religious and secular, wealthy and poor, ionic and tragic, sentimental and grotesque.

Between the elections of May 1849 and the coup d'etat of December 1851 the French countryside was in turmoil. The prolonged economic crisis in the countryside came to a head in 1848. The price of land was racing upwards. The big estates got bigger and the owners of large acerages, often a bourgeois from the city, made the largest profits and bought out

his smaller rivals. The 1846 potato blight and the poor crop of wheat in 1847 nearly crippled the country. Peasants had been encouraged to borrow money to buy more land at enormous rates of interest. Then in 1849 to 1851 there came forced expropriations and peasants being thrown off the land. It was the bourgeois lawyers who drew up the usurers contracts and the small town capitalist who bought up the land.

The returns of the election of May 1849 had shown that the Left were very strong in the countryside. The government began a war of repression and a law against the colporteurs, people who sang and sold political pamphlets, was passed. Almanacs and popular prints were confiscated, the Prefect and the gendarmes were everywhere, unearthing plots, banning political meetings, clubs and newspapers. In Paris, the Assembly voted an end to universal suffrage in 1849 and brought in a residence qualification of three years. This meant that the electorate shrunk by three million. The men who lost out were the landless labourers who followed the harvest, the village artisans and nomads who moved from town to country seeking work. From autumn onwards, politics went underground and secret societies took over. They were feared and hunted by the government. In 1851 they were the only force to resist Napoleon's coup d'etat. The last throw of the old peasantry was scattered and disorganised. The North and West did not respond to the call for barricades and the army crushed the resistance in a fortnight.

This was the world that was creeping into Courbet's consciousness. He slowly turned to politics. in his letter to Wey in 1850 Courbet wrote, "My

sympathies are with the people. I must speak to it directly, draw my knowledge from it, live by it".³ The Burial is a portrait of the small town bourgeoisie and their position in rural society. It is also a portrait of the peasantry, their hatred and distrust of the rural bourgeoisie. Courbet's work echoed his own family's ambiguous position between the peasant and the bourgeoisie. His father had gradually acquired more and more land and vineyards on the plateau of Flagey and was building himself a bourgeois identity. The community of Ornans was torn apart, it was ruled by divisions and differences by usury and the bailiff.

In official circles Courbet's paintings caused embarrassment and distress but he could not be excluded from the Salon since he had been a medalist in 1849. He was attacked for the size of his compositions, for the triviality and vulgarity of his choice of human types, for the lack of elaborate composition with a clear dramatic focus and for the absence of The critics believed that the size of a picture should correspond to the historical dignity of its subject matter. They mentioned the ideal and said that Courbet's realism avoids the distinctive task of art, its transformation of the actual world into a better one. They attacked the flatness and monotony of forms in The Burial, the sombre colour, dull light and lack of shadow and relief.

The critics did not object to Courbet's exploration of popular art, the Romantics had made this commonplace. It was accepted as a source of imagery, as a novel way of reviving the exhausted forms of high art.

But to adopt not only the forms but the values of popular art was considered subversive. Instead of using popular art to revive official culture and titillate its special audience, Courbet did the exact opposite. He exploited high art, its techniques, its size and something of its sophistication in order to embellish popular art. His art was not addressed to the connoisseur but to a different hidden public. He transformed his sources into art which claimed by its proud title of History Painting a supremacy over the dominant classes. The attempt troubled the public it excluded. The critics said they could not understand Courbet's intentions, the point of his art and which public it was made for.

Paris of the 1840's was a city of immigrants. The old communities and artisan societies were breaking up. The new fashionable strongholds of the bourgeoisie were growing in the West, the dreary slums in the South. Courbet found his public among this confusion. The Burial reminded its audience of places and experiences of their own past, the world the working men had come from. Eliza de Mirbel described Courbet's admirers as a horde of wine besotted scum who crowded the Salon each year and whose sweating bodies offended the bourgeoisie.⁴

At least 30% of Parisian shopkeepers were men of rural origins and at the bottom of the scale was a world of stallholders, street traders, craftsmen, small stock holders who came largely from the countryside and existed in an area between the bourgeoisie and the working class. It was a world obsessed with social climbing and social descent. The bourgeois was afraid

of the instability of the market, of bankruptcy and the slide back to where he came from. In the 40's and 50's a distinct bourgeois myth of rural society emerged and like all myths it was in a state of constant development and self contradiction, and shot through with an uneasy sense of the realities it tried to mask. In the myth, rural society was a unity, a one class society with peasant and master working in harmony, where there are no social conflicts and class divisions. The bourgeoisie was an unstable class, especially those who belonged to its lower or middle ranks. The function of the myth was to strengthen that category by creating clear distinctions and eliminating ambiguities. In reality there were many stages involved in the process of becoming a bourgeois. It was at this time that the political and social domination of the bourgeoisie was in doubt. The myth was being threatened and Courbet's imagery of rural conflicts and peasant hatred was an embarrassment to the bourgeois.

In an ideal life history there were four stages in the process of becoming a bourgeois. First peasant existence for father and son, second an evolution towards the rural bourgeoisie which father stays to complete but which the son leaves for the city. Thirdly in Paris the son regresses to an inferior position as an employee. Lastly came the installation as a bourgeois proper exposed to the uncertainty of the market.

Courbet's painting exploded the entire myth. He reinstated one of the pair of middle stages that the myth set out to eliminate. The Parisian bourgeois had always justified his position as a heroic struggle for position

affirmed by ability. Courbet's paintings robbed him of the justification. It showed up the rural bourgeoisie in their true colours and everyone knew how that class were despised by the peasantry it exploited.

JEAN FRANCOIS MILLET

Jean Francois Millet was born in 1814 in Normandy, the son of a wealthy peasant farmer. At intervals in his life he was attacked as socialist and subversive and on each occasion Millet protested that he was entirely unpolitical. The patient resignation of his workers and the feeling that they are part of an unchangeable order of things, speaks of this fact. At the same time it is no coincidence that his first successful pictures of workers date from 1848. Many other painters were painting themes of labour for the Salons of 1848 to 1851 but after this time they changed their subjects to suit the tastes of the ruling class. Millet became more and more convinced that themes of rural labour were more suited to him. He wrote "peasant subjects suit my temperament best, for I must confess, even if you think me a socialist, that the human side of art is what touches me most."

In 1850 he left Paris for Barbizon to stay with his friend Charles Jacques, who was a professed communist and he remained there for the rest of his (31) life. His painting of the 1840's The Wanderers refers to the depressed conditions of the rural peasant. Starvation was a major cause of migration

among the peasantry in the 1840's and this group consisted of two thirds of the French population at this time. The many famines led to unrest and panic, starving peasants were everywhere, ready even to enter prisons to obtain food. Millet's canvas conveys the peasants' life. The mother and child are simplified and generalised, symbolising a displaced class torn from their traditional ways. The approaching storm, the forlorn expression of the child and the sense of overwhelming sadness and resignation is heightened by the emotionalised, sagging forms that Millet has effected. The massed sculptural shapes almost bend into one another conveying an atmosphere of depression that is similarly evident in his other paintings of this period. In contrast to his earlier idyllic scenes Millet has strengthened his theme by abstracting the forms.

