

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF MODERN ART
VOLUME 4

Art in an Age of Civil Struggle

1848-1871



Albert Boime

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago & London



UNIVERSITÉS DE PARIS
BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE LA SORBONNE
3, rue de la Harpe, 75005 PARIS

Inv. : AV 800 337

SIGB bibl. :

SIGB ex. :

SU ppn : B401732

SU epn :

Cote : V 6 = 18882

115583101



A SOCIAL HISTORY OF MODERN ART
VOLUME 4

*Art in an Age of
Civil Struggle*
1848-1871



Albert Boime

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago & London



UNIVERSITÉS DE PARIS
BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE LA SORBONNE
17, AVENUE PARLAIRES
75004 PARIS, FRANCE
TEL: 33 1 42 87 41 41 FAX: 33 1 42 87 41 42

Inv. : A1800337

SIGB bibl. :

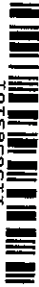
SIGB ex. :

SU ppn : 134011732

SU epn :

Cote : V6 = 18382

115653101



Contents

Illustrations	ix
Introduction	1
1 Springtime and Winter of the People in France, 1848—1852	5
2 Radical Realism and Its Offspring	77
3 Radical Realism Continued	139
4 The Pre-Raphaelites and the 1848 Revolutions	225
5 The Macchia and the Risorgimento	365
6 Cultural Inflections of Slavery and Manifest Destiny in America	403
7 Biedermeier Culture and the Revolutions of 1848	471
8 The Second Empire's Official Realism	577
9 Edouard Manet: Man About Town	633
10 The Franco-Prussian War, the French Commune, and the Threshold of Impressionism	737
Coda: Menzel and the Transition to Empire	783
Notes	801
Photo Credits	863
Index	865



3 Radical Realism Continued

Gustave Courbet

When Millet learned that Courbet's *Venus Jealously Pursuing Psyche* (a work with lesbian overtones) was rejected by the Salon jury of 1864 on the ground of indecency, he wrote angrily to Castagnary that nothing Courbet did could ever be as salacious as the work of Cabanel and Baudry, whose pictures of a supine Venus were the hits of the previous exhibition. He derided the hypocrisy of the jury and added, "I admit an indecent intention as well: this picture by Courbet would be three times as indecent for the reason that his women must be a thousand times more alive than the others."¹ Millet clearly identified with Courbet's realism, although he could not nurture so persistently the spark of radicalism ignited by 1848. He was neither Christian nor socialist, but much closer to Christian Socialism than Courbet, and his need to sermonize neutralized his ability to function politically in the real world.

Nevertheless, both eschewed sentimentality in their work and were joined in brotherhood by Thoré as the "two master painters in the Salon of 1861." Mocking their critics, he noted that perhaps their only mistake was in showing "nature with too much reality." Their pictures were the best painted in the Salon, "but M. Courbet is a realist! M. Millet a realist! Curses!" He then went on to define his own criteria for great art, an "original feeling for nature and a personal execution." It is the originality of the artist that makes the master and not the choice of subject. For Thoré to be a "realist" was to express rugged individuality and independence of thought—the keys to elevated forms of socially responsible art.²

If the carefully crafted public persona of Courbet signified anything, it was this ideal of intellectual, political, and artistic independence. Like Millet, Courbet's persona evolved under pressure in response to the events of 1848 and the realist-rural discourse. What made him unique as an artistic personality was his conscious connection to the first French revolution and the sense of being its beneficiary. To a large extent this construction

Courbet's delight in his successful cross-dressing, his flagrant narcissism, and his fetishistic preoccupation with the costume details hint at his frustration of growing up male in a feminine-dominated space. Even his later affectation of a masculinist boorishness to help create his rustic persona never effaced entirely the female traits he must have harbored in his fantasies.

Actually, he reverted to his rural origins in resisting the process of bourgeoisification (including male responsibilities) that his father wished to impose upon him. Thus when the watershed events of 1848 occurred he was mentally prepared to accept their liberating political and social consequences. Although his identification with the peasantry would always be somewhat self-conscious, he could assimilate the pretense as part of his persona. In this, he differed from Millet, whose direct claim to the rural subject stemmed from actual farm life and whose portrayal of the peasant always carried with it a sense of nostalgia and loss.

Young Courbet began his studies in 1831 at the Little Seminary (a secondary school so named to distinguish it from the regular diocesan institution), administered by the archbishopric of Besançon, the capital of the province, which prepared pupils for both religious and secular education. Courbet's disinterest in classical languages may or may not reveal an early inclination toward modern life, but if he showed slight interest in academic subjects, the school provided an early outlet for his nascent artistic gifts. The drawing teacher, "Père Beau," had studied with Gros and often took the pupils out on field trips to draw directly from nature. The sight of Courbet's notebooks filled with scribbles of every imaginable subject filled the elder Courbet with consternation. He would have wished to see his son in one of the bourgeois professions, especially law, a decision warmly endorsed by cousin François-Julien Oudot, a professor at the School of Law in Paris. Accordingly, in 1837 Régis sent him as a boarder to the Collège Royal de Besançon to study philosophy, thinking that the experience would turn him around.

Courbet dropped out of school altogether in 1838, and by the end of the following year he traveled to Paris ostensibly to study law and satisfy parental aspirations. Although reticent at first within his new urban surroundings, he gradually gained fresh confidence and asserted his independence by dropping the law courses and plunging into advanced art training. Courbet always claimed to be an autodidact, but he spent several months in the studio of Baron Karl von Steuben, and remained there as late as January 1841.⁵ Steuben was a well-known academic history painter who exhibited regularly at the Salons (in 1839 he showed *La Esmeralda* from Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*), and had been picked to participate in Louis-Philippe's pet project of the Galerie des Batailles for the Versailles Museum.⁶ He had previously attracted attention with his *Return from the Island of Elba*, exhibited at the Salon of 1831, a work appealing to the then current mania for Napoléon, who is shown being greeted warmly by a crowd of veterans, civilians, and former opponents (fig. 3.1).⁷ Steuben tried to reach a broad public

could be historically justified: the family fortune was established partly by his paternal grandfather, Claude-Louis Courbet, a peasant who profited from the sale of estates confiscated from émigrés fleeing the revolution, and partly by his maternal grandfather, Jean-Antoine Oudot (1768–1848), a revolutionary veteran awarded land for his ardent support of the Jacobins in 1793. Castagnary claimed that it was the unreservedly self-confident and tenacious grandfather Oudot who provided the decisive role model for young Courbet. Courbet always remained close to his maternal grandparents, who raised him during much of his childhood, and the grandfather initiated him into his own republican and anticlerical views.

Courbet was born in Ornans on 10 June 1819—a generational year for naturalism that also witnessed the births of Ruskin, Eliot, Fontane, and Whitman. His maternal grandparents lived in Ornans, a small town in the Franche-Comté region in the valley of the Loue river in eastern France, and his mother (née Sylvie Oudot) returned home to have her baby. Courbet's father, Régis, was a major landowner and vintner in Franche-Comté, owning property and vineyards in the village of Flagey and in Ornans, and a vineyard in the valley of Valbois that produced over five hundred gallons of wine per year. Indeed, the elder Courbet was prosperous enough to qualify as one of the privileged 200,000 electors during the regime of Louis-Philippe, thus positioning him in the hybrid social category of rural bourgeoisie. Gustave would always address him in correspondence as "Monsieur Courbet, propriétaire." Well-to-do and impractical at the same time, he spent his leisure time devising several crackpot schemes to ameliorate the labor of his farm workers, inventing a new kind of harrow that destroyed the seedlings and a five-wheel vehicle (one in the rear) to carry provisions for the chase.³ It is Régis's peculiar social status, with its combination of rustic and bourgeois preoccupations, that set the conditions for the unfolding of Gustave's career.

Gustave was the firstborn and only son of the family; after him came four daughters, Clarisse, Zoé, Zélie, and Juliette, the first of whom died at the age of fifteen. The powerful female presence in Courbet's life—including mother and maternal grandmother—played a preponderant role in his self-perception. A hint of this shows up in his many images of women depicted in groups or in pairs, often including portrayals of his sisters. It may be that his fascination for lesbian themes displaced a sexual attraction to his sisters, especially since the representation of intimate love between females in his day titillated a predominantly male audience. As early as 1840, he attended a masked ball in Paris dressed as a woman,

in a dress cut lower than my shoulders, with my hair turned back and braids at the back of my head, and I had flowers, a black velvet bodice, and wide flounces at the bottom of my muslin dress. I looked so good that I was forced to dress like that again, but that time the ladies dressed me. I had to dance with all the gentlemen of the company, for I was all the rage.⁴



3.1 Karl von Steuben, *Return from the Island of Elba*, engraving of original shown at Salon of 1831. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

and had already circulated the image in reproduction to achieve maximum popularity. His public relations savvy and reputation may well have attracted young Courbet; Steuben's *Battle of Poitiers* was exhibited in the Salon of 1838 and then seen again in its permanent location in the newly renovated Versailles Museum. (In the 1840s Courbet also attended the Académie Suisse and regularly visited the studio of Auguste Hesse, another frequent contributor to the Salons.)

During this period, Courbet reveals aspects of his personality that anticipate the mature adult. He is terribly aware of proper fashion while living in Besançon and strives for the right effect in dress, complaining at one point that his clothes are "in a hellishly mean state," and wanting to order a new set from the tailor; on another occasion he lamented that he had nothing to wear "in the way of summer daytime trousers," and that his one suit weighed "at least fifteen to twenty pounds, and his daytime vest is merely a blue cloth double-breasted vest," guaranteed to make him catch cold.⁸ Later, newly arrived in Paris and partying like mad, he spends more than twenty francs on white gloves, and when Oudot's children remark his lack of proper attire he is "forced" to order a suit and black trousers. In the same letter, he complains that Parisian heat demanded summer clothes, including a jacket, two pairs of trousers, a vest, and boots.