Like Millet, Adolphe Felix Cals was appalled by the scenes of starvation (32) after the widespread famine of 1846 to 1847. Cals' Peasant Woman and Child of 1846, like Millet's painting, is an expression of gloom and sorrow. Cals was moved by the ravaged facial features of these poor people and set out to record their expressions in detail. The rural mother with her young son are shown resting near the foot of a twisted tree within a barren landscape. The child's doleful expression is reinforced by his downcast eyes. The mother's weariness is surpassed by her anxiety and concern for her son who clutches at a painful foot. The scene is romantic in narrative, but restrained in colour and like Millet he modulates his tones to achieve appropriate tones to the tragic theme.

- (33) The Forced Halt by Jean Pierre Alexandre Antigna is another tragic painting revealing the misery of uprooted rural families. It depicts a suffering family unit, stranded on a provincial road during a raging winter storm. The Forced Halt recorded not simply an isolated incident but acknowledged the far reaching problems of the jobless who had to leave their rural origins in search of survival. In the massive depopulation of rural France, entire families took to the roads, being drawn finally to Paris. The crisis depicted in Antigna's canvas was all too familiar. Antigna intensifies his painting by focusing on the immediate struggle for survival against a ruthless environment. The all-consuming hope that Antigna's family will be able to find work in a new setting is surpassed by his rendering of the urgency to survive the conditions of the next few hours. Several of the young children are scurrying to start a fire and one child pulls at the curtain of the wagon opening it in an effort to shelter the enfeebled, oldest member within. The father stares forlornly at the dead carcass of the horse, the mother draws her infant close beneath her cloak and stands at the apex of the compositional triangle as the strength and support of her family.

The Forced Halt conveyed a realism of sincerity and truthfulness more palatable than the vigorous palette of Courbet. The development of his figures after careful study of actual models may have enhanced the sense of realism of the style of painting. Antigna created the mood by using tonal colours of greys and tans, coinciding with the barren winter landscape.

The roughness of the direct application of paint, which Antigna allowed to remain, rather than the usual Salon finish gives substance to the work. Form and message are thus united in a work that was recognised by such critics as Theophile Gautier as one of Antigna's finest achievements.

Before he moved to Barbazon in 1849 Millet painted some scenes from the countryside near Paris. The industrialised suburbs spreading out in all directions had become an overcrowded wasteland of factories and extensive quarries. Most of the new inhabitants were itinerant labourers whose poverty and frustration at these menial jobs led to social unrest and political consciousness that the government regarded as disloyal and

(34) dangerous. The Quarriers is an unfinished canvas set in a rocky landscape near Montmartre. His positioning of two workmen, straining their full weight together against the crowbar in an attempt to dislodge the heavy boulder creates a tension that conveys a powerful energy.

The Quarriers brings to mind later compositions by Daumier that concentrate upon simplified human forms and the sculturesque rendering of volumes.

The forest of Fontainebleau, like every area of woodland around Paris, had been in turmoil since the Revolution. Men and women without land depended on faggot gathering, gleanings rights at harvest time and the pigs and cows they grazed on the commons at the forest edge. Slowly these rights came under attack. Faggot gathering was made illegal and forest

guards drove pigs and cattle off the commons. The peasants often replied with violence but eventually they were forced to leave for the factories and quarries of Paris. Millet's pictures, especially from 1853 onwards, are a careful record of the struggle for survival of this class.

The Gleaners, the Diggers, Death of a Woodcutter, Women gathering Faggots, Killing the Pig, Woman grazing her Cow and The Angelus are systematic descriptions of the key tasks and situations of the particular society.

It is a portrait of a class and society in dissolution with an aggressive class consciousness of its own. This class consciousness remained acute during the Second Empire and their attitudes at the various polls and plebiscites showed that they had their old convictions intact. This fact disturbed the ruling class and Millet's work became more unpopular as the Empire grew older. Two of his entries to the Universal Exhibition of 1855 were rejected and he was described as the socialist troublemaker however much he protested to the contrary.

Millet tried to convey in a single image a sense of the particular nature of a task. Work for Millet was a series of actions, endlessly repeated like a spell or a magical rhythm. The action is given the weight of a ritual, his figures are private and monumental. Many critics scorned Millet's use of classical poses. Saint-Victor wrote of The Gleaners in 1857, "They are too conceited, they betray too clearly their claims to a pedigree from Michelangelo's Sibyl, and their certainty that they wear rags more superbly than Poussins reapers wear draperies".⁵

Baudelaire wrote, "instead of simply distilling the natural poetry of his subject M. Millet wants to add something to it at any price. In their monotonous ugliness all these little pariahs have a philosophic melancholy, a Raphaelite pretentiousness".⁶ Gautier described Millet's Winnower in 1848 "M. Millet's painting has everything it takes to horrify the bourgeois He trowels on to his dishcloth canvas, using no oil or turps, great masonries of colour, paint so dry no varnish could quench its thirst. Nothing could be more ferocious, bristling or crude".⁷

Millet's sketchbooks were crammed with symbols and obsessions; crows, harrows, the screen of the forests edge, stunted trees, spiky grass, which he threw together in a crazy unison like a map or a jigsaw. His peasants are always at work. There are no arrivals and departures from festivals and fairs. There are no worshipping scenes. In all his paintings Millet stressed the grand organising cycle of seasonal work. He chose to generalise his figures as types or emblems of work.

- (35) Millet's Sower was begun in 1850. He has few individual features and no complexity of costume. The rhythm of his body is silhouetted against the early morning sky that lends a dance like energy to the picture. The sower dominates the picture space. It is an image of assertion and movement, the body surges forward down the hillside. A flock of crows in the background seems to explode like black grain. The theme is taken from Matthew 13:24:43 and the landscape came from memories of his childhood.

One critic who regarded the painting as heroic noticed the sinister detail, "Alone in the middle of bare and newly turned ground, as if he understood the grandeur of his mission this man, who like a minister of God, holds in his hands the riches of the earth, and with the faith of an apostle throws them to the wind; and then in the distance under the cloud, a flock of birds of prey, whose screech is like an irony, a threat".⁸ For most critics, The Sower was a pastoral image which altered but did not discard the pastoral tradition. Those of the far right and left saw it as being savage and strove to read it in terms of politics. With its monumental character and rough and ready technique it was identified as the modern "Demos", the Greek symbol of solidarity with the populace.

Millet's figures are held in by a fine drawn line in dark oil paint which he uses to put an edge to things. His painting depends on drawing and outline for its main effect but he uses colour with extraordinary sureness, suiting the pigment to the task in hand. As Van Gogh wrote later, "Millet's peasants seem painted with the earth they till. But this earth has many colours besides brown. Millet's realism was different to Courbets. It had a narrower focus, concentrating on the working peasant, on the evocation of the forces of nature, the unity of man with nature. The strength of his art came in the tension of the tragic and the ordinary. Millet's peasants conform to poses derived from Renaissance religious paintings. They often derive from low-life scenes by Breugal. They do not, like Courbets rural workers, convey an overt political message, they

depict the human condition or as Millet put it, "the indispensable bond between man and man as well as man and nature".⁹ Millet attempted to transcend modernity, fashion and politics by painting basic human beings, untouched by urban industrial civilisation.

HONORE DAUMIER - THE CITY

With the advent of industrialisation and the evolution of the modern urban industrial complexes, the city was seen as the heart of contemporary darkness, a secular hell. Rich in potentiality for the ambitious, threatening to the weak and poor. The city was seen as the breeding place of pervasive modern diseases of alienation, apathy and indifference to either communal value or individual feeling. The imagery of the modern city played a major role in the work of most of the important literary figures; Balzac, Dickens, Baudelaire, Zola. In the visual arts it is perhaps Honore Daumier who investigated most fully the human dimensions of urban life. Daumier touched on all aspects of urban existence, all classes, occupations and types. But above all he concentrated on the urban middle class. He used mockery as a weapon for tearing away the protective covering of convention. Daumier worked for the journal Le Charivari for most of his professional life. Like Millet, he rarely spoke of politics. It was only when his line agrees with Le Charivari or when the regime permitted that the politics of his lithographs became public.

- (36) Sometime in 1848 he drew a picture of two men, a worker and a bourgeois. The worker in cap and smock strides towards us, absorbed in reading a newspaper. By his side stands the bourgeois, belly in profile, gazing at the grapes and marrows in a shop window, his face intent, smiling and innocent. This simple contrast of classes, the worker devouring politics, the bourgeois minding his stomach contains no anger or contempt. The comparison was too much for 1848 however and the lithograph was never published.

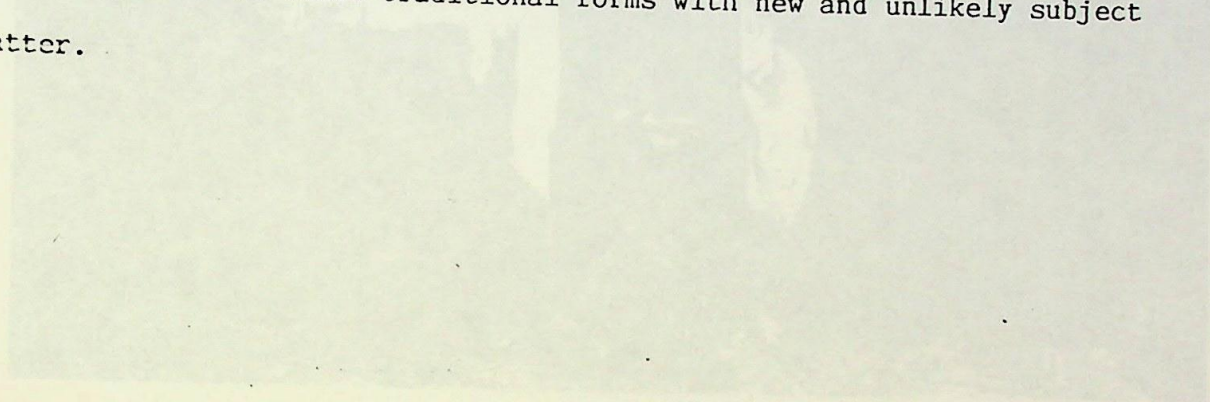
- Caricatures such as these attacked the conventional behaviour of the new bourgeoisie and the arrogance of bureaucracy. In 1850 he invented the (37) figure of Ratapoil and began to sculpt and draw him. Ratapoil was a fictional character, Napoleon's agent, an old soldier, an ex-crook, a man who bought the votes and beat the opponents of the Emperor. Ratapoil is a contemporary image, his name conjures up a cluster of political associations. A General Rapatel had been retired by the provisional government as politically suspect but Louis Napoleon had recalled him to crush the June insurrection. There was a General Hautpoil, Minister of War and interim Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1849, who was another controversial figure. Ratapoil is villain, hero and servant of power. His clothes are ragged and threadbare, his face and beard are a comic mask. The figure provokes a kind of affectionate laughter. In terms of technique, Ratapoil, the sculpted figures broken surface, marked with the comb at

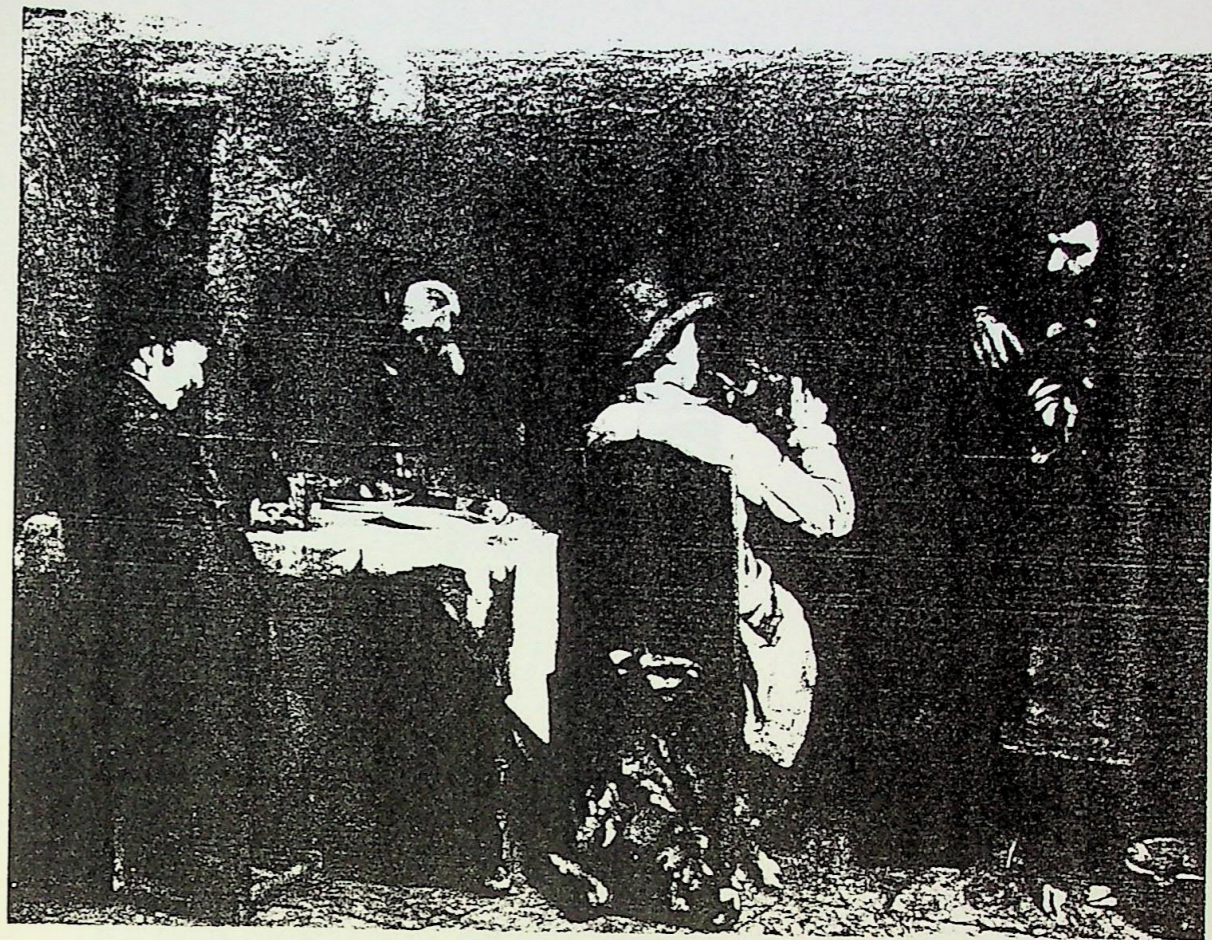
every point, seems to eat into the solid of the figure.. The sculpture conjures up skeletons and Rethel's figure of Death. The wrinkled trousers and the great billow of the creased tail-coat are mimicked on a smaller scale, by the folds and openings of every surface, so that there seems to be no flesh inside the clothes. The fascinating quality of this emaciated figure, Giacomettian before its time is due to a balance between the comic and the repulsive that only Daumier knew how to maintain.