The term for "dressing up" in the Franche-Comté region generally meant a disguise, and although this referred more to the peasantry's mindset than to that of the rural bourgeois, it is noteworthy that Courbet was conscious of role-playing at an early age.⁹ This facet of his personality already reveals itself in his confrontation with the army examining board.

Conscription in the military was done through a lottery for a certain number of recruits from every canton; lots were drawn annually and young men with numbers higher than the required contingent were exempt. Courbet, however, received a low number and rather than buy himself a substitute decided to get himself rejected. He ultimately succeeded by stammering throughout the interview, even though the medical authorities accused him of "playing dumb." In the letter to his father describing the proceedings, Courbet twice stated that, primed with cognac and tobacco, he "played his role" to perfection.

As his sense of self developed, he assumed the persona of the shrewd rustic who could meet sophisticated Parisians on their own plane. This despite the fact that as early as March 1844 he could write home that "I am not much in tune with country tasks anymore."¹⁰ Like Millet, he migrated from country to town and exploited rural resources to make a living from those whom he professed to despise. He wrote his friends Francis Wey (the author) and his wife in 1850, "Yes, dear friends, even in our so civilized society, I must lead the life of a savage. I must break free from its very governments. The people have my sympathy. I must turn to them directly, I must get my knowledge from them, and they must provide me with a living. Therefore I have just embarked on the great wandering and independent life of the bohemian."¹¹

In this same letter Courbet referred to the popular reception of an exhibition of his work in his native region, gibing that the population of the Franche-Comté were willing to pay fifty centimes to see the show, and out of "their own pockets imagine that!" But this early strategy of appealing to rustic audiences with works celebrating the countryside soon gave way to a patronage of the privileged classes. Yet Courbet never ceased playing the role of the bold, outspoken bumpkin as he simultaneously transposed high culture to his provincial point of origin and, conversely, incisively revealed an unexpected slice of rural life to the know-it-alls of Paris. What empowered Courbet in this early period was the progressive climate created by the revolution of 1848 and his engagement with the realist-rural discourse that led to the government purchase of his painting *After Dinner at Ornans*.

Akin to Millet, Courbet's painting was decisively affected by the revolutionary moment. Four years younger, however, and inflamed with the grandiose role for artists projected by the reformists (he claimed to have arrived in Paris a convinced Fourierist), he planned to carve out a niche for himself by transforming the conditions of perception and taste. In 1846 he thought, like Millet, of making a name for himself and wanted to "gain the public's acceptance," but he showed himself more innately courageous: "The more different you are from the others, the more difficult it is. You must realize that to change the public's taste and way of seeing is no small task, for it means no more and no less than overturning what exists and replacing it. You can imagine what jealousy and bruised egos that produces!"¹² The passage is important for his emphasis on the public's "way of

seeing," an idea that he will reiterate throughout his lifetime and which is, I believe, the core of his realist platform. His statements reflect Thoré's doctrine of originality: in a letter of 21 March 1847, Courbet mentions a planned visit to Thoré in connection with a project for a counter-exhibition to house the large number of works rejected by the Salon jury, including all three of his own submissions. Courbet's preference for an alternative exhibition space grows out of his awareness of official control over the Salon ("the only game in town") and indicates his budding radicalism. In addition to contact with Thoré, he is by this time participating in the bohemian circle of Dupont, Buchon, Murger, Schanne, Baudelaire, Champfleury, and the painter François Bonvin.

Poised for success just one month prior to the 1848 breakout, he writes confidently of his project for the Salon and his growing status in the art world: "Even without [the Salon piece] I am about to make it any time now, for I am surrounded by people who are very influential in the newspapers and the arts, and who are very excited about my painting. Indeed, we are about to form a new school, of which I will be the representative in the field of painting."¹³ For his friends Champfleury, Baudelaire, and Toubin he designed a vignette for the masthead of the second issue of their short-lived radical newspaper, *Le Salut public*. In this barricade scene inspired by Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, Courbet replaced Liberty with a male worker in smock and battered top hat and carrying a flag with the slogan *Voix de Dieu, Voix du Peuple* (fig. 3.2). Courbet thought of participating in the competition for the figure of the Republic ("to replace Louis-Philippe's portrait") as his mentor Auguste Hesse did, but at the last minute decided against it. Alternatively, he hoped for a commission to do one of the 800 copies of the definitive image of the Republic projected for

3.2 Gustave Courbet, masthead design for *Le Salut Public*, no. 2 (1848).



distribution in Paris and the provinces, and planned to enter the songwriting competition organized for musicians (another of his talents).

As a middle-class intellectual, he always assumed he was doing his share by aligning himself with a radical perspective. As he wrote his family in March:

Anyhow, I am not getting very involved in politics, as usual, for I find nothing emptier than that. When it was a question of destroying the old errors, I did what I could, I lent a hand. Now it no longer concerns me. Do what you think is best. If you don't do things right I will always be ready to lend a hand again to destroy what is badly established. That is all I am doing in politics.

And he added: "To each his own: I am a painter and I make paintings."¹⁴ Since the government decreed that all submissions would be accepted that year, Courbet showed ten paintings—making up for the previous refusal of his Salon offerings.

By April, he could attest to the triumph of the realist-rural discourse as the cultural complement to social reform. Writing home to his family and inquiring about the progress of his father's harrow, he predicts that it will become a necessity, for "the way things are going . . . even painters are going to want to become farmers." In the same letter, he recounts the events of 16 April and the government's attempt to undermine the working-class parade by spreading rumors of an imminent Communist takeover. Courbet knew that the crowd was not conspiratorial and looked on bitterly as the National Guards whipped up animosity against the so-called "Communists" and stirred up cries of "Long live the Provisional Government." He characterized these developments as "ridiculous and meaningless," sad to see that moderate onlookers who "had fallen for a joke" went home smugly imagining "that they had nipped the evil in the bud."¹⁵

He took the side of the radical republicans and sympathized with the insurgents of June, but watched events with a sense of detached irony. He evidently belonged to the National Guard, and in his letter to his family of 26 June 1848, which he painfully begins "we are in the midst of a terrible civil war," he noted that the "insurgents fight like lions . . . and have already greatly harmed the National Guard." For him the "distressing spectacle" was even more devastating than St. Bartholomew's Day 1572, when thousands of French Huguenots were killed in a massive religious purge. Observing that the National Guard and the Mobile Guard kept watch in all the streets, Courbet outlined his position:

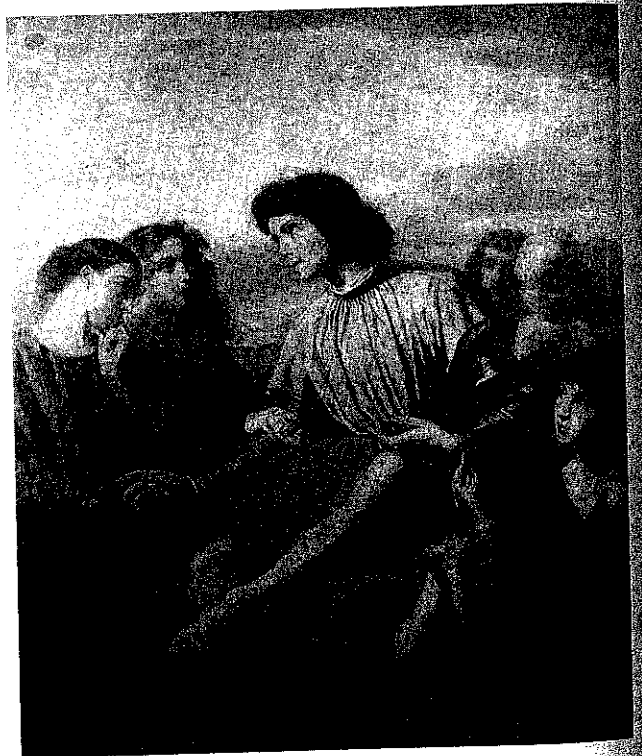
I don't fight for two reasons. First, because I do not believe in wars fought with guns and cannon, and because it runs counter to my principles. For ten years now I have been waging a war of the intellect. It would be inconsistent of me to act otherwise. The second reason is that I have no weapons and cannot be tempted. So you have nothing to fear on my account.¹⁶

The letter is clearly a rationale for a noncombative position, but I still see it as a progressive formulation given the almost universal middle-class loathing of the insurgents in June. As a member of the National Guard, Courbet is not considering fighting with the insurgents but actually declaring his refusal to take up arms *against* them. This is a radical position in June.

Again, as for Millet, the revolutionary moment galvanized his effective synthesis of personal style, working methods, and thematic concentration. We may judge this more precisely by examining his early work, most of it designed for the official Salon although often rejected. The majority of these paintings, including the narrative subjects, are self-portraits and correspond to an intense introspection in the painter's early twenties. They betray a marked debt to late romantic medievalism and the troubadour style of artists gathered around the "Ecole Deforges" (Couture, Henri Baron, and Faustin Besson, among others), baptized by Champfleury in his review of the 1846 Salon. This is not to say that his early works lack original traits—indeed, many of them represent quirky and eccentric attempts to revitalize a waning idiom—but that they take off from already popularized styles. Courbet's *Sculptor* (1844) and *Guittarero* (1845) recall such works of Thomas Couture as *Troubadour* (1843), *Jocondo* (1844), and *Falconer* (1844–1845), especially in their tilting heads, dreamy preoccupation, and

3.3 Gustave Courbet, *The Sculptor*, 1845. Private Collection.

3.4 Thomas Couture, *The Troubadour*, 1843. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.



I see it
loath-
ourbet
his re-

effec-
entra-
, most
major-
raits
enties.
ouba-
Henri
ry in
s lack
ric at-
ready
ll such
alconer
1, and

languorous, awkwardly posed bodies decked out in medieval tights (figs. 3.3-4). The landscape of the *Guittarero* evokes Moritz von Schwind's Biedermeier Gothicism, resembling an illustration for the fairy tales of the brothers Grimm. The shallow landscape nooks with their convenient rocky perches seem more like scenic backdrops than natural prospects.