- (38) Daumier based a series of watercolours and oils on The Saltimbanques from the 1850's to the 1860's. The saltimbanques were popular entertainers, part of the mass of itinerant tumblers, singer, puppeteers and sellers of the nineteenth century. They were considered dangerous and persecuted by the state who considered them to be the teachers of subversion and singers of socialist ballads. The government drafted a law against the whole profession. The clown now had to apply for a licence and submit his songs for official approval. Many were refused. Daumier painted half-naked children at their parents sides, singers performing in the half darkness in a city street, he painted them always on the move, tired and bitter. This series mixes politics with tragedy and is part of a theme which preoccupied Daumier throughout his life. That theme is "the place of art in society", the space allowed to art, its different guises, its very different publics and its perversion in the courts, its suppression on the streets. This theme animates his Theatre Series, the series of Artists and Sculptors, the series of Connoisseurs and even the Courtroom Series where lawyers are actors of a perverted kind.

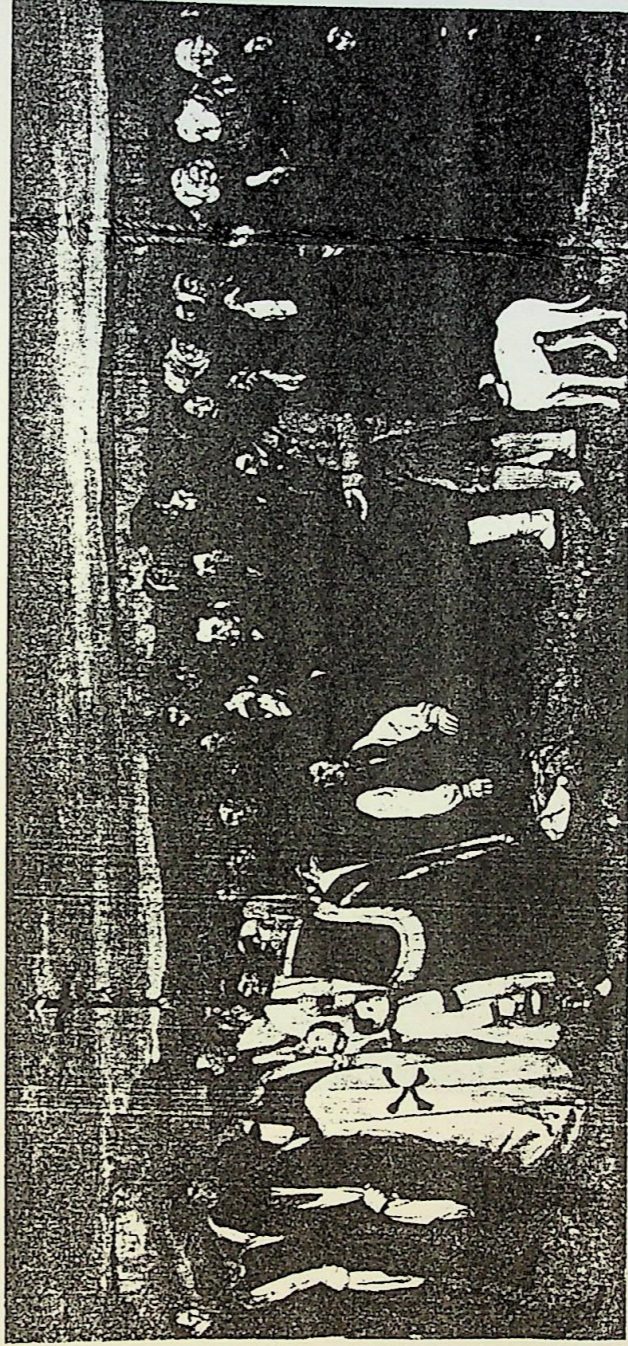
Art in some of the Theatre pictures, with the weary faces howling at a melodrama, is degraded. Art in the Sculpture Series is still a kind of mystery. Daumier was aware that some artistic forms were becoming redundant and that art was multiplying its forms. The clown is an outcast and a hero, he is the symbol of the artist. He is breaking the law, he is hungry, he is begging, he is a tragic hero, yet one of the crowd that surrounds him.

This painting and that of Millet and Courbet went clean against the grain of its time. It looked straight at things that almost everyone else chose not to notice. It fused traditional forms with new and unlikely subject matter.





29 DINNER AT ORNANS by Gustav Courbet



30 BURIAL AT ORVANS by Gustav Courbet



31 THE WANDERERS by J.F. Millet



32 PEASANT WOMAN AND CHILD by Adolphe Felix Cals



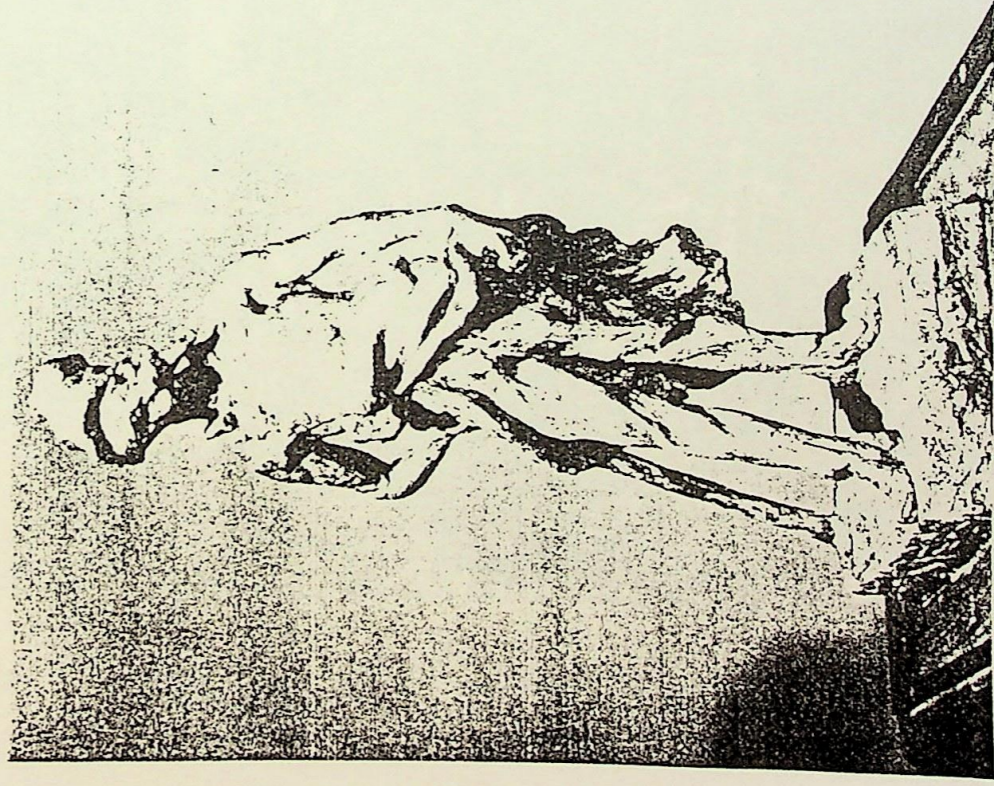
Antigua



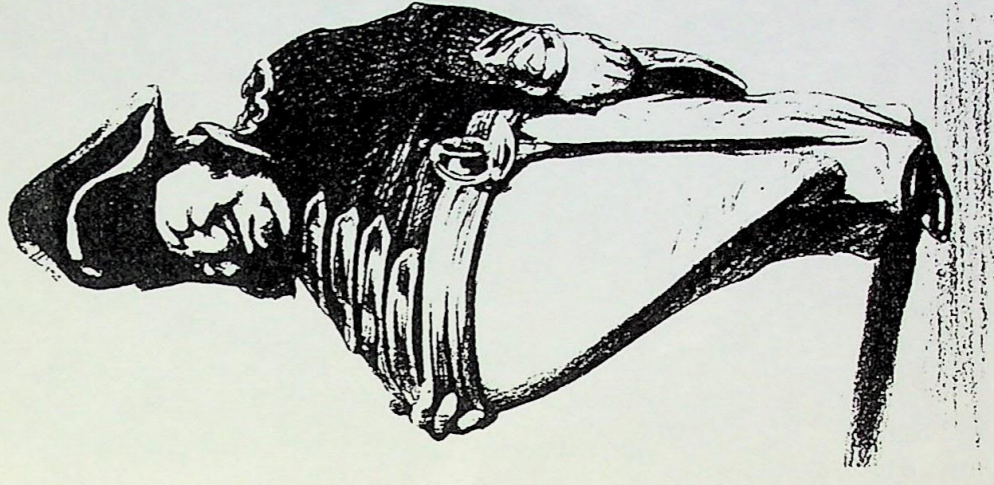
34 THE QUARRIERS by J.F. Millet



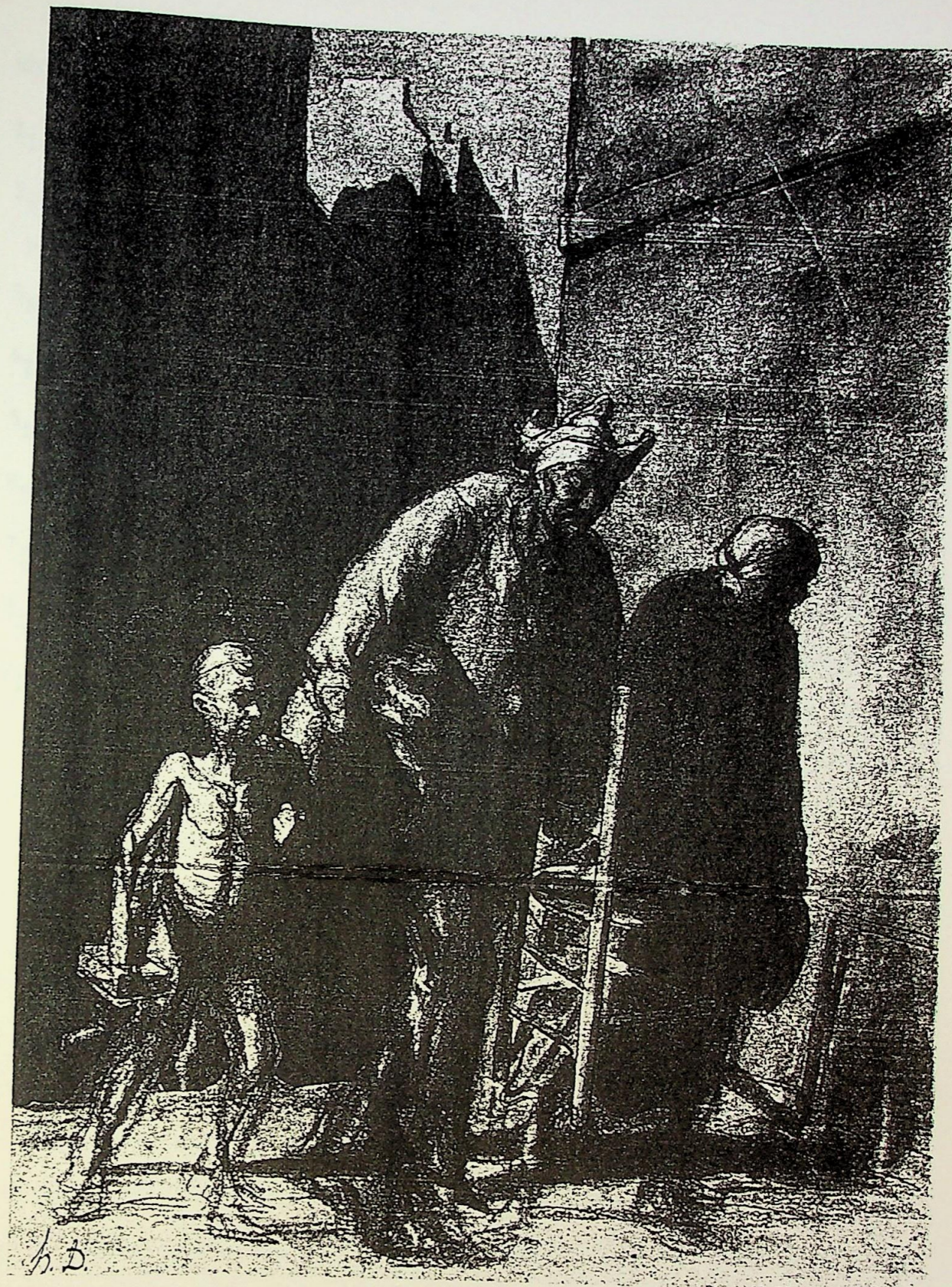
35 THE SOWER by J.F. Millet



37 RATAPOIL by Honore Daumier



36 CARICATURE OF KING LOUIS PHILIPPE by Honore Daumier



NOTES:

- ¹Linda Nochlin, Realism, p.47
- ²T.J. Clarke, Image of the People, Gustav Courbet and the 1848 Revolution, p.73
- ³Ibid, p.113
- ⁴Ibid, p.148
- ⁵Ibid, p.73
- ⁶Ibid.
- ⁷Ibid, p.74
- ⁸Ibid, p.94
- ⁹T.J. Clarke, The Absolute Bourgeois, p.73

CHAPTER 5

AFTER REALISM

MANET AND HIS FOLLOWERS

It was in the world of the agricultural labourer or the urban proletariat that the realist movement found its inspiration in the years immediately following the 1848 Revolution. It was in the different milieu of the park and the picnic, the seaside resort or the race track that the modernism of the 1860's and 1870's in France evolved. This development of Realism in the work of Manet, the Batignolles painters and later the Impressionists were based on themes that were far removed from raising any awkward issues such as industrial poverty and exploitation. They were not interested in extolling the solid virtues of those who work with their hands.