His first work admitted to the Salon was *Self-Portrait with a Black Dog*, painted, according to the artist, in 1842, but accepted in 1844 (fig. 3.5). Here Courbet presents himself as a dandified outdoorsman, resting after having climbed with his spaniel to the crest of a mountain. At his side, leaning against a boulder, is his elegant walking stick and sketch album; but instead of showing himself at work at his elevated station, he and his dog turn to confront the spectator, who, as Michael Fried has pointed out, is positioned to view them from below.¹⁷ This subverts the conventional image of the poet-artist climbing the heights to gaze down rapturously on the sublime scene below—indeed, there is just such a prospect in the painting—essentially turning the voyeuristic gaze back on itself. Typically, the absorbed poet-painter is a certifiable conduit of proper taste who inferentially invites the spectator to share the exalted view, but in this case the poet-painter turns abruptly to catch the beholder in the act of beholding. Instead of being able to contemplate the magnificent perspective in safe isolation, the spectator is forced to confront the knowing artist and spaniel staring down at her as an unwanted interloper. Courbet plays on the romantic trope,

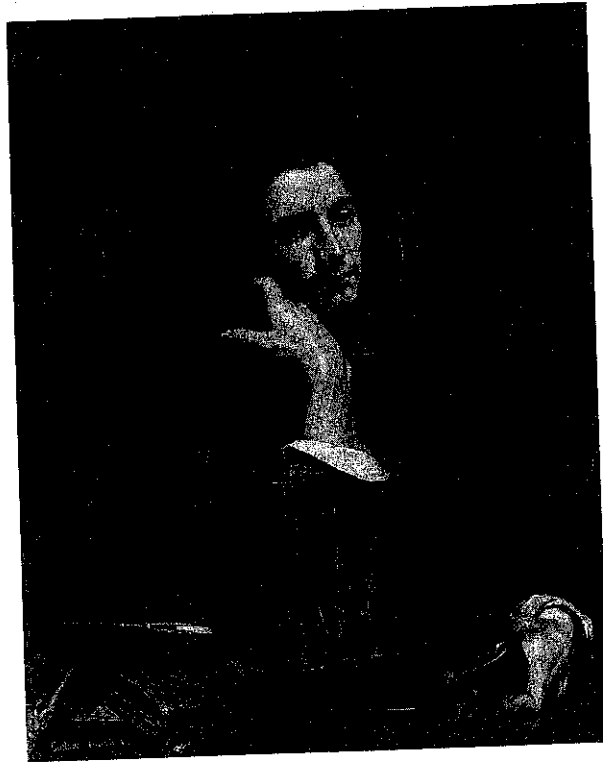
3.5 Gustave Courbet, *Self-Portrait with a Black Dog*, 1844. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris.



showing that he is well aware of romanticism's waning status, and searching for ways of giving it an original and perhaps even parodic twist.

I think we see this process reiterated in *The Man with the Leather Belt* of the mid-1840s, a work that references Old Master Dutch, Spanish, and Venetian portrait painting but replaces the aristocratic sitter with the artist himself (fig. 3.6). The half-length seated figure is actually painted over a copy of Titian's *Man with the Glove* (Louvre, ca. 1519), and there is a calculated connection between the hand grasping the belt in the Courbet and the bare right hand at the lower framing edge in the Titian. Courbet similarly represents himself as a dashing cavalier, but one who has to work for a living. His right elbow rests on the same leather-bound album glimpsed in *Self-Portrait with a Black Dog*, with a porte-crayon lying across it. He simultaneously seeks traits of identification with the great art of the past while declaring his independence from it. Unlike Titian's sitter, moreover, whose eyes turn away from us, Courbet faces outward, his right hand (and provocative bared wrist) debonairly brushing back his long hair to let the spectator get a better look at him, his left forcibly grasping the rugged leather belt. The dexterous relationship of the two hands suggests both sensuality and virility, an interplay of sexual invitation and physical presence. Near the end of the July Monarchy, when utopian movements grew in strength,

3.6 Gustave Courbet, *The Man with the Leather Belt*, 1845-1846. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



search-
:
ther Belt
ish, and
the art-
ed over
is a cal-
bet and
et simi-
rk for a
psed in
e simul-
st while
; whose
nd pro-
he spec-
leather
nsuality
e. Near
rength,

Courbet narcissistically flaunts both feminine and masculine aspects of his personality as the foundation of the creative act—the artist as androgyne.

Thus during his apprenticeship years we see Courbet expending his creative energies in a number of hit-and-miss directions, and though demonstrating a distinctly original and satirical turn of mind, he remains mired in the throes of a fading romanticism. Although never as financially needy as Millet, his thirst for fame is just as pressing and he eagerly plunges into the official fray to establish his reputation. As late as spring 1848, he had yet to find his focus—conspicuously evident in the jumble of themes submitted to the free Salon that year. His ten pictures included a *Classical Walpurgis Night*, inspired by Goethe's late classicizing sequel to *Faust*, several portraits, and a variety of landscape and genre scenes. One of the landscapes, *Midday (Le Milieu du jour)*, showed a man in a frock coat and top hat chasing a nymph through the woods!

Yet between the winter of 1848–1849 and the following spring Courbet embarked on a series of monumental pictures that constitute a watershed in both his personal and creative development. These large figure compositions, centering on his native region around Ornans and exploring the social relations of his family members and friends, mark the emergence of modern critical realism. Through contact with Thoré, Buchon, Champfleury, Dupont, and Sand (Courbet's 1848 Salon entries included a musical theme inspired by Sand's novel *Consuelo*), Courbet assimilated the realist-rural discourse and grasped its ideological appeal to the moderate Second Republic. Except for Sand, these middle-class males assembled at the Brasserie Andler, a rendezvous for late bohemian and realist intellectuals anxious to debate cultural politics and inaugurate a new movement. The romantic bohemianism of the early July Monarchy had by now taken a sharply political turn, recognizing that mere cultural measures could never alone reform a materialist society. In a sense, Courbet's testing of romantic tropes in his work of the 1840s corresponds to the late phase of bohemianism marking a transition to realism. Thus bohemians cum realists shared collectivist aspirations and a refusal of bourgeois culture, and although bohemianism was a distinctly urban phenomenon, its fringelike status placed it in a sympathetic relationship to rustic life. Analogous to the peasantry migrating from the countryside only to wind up in the working-class slums of Paris, so artists and writers of rural origin like Courbet and Buchon wound up merging with more urban types like Baudelaire, Champfleury, Mathieu, and Dupont, who developed strong ties to folk and popular culture.

Buchon and Champfleury were especially open to the work of the German authors exploring folk themes, in particular Johann Peter Hebel and Berthold Auerbach, who opposed rustic candor to the duplicity and impersonality of town and city. Buchon translated from Hebel's *Schatzkästlein des rheinischen Hausfreundes* and Auerbach's *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten*, and Champfleury devoted a long critique to Hebel and pored over Auerbach and the Swiss Albert Bitzium (aka Jeremias Gotthelf). Hence there are

points of intersection between Biedermeier culture and French realism that will even overlap in 1848, when revolution breaks out in Berlin and Vienna and Biedermeier turns critical.

We know that 1848 marks the critical turning point in Courbet's career because Champfleury, in his letter to Sand recapitulating the painter's development, declared, "Since 1848 M. Courbet has been privileged to amaze the crowd," and Courbet's full title of his magnum opus/manifesto of 1855—*The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up a Seven-Year Phase of My Artistic Life*—affirms that the significant date of departure for his artistic maturity was 1848. Castagnary wrote in his unpublished biography of Courbet that just at the moment when the artist had acquired technical mastery, political events disrupted everyday life and eliminated at one fell swoop the bourgeois monarchy and the sway of the Academy of Beaux-Arts, which "gave freedom to everyone, including the painters." He added that the "new master could now paint freely and according to his own ideas . . . and Courbet had an idea, more than an idea, a doctrine: he was a realist."¹⁸

Given these eyewitness accounts we may infer that the transformative moment in Courbet's life and art is inseparably linked to the revolutionary events of that year. Years later, Courbet wrote to Jules Vallès that in 1848 he "raised the flag of realism, which alone put art in the service of humanity." As a consequence of that action, he had since consistently resisted all forms of illegitimate authority, desiring to see human beings governing themselves according to their needs. He added that in the same year he opened a "socialist club" to rival other radical clubs filled with "so-called" republicans, and although neither his correspondence nor the accounts of his friends support this assertion, the statement nevertheless testifies to his own belief in the decisive importance of 1848 for his artistic and political development.¹⁹