The increased prosperity and stability of the bourgeoisie led to the changing of tastes. The majority of realist painters changed their style to utilise decorative ensembles, pastel hues and fashionable themes.

Although themes were still derived from contemporary life, the art audience no longer wanted to see life as it was. The suffering and misery around them, the beggars, the homeless, the failures of industry, did not appeal to the tastes of the new art collectors. Art was supposed to be

pleasurable and entertaining. Social reform as the purpose of art gave way to elegance and sophistication. Pictures were no longer directed towards the masses, and artists once more sought to associate themselves with the wealthy.

For Manet and his followers the city offered an unlimited supply of contemporary pictorial motifs. While Degas may have created an image of urban 'viciousness' in L'Absinthe or Manet sketched his equivalent of Missioniers Barricade during the bloody days after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, on the whole their view of bars, halls, laundresses, boulevards, cafe concerts, theatres and cityscapes were remarkably free of any social content. Monet's Unloading Coal, Degas' Ironers, Caillbottes Floor Scrapers are themes taken from the labour of the urban proletariat and in each case the subjects of the painting are recorded in a photographic obliquity, as a daily experience. They set out to capture the urban reality of their time, rejecting any social or Romantic interpretation. Manet's city is neither picturesque nor pathetic. It has nothing to do with capturing the bitterness of the lower class existence, nor is it related to the minute topographical accuracy of urban eighteenth century scenes. In Concert in the Tuileries he creates a modern urban imagery in a specifically Parisian setting. The painting is stripped of anecdote or 'meaningful' (39) incident that usually mark such representations. In the Street Singer a single figure is captured as though by a camera lens between the top and bottom of the barroom door. The momentary image gives us a single instant of urban (40) reality. In Chez Piere Lathuille the imagery is squeezed dry of all overtly

psychological implications, it is reduced to an urban incident, arrested midstream without ever being raised above the level of ordinariness. The sense of immediacy of these images has to do with their being pictorial slices of life. Manet cut off his scenes arbitrarily even if, or especially if this meant that amputation of a tantalisingly important human figure. In Nana the figure of the girls admirer to the right is permitted only quarter presence. His physical incompleteness emphasises the importance of the mirror in an image of piquant narcissism.

As Realism evolved the demand for contemporaneity became more rigorous. The instaneity of the Impressionists is contemporaneity taken to its ultimate limits. The 'now' and the 'present' had become 'this very moment', 'this instant'. Photography helped to create this identification of the contemporary with the instantaneous. In a deeper sense the image of the random, the changing, the impermanent and the unstable reflected the atmosphere of the day better than the imagery of the stable, the balanced and the harmonious. The scientific optimism of the mid-century had disappeared with the rise of the bourgeoisie. Science was no longer being used as a method of investigating and improving reality, it was now being used by the bourgeoisie for material gain and the exploitation of the masses. The democratic ideals of the revolution had been crushed by the repressive measures of the regime. Artists were no longer free to express the truth. In fact for many artists it was difficult to recognise the truth during this period of repression and confusion. They no longer knew of or could be sure of any one reality. Artists such as Millet and Courbet did

not isolate a completely isolated incident. They always implied what preceeded and what would follow it.

- Degas destroyed this paradigm of temporal continuity in favour of the (41) disjointed fragment. In his Dancer on the Stage there is no interest in conveying any ideal image of movement. He concentrates on the specific movement and the poses of the figures far from leading step by step to a climax are deliberately disconnected from each other. The acceptance of what is immediately experienced and of nothing beyond it is the entire meaning of the event depicted. This 'slice of life' technique let the artist off the hook. He did not have to take sides to express his own opinions about his subject matter. The artist was in the comfortable position of being able to keep at a safe psychological distance from his (42) subject matter. Manet's Execution of the Emperor Maximilian led critics to accuse the artist of lack of feeling and of the inability to create a pictorial equivalent for the moral and psychological implications of a chillingly brutal subject, as Goya had done in his Third of May. There is a sense of detachment in Manet's painting, we do not know how he feels about the event or what the implications of the event are. Manet paid careful and painstaking attention to the details of the execution. He confined the meaning of the painting to firm concrete facts and to the documentation of his evidence rather than transforming it into a more humane commentary about the condition man as Goya did in the Third of May. Some critics asserted that Manet, Degas and the Impressionists generally were (unlike Daumier) quite uninterested in the human, emotive qualities of

urban existence but only interested in the purely formal visual elements of art.

The old ways of embodying reality in picture making were rejected by these artists and in doing so they created a new structure for art. Manet's new structure of art was made from the imagery of the hurried, the haphazard and the disjunctive. The recent photography of Parisian vistas by Haussman with its random figures, blurred moving shapes, sudden diminutions of scale and radical cropping had a major effect on the artists of the day.

The most novel realist view of the city was the distant view in which the height and range of the artists vantage point tends to distance the spectator from involvement in dramatic anecdote or minute descriptive detail. Views such as Monet's Boulevard de Capucines imitate the camera in their specificity of vantage point and the lack of focus on human problems characteristic of Daumier and other socially conscious depictions of the scene. This shift in focus and attitude toward the city vistas embodied in Impressionist paintings was connected with an increase in psychological as well as physical distance.

It is interesting to compare two city views of the period. In Charles de (43) Croux's The Coffee Mill we are pressed close to the image of urban misery, the peeling billboards, the snowy street, the sense of make-shift inadequate (44) shelter sought out by the poor. In Manet's Road Menders by contrast, no point is made of the social significance or even the physical effort demanded

of the labourers. The road menders are simply an element among many.

In all these French city vistas a loose, open, synoptic all over manner of brisk work is used, similar to the type of pictorial notation formerly reserved for the background or the far distance. The figures in Monet's Quai du Louvre are summarised in a few dots and streaks of pigment. This use of a technique formerly reserved for the background gives a sense of impermanence and insignificance to individual subjects now considered to be motifs. It reveals the distance that has been established between the artist and what he is painting.

ANDREA PISSARRO

Andrea Pissarro was one of the few Impressionist painters preoccupied with social themes as opposed to themes of leisure which characterised Impressionist painting as a whole. Pissarro was one of the moving spirits of the Impressionist group and was looked up to by all of them as a man of uncompromising integrity. Cezanne described him as 'the humble and colossal Pissarro'.

By the 1880's Pissarro had despaired of the style of Impressionism he had gradually developed. Comparing it to knitting, he sought to change it. While other Impressionists sought inspiration at this time by travelling further afield; Monet to the Midi, Renoir to Italy and North Africa, Pissarro subjected his style to close examination and sought a solution through self

analysis. His first market scenes date from 1881 and his numerous drawings testify to his close observation of these important social scenes with the intermingling of different social classes.