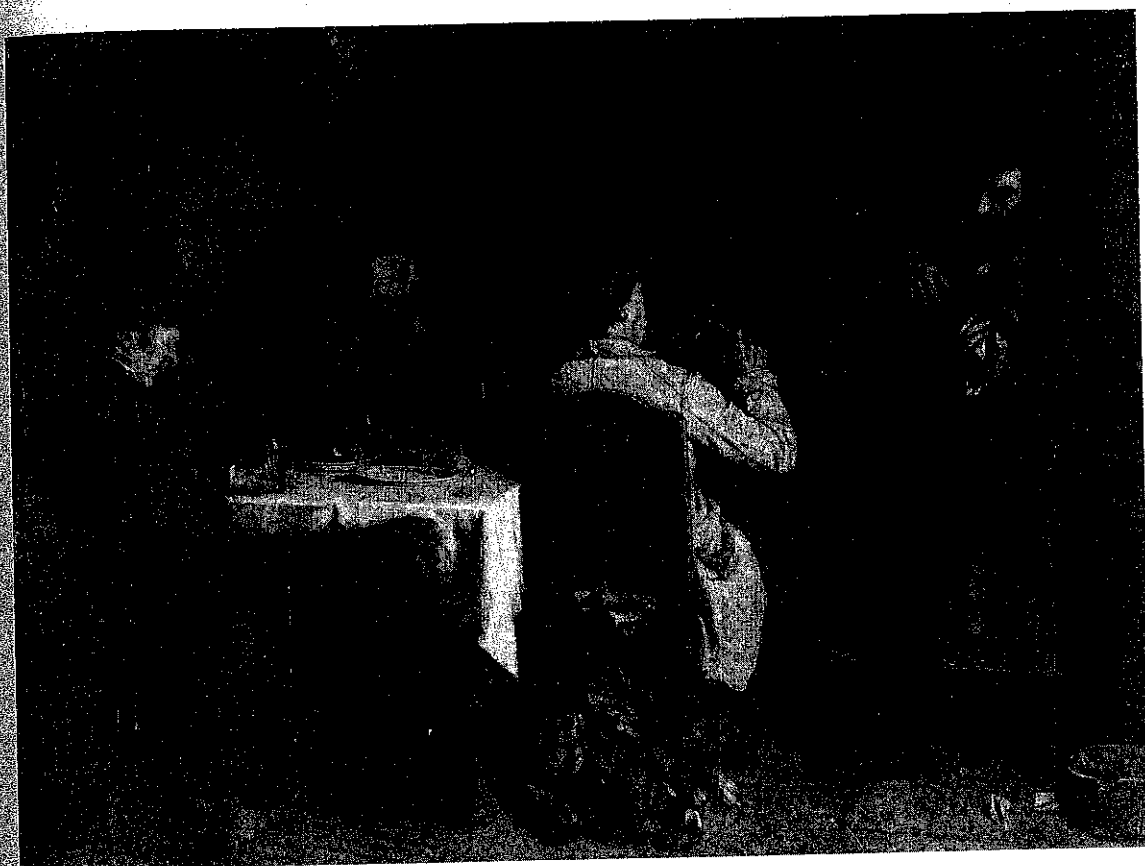
In addition to the stimulus of the revolution, the death of his beloved maternal grandfather, Jean-Antoine Oudot, on 13 August of that year, profoundly moved him. The coincidence of the demise of his boyhood idol—a hero of the 1789 revolution—with the painful crises of 1848 bracketed an entire history of the French radical tradition up to that moment. Courbet chose at that juncture to carry on the grandfather's memory by consecrating his efforts to sustaining that tradition through his art and his intellect, if not through direct action.

One month after Oudot died Courbet visited his family in Ornans, and by December was back in Paris hard at work on *After Dinner at Ornans*. The work centers on Courbet's father, Régis, and three family friends seated around a table, and although the painter inscribed in the register of Salon entries that the event took place in the home of Urbain Cuenot, Castagnary claimed that the interior resembled "that of the Courbet family in Ornans." The melancholy mood of the scene and dejected posture of Régis probably resonates with the painter's own mental state in this period.

One reviewer wondered why the artist went out of his way to “convey the sense of sadness by vastly extending his mournful and dirty painting, as if it had been executed with the ashes of the fireplace?”²⁰ In the wake of 1848 and the death of his grandfather Courbet needed to renew contacts with family, boyhood acquaintances, and his natal environment. Along with this work, Courbet exhibited several views of the topography surrounding Ornans.

Life-size at six by eight feet, the immense canvas represented his first major undertaking of a rural theme; it made a powerful impression on the 1849 Salon audience unaccustomed to seeing an ordinary genre scene blown up to history painting proportions (fig. 3.7). In a space with a large fireplace—known in Franche-Comté as a *chambre du poêle*, which functioned as kitchen, salon, and dining room combined—Courbet’s father at the left, Cuenot, and an artist friend, Adolphe Marlet, meditatively listen at table to Alphonse Promayet at the far right playing the violin. As in *The Draughts Players* (1844), the protagonists are seen close-up from behind and to the side and the table is aligned with the frontal picture plane; the

3.7 Gustave Courbet, *After Dinner at Ornans*, 1848–1849. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille.



spectator is thus positioned as if suddenly opening a door onto the scene. This effect is reinforced by the location of the legs of the chairs close to and touching the lower picture edge, so that the distance between the spectator's space and the illusionary space is all but negated. The actuality of the scene is made all the more convincing by the size of the figures in relation to the shadowy interior, by the starkly precise rendering of the accessories, and by the mellow, flickering light.

Within the space itself the figures appear unstaged and refusing a coherent pattern; rather, they are strung out in a wobbly line as if assuming artless positions. In fact, however, a subtle diagonal unites the key figures from left to right, from Courbet *père*, sunk heavily in his chair, to Promayet, raised slightly above the others on an improvised bench. Both cross one leg over the other and lower their heads in total absorption. The other two gaze in rapt attention at the virtuoso performer and serve as linkages between what I believe to be the two principal figures: Régis Courbet and Promayet. This fits Courbet's own explanation that on the occasion depicted he and his friends persuaded Promayet to specifically play for his father. Régis does more than merely listen, however: he is drawn into himself and his memories by the music—the alter ego of the painter still mourning the loss of grandfather Oudot. Courbet once established a historical lineage linking all three in a common bond of integrity: "My grandfather, who was a 1793 Republican, adopted a maxim that he always repeated to me: 'Shout loud and walk straight.' My father has always followed it and I have done the same."²¹

The original title of the work, *Une Après-Dînée à Ornans*, suggests more than an ordinary dinner, but carries the connotation of a dinner caught on the run, on the road. The protagonists still wear their bulky hunting clothes, and have come in out of the late autumn cold to share the warmth of a friendly hearth. Clark characterized the moment as a *veillée*, a rural ritual that took place between supper and bedtime during autumn and winter evenings, but others—Georges Riat and Hélène Toussaint in particular—have stated that the time of day depicted is the afternoon. I share Clark's opinion, mainly on the direct testimony of the artist himself, who referred to the work in a letter as *Evening at Ornans* [*Soirée à Ornans*], and also Castagnary, who declared that the picture recalled for him the "evenings" he spent with the Courbets at Ornans when the "large room that served at once as salon and dining room was transformed into a reading room or music session."²²

Weber has described the *veillées* as after-supper moments in rural households when an hour or two before bedtime was given over to singing or listening to music. The *veillée* was a regular ritual throughout most of rural France that began as the fall labors diminished. Late fall and winter evenings were long, cold, and isolating, and fires had to be carefully tended and nursed. Around the fire would gather neighboring families who took nightly turns at one another's home, thus saving on light and heat. Music

and folklore were standard features of most *veillées* (recall that Sand wanted to call her pastoral tales the "*Veillées of the Hemp Dresser*"), and the talk was filled with reminiscences. Typically, the event took place when the light was poor and music then became indispensable entertainment in country life. Notables and officials generally detested the *veillée* because the discourse and songs frequently turned bawdy and subversive.²³

Courbet's work thus documented the participation of his family and friends in a common social ritual of the countryside, narrativizing an ordinary rustic scene on a scale reserved for history painting. The absence of old Oudot within the unfolding circumstances of 1848 revealed to Courbet the possibility of glimpsing history at work within the present, of understanding history as constitutive of the dynamic here and now. Painfully aware of having missed the opportunity to record Oudot within context for posterity, Courbet's historical sense expanded to encompass contemporary commonplace events. He now grew conscious of watching history unfold before him and believed it was possible not only to participate in that history but help shape it. This attitude clarifies one of Baudelaire's headings in notes for a projected essay on the painter: "*Courbet saving the world.*"

Courbet consistently wrote of realism as "my way of seeing" (*ma manière de voir*), admitting up front its subjective and ideological implications, but also acknowledging his role in the construction of contemporary history.²⁴ His letter to his prospective students was quite clear on this issue, asserting that "art, or talent, should be to an artist no more than the means of applying his personal faculties to the ideas and the events of the times in which he lives." And he continued:

Every age should be represented only by its own artists, that is to say, by the artists who have lived in it. I hold that the artists of one century are totally incapable of representing the things of a preceding or subsequent century, in other words, of painting the past or future. It is in this sense that I deny the possibility of historical art applied to the past. Historical art is by nature contemporary. Every age must have its artists, who give expression to it and reproduce it for the future. An age that has not managed to find expression in the work of its own artists has no right to be expressed by later artists. That would be falsifying history.²⁵