- (46) It is the socio-economic aspects of the market scenes that seem to have initially attracted him to his subject. He concentrates on the human figures and the transactions made. These paintings are of great consequence for younger artists such as Gauguin and Van Gogh who oscillated towards Pissarro during the 1880's. Pissarro places far less emphasis on background detail and far more on the figure itself. He tends towards caricature rather than prettiness and for simplicity rather than skilful line. Each form in the painting is treated with small even brushstrokes, so that there is no real differentiation between the various parts of the surface of the canvas. This technical development allowed him to camouflage his figures amidst their surroundings without however in any way sacrificing the sense of form or the solidity of the human figure. His powerful figures now fill the composition, placed in the immediate foreground. His preliminary drawings were made from life and show a variety of postures and activities. His rhythmical outlines display his pleasure in drawing the rounded forms of the human figure.

The importance of Pissarro's work in the Neo-Impressionist style lies in his continued adherence to rural subject matter. His later figures are immobile or pursuing gentle tasks, they also have a certain psychological introspection, a focusing on the inner state of mind. His small brush strokes

evenly distributed across the canvas foreshadow the pointiliste technique. He evolved a system of passage in order to deploy intermediary hues linking the complementary colours. Pissarro had formulated his theory of unity at fifty years of age, but at the age of sixty he began to see the possibility of rendering it. Clement Greenberg wrote in The Nation in 1944, "He was greatly concerned about the synthesis, the harmony or the unity of a work of art and rightly so, for a painting like a living organism, exists by the simultaneous relation of its parts".¹

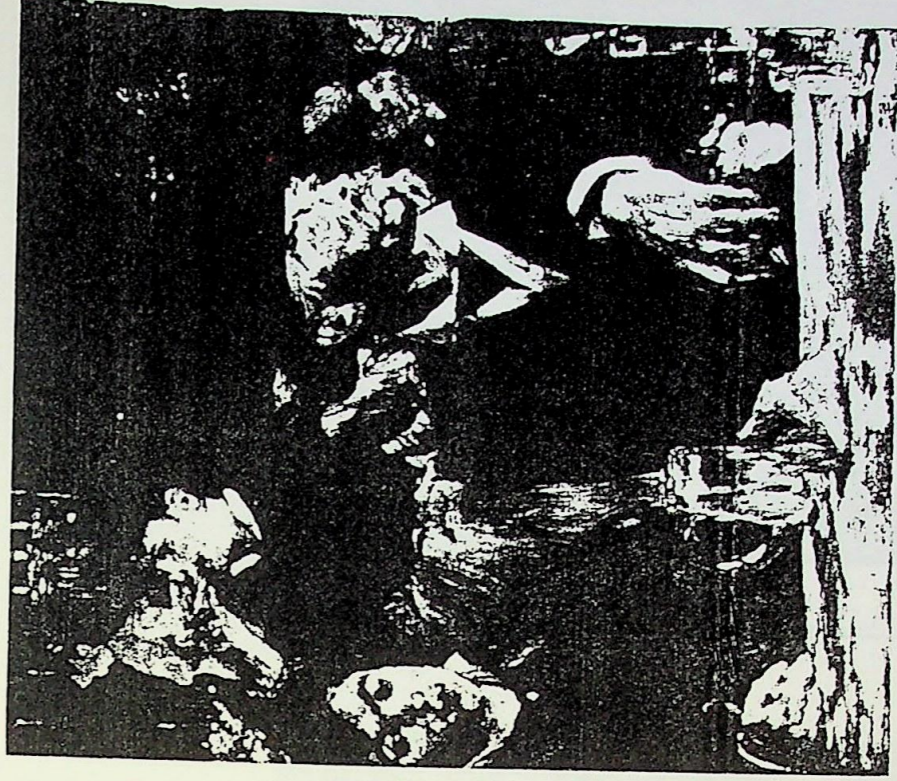
Although Pissarro took no active part in politics, it is certain that by the 1890's his anarchist opinions had hardened. The anarchists believed that man's faults and the problems of society are the result of social imbalances, that if imbalance is righted, then man's plight will improve. The aim of scientific anarchy was the realisation of the common good by the suppression of competition and authority and the harmonisation of interests.

The anarchists saw that life in the industrialised urban environments was physically exhausting and spiritually degrading. Life in the country, although in fact a life of unrelieved toil, was for the anarchists a life of mutual dependency and common good and this was ensured by nature. The reform of agriculture was one of the main issues discussed by anarchists (47) in the context of rebuilding society. The peasants depicted by Pissarro at Pointoise mainly tend their own land, they are seen moving through the landscape, carrying or transporting their produce to market. He depicts

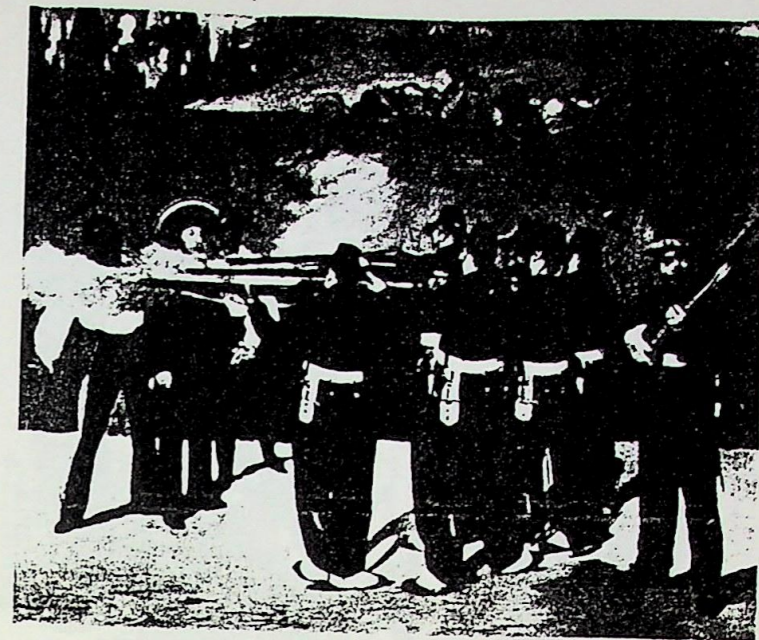
a class of peasants who lived close to Paris and managed to make a living supplying the city market. The relative prosperity of his peasants compared with those of his predecessor J.F. Millet, differs considerably. Millet depicted the hardship of peasant life, the back-breaking drudgery of endless toil, while Pissarro observed a different section of society. Pissarro's views of peasant life were bound up with his political views and his optimism for an ideal society where men would reap the fruits of their own labour.