After Dinner at Ornans represented his first mature attempt to put that doctrine into practice. Conservative reviewers of the 1849 exhibition were characteristically ambivalent in their responses to the work: generally bowled over by Courbet's technical mastery, they were incensed by what they considered a huge wasted effort. Their strategy was to implicate his work in the negative discourse surrounding the daguerreotype, to reduce his painting to the level of mechanical process. The art critic of *L'Illustration* noted that the subject would have well suited a small genre picture, but why did the artist have to give the "vulgar thing the proportions of Ingres's

ceiling decoration of [the Apotheosis of] Homer?"²⁶ Louis Peisse got the ball rolling with his statement that no other artist could "degrade art [*encanailler l'art*] with greater technical know-how," a remark picked up by others searching to position Courbet's work. "Feu Diderot" of *L'Artiste*, for example, admitted the crudity of the term but felt that it was the sort of truth that comes from the bottom of a well. Advising the painter to *interpret* and not simply *imitate* nature, the critic admonished Courbet to infuse his work with more "passion" and elevate it above the trivial. He declared that Courbet "suffered a grievous fault, and that is to be satisfied with himself." He needed to search for and discover beauty—that is, "nature seen through the lens of poetry."²⁷

Courbet's response to these critics (in a letter to Francis and Marie Wey) acknowledged full responsibility for their particular reading of his new work: "Yes, M. Peisse, it is necessary to degrade art. For too long you have been affirming art that is pomaded and in 'good taste.' For too long painters, even my contemporaries, have based their art on stereotyped ideas." What is curious in both Peisse's and *feu* Diderot's remarks is an implied familiarity with Courbet's mindset, as if he were a veteran of the Salon. They treated him as an experienced professional who had somehow strayed from the straight and narrow and needed to get back on track, and, conversely, Courbet answered them as the bellwether of the new movement. This indicates the profound impression his work made in 1849, echoed in Delacroix's exclamation before the picture: "Have you ever seen anything like it, anything so strong, without dependence on anyone else? Here's an innovator, a revolutionary, too; he burst forth all of a sudden, without precedent: he's an unknown!"²⁸

Lagenevais of the conservative *Revue des deux mondes* began his review by wondering out loud why Courbet painted a genre scene on a five-foot [*sic*] canvas. A kitchen interior pleases on a modest scale, he continued, but loses its charm when scaled to actual size. When magnified this way accessories that were normally so enchanting in small Flemish cabinet pictures simply became boring and commonplace. Like Peisse and *feu* Diderot, he acknowledged Courbet's technical virtuosity and precision but regretted that it produced nothing more than a "trivial truth." Nevertheless, he used Courbet's example of modernity positively to put down the faux "realist" work of Meissonier and Fauvelet, who insisted on slotting their scenes into a comfortable rococo niche and depriving the Salon audience of the elegant aspects of modern life.²⁹

The critic for the center-right journal *L'Illustration* made an important contribution to the discussion: he observed that the four protagonists of the picture were "half-bourgeois and half-rustic," hinting at Courbet's more complicated understanding of the rural social structure and helping explain another side of the critics' consternation. The painting problematized the inhabitants of the countryside at a time when that population could no longer be taken for granted. When Lagenevais claimed that

realists had pretensions of being revolutionaries, he surely had in mind their larger-than-life workers and peasants. Yet I believe it was the very instability of the peasantry in this phase of the Republic that guaranteed Courbet's official success that year, for despite the acerbic critiques he won a second-class medal (exempting him henceforth from ordinary jury scrutiny) and the state purchased the work for 3,000 francs.

On 5 August 1849 the official government newspaper, *Le Moniteur universel*, ran a review-article on agriculture that began as follows:

In an era when the most subversive doctrines have spread throughout the countryside, when society is attacked on all sides, when the family, property, everything is open to question, it is the obligation of honest people and especially eminent men placed at the head of affairs to lend their good name and talents in support of the nation in order to arrest the evil, to attack and combat it, and restore the calm and repose to society that a few fanatics have wrested from it temporarily. One of the most efficacious means of achieving this is to moralize the rural populations, to increase their well-being in augmenting agricultural production through positive improvements, and to enhance in their own eyes and in the eyes of all the art that they cultivate, the most ancient, the most noble, and the most essential to mankind.³⁰

In this official statement on the rural areas, the government sets as its priority their stabilization and moralization, the restoration of "the calm and repose" that have "temporarily" been lost because of the radical politicization of the countryside. Now what Courbet shows in his work are rural inhabitants totally entranced by the dulcet strains of the violin, soothing them into a state of absolute calm and serenity. Music is shown to have a "civilizing" effect on rustic folk. Here the ambiguous "half-bourgeois, half-rustic" portrayal may have aided in sustaining the image of a peasant capable of absorption in higher cultural forms.

It may be worthwhile to confront this work with the American William Sidney Mount's *Music Hath Charms* or *The Power of Music* of 1847. Courbet may have known Mount's work since it was sent to Paris and lithographed by Goupil in 1848 for European consumption.³¹ Mount similarly showed three men (wearing hats like that worn by Marlet) in a rustic ambiance captivated by a violinist, one of whom is an African American who stands outside the barn where the others, all white, gather to listen. Particularly intriguing is the opening into the barn, which operates as a surrogate frame whose lower edge barely contains the figures, analogous to Courbet's composition. The difference being, however, that Mount exploits the container motif to depict an outside as well as inside, thus excluding the African American, who nevertheless listens as attentively as the whites inside.

Mount's title invites the idea of the "savage beast" who may be soothed—a theme dear to the heart of dominant elites everywhere whose concerns were the same in wishing to contain dissenting peasants, mili-

tant artisans, feminist agitators, and upstart blacks. What was crucial was securing them all to a fixed place within the scheme of things. Returning now to the Courbet, it is possible to speculate that the imaginary spectator brought close-up to the pictorial space is an excluded auditor like the black in Muntz's work, a peasant servant perhaps (who is surely there somewhere), not permitted to share the space of the "half-bourgeois, half-rustic" fraternity. Thus the spatial arrangement implies an element of exclusivity in its proximity to the beholder, who is made to feel debarred from the intimate gathering. Courbet's social and political consciousness, though developing rapidly, still retained elements of class bias at the outset of his radical phase.

The logic of events acted as a corrective on his bourgeois blind spots. Two days before the 15 June opening of the Salon of 1849, the radical republicans, led by Ledru-Rollin, staged one final attempt to gain control of the government. Outraged by Louis-Napoléon's violation of the Constitution in intervening in Italy to suppress a sister republic, a long column of assorted republicans and National Guardsmen from the working-class districts made their way toward the National Assembly. Government troops broke up the demonstration, and when Ledru-Rollin and a loyal group of followers rallied at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers to organize a full-scale insurrection, the troops again easily put down the rebellion.

Courbet monitored these events closely and wrote his father that the "Constitution has been violated from top to bottom," thus echoing the position of the extreme radicals. He condemned the "insolence of the reactionary party" and noted that General Changarnier, who led the troops against the insurgents, announced that France would have an emperor by morning. Radical newspapers had been vandalized, and barricades once more erected. Changarnier was fired at by a sniper "but unfortunately not hit. Everyone who fired was killed on the spot. As for M. Napoléon, he has not been shot at yet, which is even more unfortunate."³²

Thus by 1849 Courbet's political progressivism had moved solidly to the Left and between then and the end of the Republic critics positioned him as leader of the radical realists. When two weeks before the coup d'état a critic named Garcin called him "the socialist painter," Courbet wrote the editor of the newspaper with an energetic avowal of principle: "I accept that title with pleasure. I am not only a socialist but a democrat and a republican as well—in a word, a partisan of all the revolutions and above all a realist . . . a sincere lover of the honest truth."³³ He now perceived himself as a role model to empower others, intending to "be so outrageous that I'll give everyone the power to tell me the cruelest truths. You see that I am up to it. Don't think that this is a whim, I have thought about it for a long time. Moreover, it is a serious duty, not only to give an example of freedom and character in art, but also to publicize the art I undertake."³⁴

Courbet made good on his word in the Salon of 1850-1851, where he exhibited three major multigure pictures, two landscapes, and four por-

traits, including the well-known self-portrait *Man with the Pipe*—the artist moved by the spell of tobacco rather than the muse. His explanation of this portrait to the patron who bought it emphasizes his evolving “realist” demystification of bourgeois ideology: “It is the portrait of a man unburdened of the nonsense that made up his education, who seeks to live by his own principles.”³⁵ Courbet added that his numerous self-portraits disclose his gradually changing attitude and altogether constitute an “autobiography.” Here he testifies to his striving for self-knowledge, a process inextricable from his visual production. He insisted in his “realist manifesto” of 1855 that his main objective had always been “to draw forth from a complete acquaintance with tradition the reasoned and independent consciousness of my own individuality.” Applied to his art this meant, “To be in a position to translate the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my epoch, according to my own estimation; to be not only a painter, but a man as well; in short, to create living art—that is my goal.”³⁶

Courbet’s robust presence on the Salon scene of 1851 created a sensation; in spite of themselves, the most conservative critics converged on his pictures as if riveted by a magnetic force, often devoting such a disproportionate amount of space in their reviews to his painting that they wound up apologizing to their readers for sinking in the mire with a miserable charlatan. Their excuse was their fear of Courbet’s bad example for the younger generation and the need for clarity on first principles. When Louis de Geofroy of the lordly *Revue des deux mondes* overheard someone describing Courbet’s work as “socialist painting,” he responded, “too bad for socialism! the pictures of M. Courbet do nothing to render it attractive.” Yet he began and ended his long critique of the Salon harping on Courbet, one of the new barbarians glorifying ugliness and “widening the breach” of the Salon wall.³⁷ Courbet was ultimately passed over in silence by the awards committee, and an outraged Gautier, with rare generosity, wondered how this was possible: Courbet had stirred up the public as well as the artists, and despite his defects his superior qualities and incontestable originality merited a first-class medal just like Antigna.³⁸

Castagnary made it clear that the wild reception of Courbet’s work was overdetermined by the charged political conditions:

What! They had dissolved the national workshops; they had conquered the proletariat in the streets of Paris; they had overcome the republican bourgeoisie of the *Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers*; . . . They had purged the general election, eliminating by the law of 31 May [1850] three million voters—and yet there were the “vile masses” who had been chased out of politics, reappearing in painting!³⁹

Castagnary recalled that the period was shot through with tension as the right wing of the National Assembly aggressively pursued with Louis-Napoléon the unraveling of the Republic, and nervously felt a “presentiment of an approaching catastrophe.”

Courbet's response took the form of a retreat to his native homeland. His three ambitious pictures and the landscapes were all painted in and around Ornans, where he spent the fall and winter of 1849–1850. He converted a space in a family-owned house in Ornans into a workshop and once again plunged into the social and cultural life of the familiar countryside. All the titles of his works in the Salon carry that specificity of locale—for example, *Un enterrement à Ornans*, *Les Paysans de Flagey revenant de la foire (Doubs)*, and *Les Casseurs de pierre (Doubs)*. The images of the social structure and topography of his native environment were essential to his ongoing self-analysis and to the public expression of his ebullient personality.

The Stonebreakers

We know a great deal about the origin of *The Stonebreakers*, which Courbet began in November 1849, concurrent with his work on *Funeral at Ornans*. Apparently, the sight of two laborers along the road crushing rocks into gravel stirred him to momentarily suspend effort on his magnum opus and immediately take up what he considered a pendant to his *After Dinner at Ornans* (fig. 3.8). Near the end of November he wrote his friends Francis and Marie Wey about his encounter on the road, prefacing his description of the circumstances with reflections on his restless mental state in the vicinity of his rural hometown: "If after I left, you were beginning to find me lazy, my God, what would you say now? And you would be right! But I will clear myself heroically, you'll see. When I am in Ornans, I am in Paris, my thoughts wander. Here especially I enjoy that kind of vague idleness where one does so many things while doing nothing. That is not what I mean by clearing myself, but it is coming." I take these comments as indicative of his soul-searching at the outset of the most productive period of his life, and that his intention to "clear himself" signified his perseverance in probing the ideological boundaries that constrained pictorial vision—his "heroic" equivalent to fighting on the barricades.⁴⁰

He immediately followed these insights with his eyewitness account of his experience on the road:

I had taken our carriage to go to the Château of Saint-Denis to paint a landscape. Near Maisières I stopped to consider two men breaking stones on the road. One rarely encounters the most complete expression of poverty, so right there on the spot I got an idea for a painting. I made a date to meet them in my studio the following morning, and since then I have painted my picture. It is the same size as *Evening at Ornans*. . . . On one side is an old man of seventy, bent over his work, his sledgehammer raised, his skin parched by the sun, his head shaded by a straw hat; his trousers, of coarse material, are completely patched; and in his cracked sabots you can see his bare heels sticking out of socks that were once blue. On the other side is a young man with swarthy skin, his head covered with dust; his disgusting shirt all in tatters reveals his arms and parts of his back; a leather



3.8 Gustave Courbet, *The Stonebreakers*, 1849. Destroyed. Formerly Staatliche Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

suspender holds up what is left of his trousers, and his mud-caked leather boots show gaping holes on every side. The old man is kneeling, the young man standing behind him energetically carrying a basket of broken rocks. Alas! in this class [état], this is how one begins, and that is how one ends.⁴¹

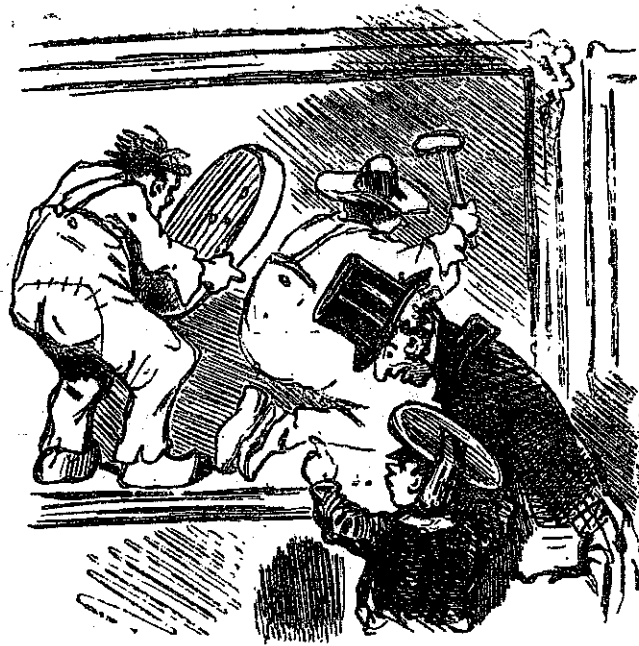
Concluding his description with an inventory of their tools—a pannier (for carrying on the back), a hand barrow, a hoe, and a farmer's lunch pail—Courbet noted the irony of the entire wretched scene taking place in a bright, sunlit landscape, in the middle of the countryside. Significantly, it is precisely at this juncture that he challenged Peisse's comment on his *After Dinner at Ornans*, "Yes, Monsieur Peisse, we must degrade art. For too long you have been affirming art that is pomaded and 'in good taste.'" If anything, *The Stonebreakers* must be seen as an aggressive encroachment on the ideological boundaries of Salon art and a further extension of Courbet's self-awareness. The two road menders are in effect the absentees in the *After Dinner*, the equivalent of Mount's excluded blacks and Millet's ostracized gleaners, now come home to demand their place at the table.

Some of Courbet's other remarks in this letter and in subsequent correspondence with Champfleury confirm his heightened sensitivity to the class issue and ability to empathize with those outside his tribe.⁴² The epiphany upon spotting the two workers—the fact that he suspended other picto-

rial labors to take up the stonebreakers' theme—hints at some kind of revelation. Courbet's self-disclosure is most evident in his fascination for the clothing of the laborers, always keeping in mind his own former dandified obsession with the elegance of his figure and setting it off to best advantage with the latest male fashions. At the same time that he is repulsed by their garb, he itemizes their every costume detail just as he did when ordering his own tailored dress. Courbet recognized in the articles of clothing sure signs of class, and delineates them with scrupulous objectivity. Rather than mask the body as in bourgeois clothing, however, these filthy, patched, gaping, and tattered hand-me-downs disclose the wretchedness of working-class physical existence. The wracked and stricken bodies of the stonebreakers—in a letter to Champfleury he adds that the young man suffers from scurvy—are revealed by the clothing in inverse proportion to fashionable concealment or conscious display of status. Courbet noted in his letter to Champfleury that the old man's coarse trousers "could stand by themselves," and his attempt to give them the weight and feel of coarse fabric was strikingly apparent to the critics. Contemporary cartoonists had a field day in seizing upon this motif as the salient feature of the painting (fig. 3.9).

3.9 Cham, *Why Do They Call This Painting Socialistic, Papa?* wood engraving from *Revue comique du Salon de 1851*, 1851.

In his letter to the Weys Courbet wrote in a postscript that he had just purchased a pair of blue leather sabots, suggesting his identification with the rural laborers. Fried sees the nearness of the stonebreakers to the frontal plane as evidence of Courbet's own bodily investment in the picture's



f rev-
or the
dified
dvan-
ed by
n or-
loth-
ivity.
filthy,
dness
ies of
; man
on to
ed in
stand
oarse
s had
nting

d just
with
fron-
ture's

physicality, but I would go further in arguing that this nearness has a social function in representing Courbet's desire to attach himself corporeally to the bodies of the road menders.⁴³ He told Champfleury that he loved the winter season, a time when "the servants' drinks are as cool as their masters," and he bragged that the local vine-growers and farmers were much taken with his painting, claiming that nothing could "be more true to life." Thus he delights in the broadening of his audience with an idiom that transcends "art for art's sake" and communicates to a constituency normally excluded from representation in the institutionalized venues of display. Finally, the letter to the Weys describes the old man as "bent over," which in French is "courbé," a pun on the painter's own last name. These are only tantalizing snippets to be sure, but in their aggregate I believe they are telling indications of Courbet's increasing class-consciousness in the breakthrough period.

Stone-breaking for roadbeds was commonplace in rural areas especially during the off-seasons (after hay-time and harvest) when the primary farm chores had been accomplished and extra income was needed. Rocks were quarried from the side of the roads and crushed into gravel to pave new thoroughfares or repair old ones for the winter weather. The Second Republic also funded roadwork in the countryside to avoid an influx of unemployed peasants into Paris, and the association of this project with the memory of the disastrous National Workshops may have exacerbated the critical response of conservatives to Courbet's enterprise in 1851.⁴⁴

During the economic hard times of 1848, the Municipal Council of Chavignolles (Calvados) offered relief to the unemployed by commissioning a branch road built to a local nobleman's château.⁴⁵ Courbet noted that he was on the way to the picturesque Château of Saint-Denis to do a landscape when he came upon the road menders, once more indicating his awareness of class oppositions and contradictions. It was clear that from the official perspective, stone-breaking was "make work" activity, a low form of unskilled labor designed to prevent the rural *canaille* from pillaging and filling the ranks of the "idlers" in town and province. Courbet wanted to observe this painful spectacle by refusing as much as humanly possible to idealize and sentimentalize it, to record it unburdened by bourgeois prejudice.