39 THE STREET SINGER by Edouard Manet



40 THE TAVERN by Edouard Manet



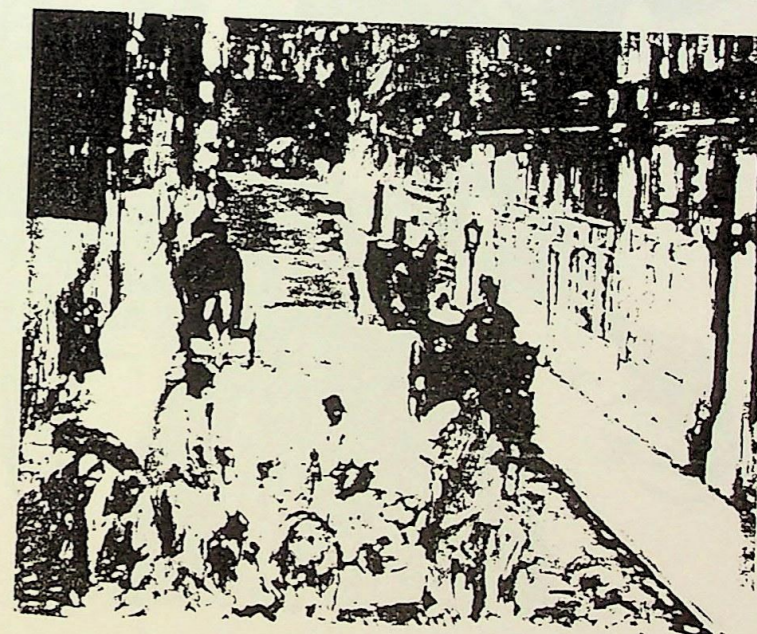
42 EXECUTION OF THE EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN by Edouard Manet



41 DANCER ON THE STAGE by Edgar Degas



43 THE COFFEE MILL by Charles de Croux



44 ROAD MENDERS by Edouard Manet





NOTES:

¹Christopher, Lloyd, Pissarro, p.109

The nineteenth century was a time of change, a time of scientific discovery, of new philosophical and political thinking and a sense of individual and social awareness among writers and artists. The search for concrete truth, the search for the truth was the motivating force behind the great works of the century. Painters had to have a contemporary relevance and something that was philosophical or historical and cast aside in favour of a style of painting that was of current interest. The artistic possibilities in the lives of ordinary people of ordinary working men and women began to fascinate artists. The peasants with their religious, their domestic activities, their houses, tools and artifacts were looked upon with a new respect and considered to be worthy of painting in a great style. The subjects formerly reserved for history painting were now given to artists who painted characters, the peasants and the farm workers of contemporary France.

Not only were the ordinary people given a new sense of importance in painting, but as artists grew in social awareness, they began to paint their characters in context, revealing the appalling social conditions that the majority of people were living in at the time. The Realist goal was not only the depiction but the analysis of contemporary life.

It was at this time that artists began to paint current events and the Revolution of 1848 produced a stream of prints and paintings on the subject. Some of the resulting works penetrated the social deceptions

CONCLUSION

The nineteenth century was a time of change, a time of scientific discovery, of new philosophical and political thinking and a sense of individual and social awareness among writers and artists. The search for concrete facts, the search for the truth was the motivating force behind the great minds of the century. Painting had to have a contemporary relevance and anything that was allegorical or historical was cast aside in favour of a style of painting that was of current interest. The artistic possibilities in the lives and daily activities of ordinary working men and women began to fascinate artists. The peasantry with their religions, their superstitions, their stories, songs, tools and artifacts were looked upon with a new interest and considered to be worthy of painting in a grand scale. The scale and techniques formerly reserved for history painting were now used to embellish the familiar characters, the tradesmen and the farm workers of contemporary France.

Not only were the ordinary people given a new sense of importance in painting, but as artists grew in social awareness, they began to paint their characters in context, revealing the appalling social conditions that the majority of people were living in at the time. The Realist goal was not only the depiction but the analysis of contemporary life.

It was at this time that artists began to paint current events and the Revolution of 1848 produced a stream of prints and paintings on the subject. Some of the resulting works penetrated the social deceptions

of the day, revealing the faultiness of the alliance between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and robbing the bourgeoisie of their glamourised notions of revolution and bloodshed. Artists refused to take sides, they painted the barricades as they were. They revealed the ugliness of violence, the confusion of war and the futility of mass killings.

After the bourgeois coup d'etat a campaign of political and artistic oppression was embarked upon by the government. This made it extremely difficult for painters who were trying to highlight the social injustices of the day and the need for better conditions for working men and women to continue to work in a vein that was true to their ideals. The bourgeoisie created a myth projecting rural society as a unity, a one class society, where peasant and master worked in harmony. As the strength of the bourgeois government grew, artists such as Jules Breton changed their tune to comply with their demands. The resulting painting pulls a mask over the social and economic conflict in the countryside.

The Government went so far as to select the juries for the Salons, to appoint teachers of their own choice in the academy and to commission artists to paint works of political propaganda based upon their own ideology.

Despite all this cultural sabotage some artists did continue to paint the truth. Gustav Courbet exposed the bourgeois myth in his painting, revealing the structure of class society in the countryside. He painted for a new audience which he found among the confusion of classes in Paris, most of who originally came from the country and could relate to his work.

Jean Francois Millet painted his figures as isolated outcasts of society. This was another painter who tore away the bourgeois myth. The weather beaten and hardened figures that he painted had a timeless and classical quality to them, giving them a dignity, an earthy solidity, and a natural unity with the land they were born on, the land which was being taken away from them by the bourgeoisie.

The works of Courbet, Millet and Honore Daumier, who painted social conditions and class structure in the city caused great consternation and debate among bourgeois critics and writers of the day. Many chose to ignore the deeper meanings⁹ in their work for to admit to these was to raise the issues of poverty and oppression and the struggle of the masses for better conditions. For bourgeois society the truth of their failures was too difficult to face. To admit to the facts was to admit to the failure of such class society, admitting the necessity for social change.

As the Napoleonic reign of oppression strengthened its grip on the financial control of the art market, the salons and on patronage of art works, the work of later Realist painters became more vague and less concerned with the search for the truth and the analysis of the facts. Today we have reached a situation where content is very difficult to assess in a work of art and tends to vary enormously from one artist to the next. Artists are still concerned with developing new art forms but in my opinion there cannot be form without content. This is why we have fashion following fashion at short intervals because artists are not clear on what the content of reality is, therefore they are not clear as

to what the content of their art should be. Without a new ideology or a new interpretation of reality there cannot be a new art. This is why terms such as post-modernism or neo-expressionism are coined to denote art forms which are not innovative or new but which are based on earlier art styles, often a result of a mish-mash of numerous styles.

In our western society of fast food, fast cars, chaotic cities and changing fashions there seems to be little time or peace for people to face up to reality. People like to think that reality is impossible to understand, that the world is unexplainably the way it is with most of the population starving and fewer and fewer living off the great wealth and resources of the world. Artists seem to accept this situation, or if they don't accept it they indulge in expressive rendering of the chaos, the mania they experience around them. Very few take the time to see through the blur of modern life to investigate the facts and to admit to the need for change. When artists do accept that we are living in a crumbling political system, which is outdated and non-productive, when they accept that our ideas and values have to change before we can create a new political and social system, then they will have their content for a new art. Courbet, Millet and Pissarro were artists who refused to be swayed by the whims of the bourgeoisie. They saw the need for change and they expressed this need in their work, each in his own individual way; Courbet by revealing the class structure of a corrupt society, Millet by showing the spiritual and physical effects of poverty on working men and women and Pissarro put forward his hopes and ideals for a future society.

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