Although shocked reviewers of the 1850-1851 Salon concentrated their commentaries on *Funeral at Ornans*, the brief comments on *The Stonebreakers* are nevertheless telling. Geoffroy launched his review with this work:

M. Courbet says to himself, "What's the use of seeking out beautiful types that are only accidents of nature and reproducing them according to an artificial arrangement that is never seen in ordinary life?" Art that is made for everyone should represent what everyone sees; the only rule to follow is perfect exactitude. Accordingly, our theorist plants his easel on the side of a highway where road workers are breaking stones. Here is a picture already made, and, for fear

that a single detail might escape him, he copies the two manual laborers in all their grossness and natural size. The older worker, glimpsed in profile, wears a straw hat and a striped vest with two rows of buttons; he has removed his jacket and kneels with one knee on the ground to work; his shirt is of a very coarse linen and his trousers are patched; finally, he wears sabots, and his dirty heels show through the worn wool stockings. His young companion carries a load of rocks and we see him only from the rear; but this part of his body is not without some important peculiarities: one shoulder strap retained by a single button and a rent in his shirt that reveals his bare shoulder, etc.⁴⁶

These comments demonstrate Courbet's capacity to force his critics to meet him on his own ground. Geoffroy practically repeats verbatim the description that the painter gave the Weys, including the special emphasis on the clothing. We find over and over again that Courbet's sensitivity to costume as a social signifier irritated the conservatives for the very reasons that their own ideological attraction to this aspect of his work obligated them to admit their own class-consciousness. He compelled his critics to think and argue his work in political terms, which is precisely what they wished to avoid in their Salon reviews. This is seen in the writer for *L'Illustration* whose inordinately long section on Courbet's *Funeral at Ornans* prompted an apology to his readers. Describing *The Stonebreakers* as still "another reality," he continued:

Two stonebreakers of the department of Doubs. That's it! It is a subject with very little appeal. To render it even more unpleasant the artist has suppressed the two heads of the poor laborers, that is to say, the only things capable of preserving the interest of such an empty subject. The standing worker turns his back to us and we see only his nape; the other who kneels has his head hidden under his straw hat. What happens to the principal objects of a painting if they are not treated with the importance that is evidently accorded them, positioned with their relative legitimate value, expressive of a certain truth, and rendered with a vivacity suitable to display the artist's talent for material execution? Instead of that wan and ambiguous glimmer of light spread throughout the scene, shouldn't we feel the full effect of sunlight that the painter meant to put there, indicated by the cast shadows that, however, do not sufficiently achieve the aim of making it shine?⁴⁷

Here again the critic affirms Courbet's intention to refuse his subject all idealization, although he finds it painful and disturbing to behold. The critic finds Courbet's clinical detachment intolerable and wants some kind of dramatic lighting scheme and narrativizing concept, pathos, or moral contrast to justify the painter's choice of subject matter.

According to the critic of the *Le Moniteur universel*, Fabien Pillet, Courbet should be counted among the painters "who reveal a marked predilection for the least civilized of rustic customs and habits."⁴⁸ This restated the

general concern for Courbet's rejection of idealized forms and content and his seeming preference for the sordid aspects of human behavior and social existence. At the core of this new construction aimed at displacing classic, romantic, religious, and metaphysical interpretations of nature and society was a novel concept of time, an experience in real time opposed to the "timelessness" of classical beauty and spiritual perfection.

The old dualism of the timeless and the temporal realms was replaced by the monistic emphasis on an imperfect time-ridden human dimension. Classicists and romantics celebrated the epic and episodic moment, even when their work was based on actuality: David's *Oath of the Tennis Court*, Goya's *Third of May*, Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, and Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* are all stage-managed to elevate reality to the level of epic consciousness. The moment chosen is a heroic moment demanding an undivided state of heightened adoration and thralldom, the suspension of critical thought. Similarly, notions of the Beautiful and Divine Perfection presupposed the negation of the consciousness of change and contradiction in pointing to an exalted state. Realism's focus on the empirical world, however, revised the aims of high art to align it with the scientific and positivist method, providing a sense of concrete time that flattened out climactic historical representation and, by extension, history painting. It was the uninflected present that preoccupied the realists, and in the hands of the radicals realism's embrace extended to the squalor of life, the social contradictions, and the alienation of labor analogous to Marx's analysis of modern capitalism.

Contrary to the conservatives, Proudhon lauded the work as a successful case study of "socialist painting." Simply reproducing the realities of the contemporary present was not enough; artists have to touch the consciences of their audiences and make them think. In this light, Proudhon understood *The Stonebreakers* as an ironic comment on "our industrial civilization, which every day invents marvelous machines to labor, sow, reap, harvest, thresh the grain, grind it, knead, spin, weave, sew, print, manufacture nails, paper, pins, cards; in short, to execute all sorts of jobs, often very complicated and delicate," but which "is yet incapable of liberating the human being from the grossest, most painful, the most repugnant tasks—the eternal lot of the poor."

Proudhon continued his discussion of modern machines, declaring that they are more skillful than human beings and achieve better results, and once in motion "they replace us with immense advantage." Machines have only one fault: they do not act by themselves but require people to monitor, control, and even to serve them. But what is there to prevent someone from inventing a machine to crush stones like the one invented to saw them? Proudhon responds that Courbet would have had simply to modify his subject, since the problem of manual labor remains the same and is in fact insoluble. One invention invokes another ad infinitum, but universal mechanization of all tasks in creation is as impossible as a perpetual motion

machine. One day someone will invent a machine to break stones, but to be of significance to the capitalist it will then be necessary to invent one to extract the stones from the quarry, another to load them, another for the vehicle to transport them, and still another to spread them, and the process goes on without end. Even if we admit the possibility of total mechanization, what would then happen to the suffering laborers who live off these wearisome tasks, and who would then be completely disinherited from society?

Thus it is that the human being becomes a slave to the machine, the outcome of human ingenuity. The more mechanized we become, the more we increase servitude, and the grosser the task and the more servile the function the greater is the physical, intellectual, and moral impoverishment of our proletarian slaves. This is the fatal law of labor in a capitalist society with no alternative in sight. Proudhon suggests what he considers the sole remedy, to distribute this heavy task as a public service among all the eligible members of society, either in the form of a duty or paid labor. Outside of that solution there is only endless exploitation, and consequently degradation and disfigurement of the human race. If aesthetic idealism and the fine arts accept and hide servitude as a natural social state, then the rights of the human being and citizen established in 1789 have lost their meaning.

Proudhon then asks his reader to guess which of the two laborers in the painting most effectively expresses servitude and poverty, predicting the obvious in the choice of the old man, since youth is better able to tolerate afflictions. But Proudhon writes that this response would be mistaken:

The kneeling old man, bent [*courbé*] over his rude task, who breaks stones on the side of the road with a long-handled hammer, is certainly worthy of your compassion. His immobile body reflects a melancholy that goes straight to the heart. His stiff arms rise and fall with the regularity of a lever. Here indeed is the mechanical or mechanized human being in the state of desolation to which our splendid civilization and our incomparable industry have reduced him.

The old man has at least seen better days, since he has lived; though his present is without illusion and without hope, he has his memories and regrets to sustain him, while the youth will never know the joys of life. Chained before his time to penurious labor, he is already coming apart at the seams; his shoulder is out of joint, his step is enfeebled, his trousers are falling down; uncaring poverty has made him lose his self-esteem and the nimbleness of adolescence. Ground down in the prime of life, he is already half dead. Proudhon then elaborates on the same conclusion reached by Courbet in his letter to the Weys:

Thus modern bondage devours the generations in their growth: this is the state of the proletariat. And we speak of liberty, of human dignity! We declaim against the enslavement of blacks, whose status as beasts of burden at least

protects them against the excesses of pauperism! May it please God that the proletariat may be at least as materially well off as the blacks!

Doubtless, it would not be completely fair to judge this great nation of ten million sovereign voters by this sad example; but does it make it any less true that this is one of the shameful aspects of our society, and that there is not one of us, city dweller or peasant, worker or proprietor, who may not one day, through a quirk of fate, see herself reduced to this? The condition of the stonebreakers is that of more than six million souls in France; then boast of your industry, your philanthropy, and your politics!

Proudhon quotes a critic of a rival school of thought who called *The Stonebreakers* "a masterpiece in its genre." He accepted this judgment with the qualification that the *genre* to which the painting belonged had to be considered the most elevated genre of the day, indeed, the only one admissible in contemporary art. He then asked rhetorically what the canvas would need to gain unanimous approval. He answered that it would have to be less real and more traditional. For example, if Courbet loved antithesis and melodramatic contrast like the romantic author Victor Hugo, he would have located the stonebreakers at the entrance of a château; behind the gate, in perspective, a vast and superb garden, and beyond, the master's mansion with terrace, portico, and marble statues of Venus, Hercules, Apollo, and Diana. Courbet, however, preferred the broad open highway, completely bare, with its emptiness and monotony, which Proudhon thought was preferable. There is where work occurs without diversion, where poverty is unrelieved by holidays, and only dreary solitude reigns.

Proudhon concluded his discussion of *The Stonebreakers* with an affirmation of its broad appeal, noting that some peasants who have viewed the painting wanted to possess it to install it—"guess where?"—on the high altar of their church. He suggested that Hippolyte Flandrin, the student of Ingres famous for his biblical scenes in the churches of Saint-Séverin and Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris, take a hint from Courbet's "morality in action" to improve his religious compositions. Here again Proudhon transposes Courbet's monumental genre paintings to the level of official high art.⁴⁹

At this point, Proudhon again enters into dialogue with his imaginary middle-class reader as a pretext for spelling out the conditions of a realist sensibility. "Poverty grieves you," Proudhon declares, and although admitting high tragedy and catastrophic misfortune into the art canon, the readers undoubtedly feel that it is beneath art's dignity to reproduce everyday suffering. His readers reply that everyone knows that life is not a bed of roses: our hospitals, prisons, asylums, pawnshops, and penitentiaries are constant reminders of our misfortunes. Since pain is more universal than happiness, why confound them? If art has a mission, surely it is to throw a veil of consolation and decency over the misery of the century. Kindly spare us the cruel refinements of "critical art."

Proudhon then retorts that this is precisely the error of the critics of realism and the defenders of all previous art movements, who wish to separate that which is intrinsically inseparable: light and dark, spirit and matter, form and substance, beauty and ugliness, pleasure and pain, art and science/industry, fantasy and conscience, joy in work and illness, freedom and thralldom, life and death, glory and humiliation. They refuse to recognize that human life consists in the union of these binaries, mixed in varying doses. Instead, they have compartmentalized life into a type of God and a type of human being, a type of aristocrat and a type of slave; they have dreamed of one existence of perfection and exalted bliss, and another of eternal damnation and punishment, and they have declared: the first is the Ideal, Paradise, Art; and the second is Reality, Barbarism, Hell. And thus they have proscribed nine-tenths of the human race, reserving for themselves the ideal and condemning all the rest to hard labor. Proudhon rejected these self-serving categories and argued that art must embrace everything at the risk of infamy for the entire human race. Here, I believe, he gives the most succinct definition of realist ambition in the post-1848 era, converting aesthetics into political ideology and expanding the repertoire of the artist to encompass hitherto proscribed themes and forms.

Courbet's art provoked such responses in a tense atmosphere of political transition, which is why the conservatives so resented him at the Salon of 1850-1851. The *Moniteur universel* reported on 22 February 1851 that the district attorney had seized all the issues of the newspaper *Le Vote universel* with the article "Aux Paysans, études politiques et sociales" (To the Peasants, Political and Social Studies), and was prosecuting the author and publisher for "inciting hatred and mistrust of one group of citizens against another."⁵⁰ The art critic of the government newspaper considered Courbet's "Franche-Comtois" laborers a representation of the worst form of degraded human being in the countryside, and although this genre was unpleasant to the eye, the artist at least had the merit of "treating it with scrupulous fidelity."⁵¹ In other words, the viewer of Courbet's painting could get a good picture of the type of rustic ruffians most susceptible to Red propaganda.

Max Buchon's advertisement for Courbet's dry-run exhibition of his new pictures in Besançon and Dijon in the spring and summer of 1850 (pending the official opening of the Salon) described the two stonebreakers as the alpha and omega, the dawn and twilight, of modern galley-slave [*forçats*] existence. The old codger with his crude labor, his poverty, and sympathetic physiognomy was not yet the last word in human distress. Indeed, things could get much worse: "If the poor devil had the least thought of turning socialist, he could be envied, denounced, expelled, cashiered. Just ask the local prefect."⁵²

Buchon's observation of the old man's "automatic precision given by long habit" and Proudhon's mechanical metaphor to clarify the significance of *The Stonebreakers* echoed the thoughts of Courbet, who described

the kneeling road mender as "an old machine." Courbet's metaphor arose at the moment of observation, for it is built right into the composition, unstructured and artless as it might appear at first sight. (We have already seen that the concealment of the heads of the two laborers impersonalizes their activity as mere motion at work.) Starting with the movement of the youth, who steps off at a diagonal, we read zigzaggedly across the pictorial field from left to right, impelled in part by the absence of any relieving horizon or opening for visual respite. The movement initiated by the angle of the younger worker's left foot is extended by the diagonal of the hoe leaning against the side of the road, which in turn directs us to and parallels the back of the older man, continues in his upper right arm, and culminates in his raised right forearm and sledgehammer. Thus the two figures are linked in a movement reminiscent of the axes of a piece of machinery, akin to the connecting rods of the wheels of a locomotive. The idea of beginning as one, and ending up as the other, suggests an endless cycle of rotating machinery, the perpetual motion machine dreamed up by Proudhon's capitalist.

As automatons, their lives are predetermined by outside social forces. The pioneer writer on the peasantry, Eugène Bonnemère, hinted at this process in appealing to the privileged classes to alleviate the conditions of the peasantry:

You can multiply the schools, you can make education free, but you will have done nothing, absolutely nothing, as long as you have not changed the conditions of the existence of this person who, bent over [*courbé*] and brutalized on his furrow every hour and every day of his entire life, arrives at the end of his career as ignorant and almost as miserable as at the beginning of it.⁵³

Courbet's robotic laborers participated in a wider field of discourse than the merely representational, forging a radical political tract as much as a radical artistic manifesto.

The allegorizing of modern society as a web of sinister invisible forces ensnaring the helpless individual is parodied in Sue's *Wandering Jew*, where the Jesuits, a murderous Javanese cult, and rapacious capitalism are made to possess a common conspiratorial purpose against the commons. The Abbé-Marquis d'Aigrigny, mastermind of the Jesuitical conspiracy, describes the power of the Order to transform the individual into an automaton. Once enlisted, the new recruit

becomes but a human shell; its kernel of intelligence, mind, reason, conscience, and free will, shriveled within him, dry and withered by the habit of mutely, fearfully bowing under mysterious tasks, which shatter and slay everything spontaneous in the human soul! Then do we infuse in such spiritless clay, speechless, cold, and motionless as corpses, the breath of our Order, and lo! the dry bones stand up and walk, acting and executing, though only within the limits

which are circled around them evermore. Thus do they become mere limbs of the gigantic trunk, whose impulses they mechanically carry out, while ignorant of the design, like the stonemason who shapes out a stone, unaware if it be for cathedral or bagnio.

This mechanized existence echoes on a perverse religious level the lives of proletariat men and women beaten down into submission by a pitiless power with mechanical precision. The symbolic incarnation of this proletariat is the perpetual wanderer, the Jewish artisan who mocked Christ and was condemned to roam the world unceasingly. He represented the race of laborers, a race "always slaves, who, like me, go on, on, on, without rest or intermission, without recompense, or hope; until at length, women, men, children, and old men, die under their iron yoke of self-murder, that others in their turn then take up, borne from age to age on their willing but aching shoulders."

Implicit in Sue's novel and in Proudhon's analysis of the robot-like *Stonebreakers* is the notion of alienation soon to be articulated in less fantastic terms by Marx. Actually, the two laborers were alienated in a double sense—from their own drudgery as depicted in the painting and from the spectator's wish to see them conform to the conventional aesthetic and social code. Social roles once determined transform social relations into the form of a relation between objects. Human relations are replaced by object-like relations between roles. This is what Marx refers to as "reification," the state in which the object masters us and the world we have forged turns against us "as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer." The proletariat's labor ultimately serves to increase the wealth and power of the capitalist, thus reinforcing the conditions of her or his own oppression. Machinery, intended as a means of emancipating human beings from the yoke of animal labor, becomes alienated from their control and winds up exercising power over them.

Millet and especially Courbet wanted the viewer to experience the material existence of their subjects by transferring the sense of weight and texture of the external world to the canvas, hence the sheer density of their surfaces. The rough, mortar-like accumulation of pigment (applied by Courbet with palette knife) substitutes for the actual material substance portrayed. Hence the difference between realism and its later offshoot impressionism, which addresses almost exclusively the fleeting effect of light as it falls on matter. The realist's light effect is composed of broad opaque patches that transform the universe into a mosaic of solid chunks of matter, whereas that of the impressionist is a transparent web of loosely connected brushstrokes. The realist is still involved with the accumulation of empirical detail translated as viscous pigment, whereas the impressionist's emphasis on the fugitive atmospheric effect ignores the look and scope of cognitive substance.

The reviewer of the *Moniteur universel* declared that Courbet's "bulky and heavyset diggers [*terrassiers*] in *The Stonebreakers* perform their task with praiseworthy zeal, but their forms needed to have been modeled more firmly," and later complained that the execution of *Funeral at Ornans* was "more rustic than meticulously finished," here punning on the word *rustique* which meant both coarse and countrified.⁵⁴ The bold execution of Courbet's work in the 1850-1851 Salon implicated him in the sketch-finish debate that had been sharpened by the discussion of the Barbizon painters and then folded into the realist-rural discourse. His unemphatic presentation of his figures called for an overall surface execution that in the eyes of contemporary critics made his forms appear flat and primitivized as in popular prints. But read in the context of his ungainly rural workers, the rough execution reinforced the awkwardness of the first impression and intensified the raw power exuded by the country types.

Other reviewers alluded to the "unfinished" surfaces of these works, a characteristic that many of his colleagues likened to *pochades*, or the most summarily painted sketches. In this sense, Courbet's work approximated more the landscapist's *étude* than the history painter's *esquisse*—that is, a study of nature rather than an imaginative composition for a finished tableau.⁵⁵ Whereas the *esquisse* depended upon chiaroscuro, a more or less arbitrary arrangement of light and shade, the *étude* stressed the light values of a natural site. The *étude* required a certain dexterity to capture the ephemeral light effect and played down the clarity of specific objects in favor of the general ensemble. Thus it was primarily the visual, rather than the structural, elements that dominated the surface of a painting.

Instead of relying on the old composition in arbitrary light and shade (as Courbet had done in *The Man with the Leather Belt*, for example), independents like Corot and Courbet came to accept the actual arrangement of light and shade as the foundation of their pictures, spreading the values over the entire canvas. An artist cannot accept the actual conditions of light as governing the light and shade of his work without extending the same scheme of relations over the whole surface. Otherwise the values would be contrary to empirical fact—a problem detected by Dupays in *The Stonebreakers*, where the shadows cast by the figures contradict the predominant gray tonality. Despite what the critics perceived as defective drawing, they grudgingly admitted the validity of the atmospheric effect that they nevertheless tried to dismiss by classifying his work as *pochades*.

Yet a certain ambivalence pervades the critical responses in decrying at one and the same time Courbet's mechanical exactitude and his sketchiness, his accuracy and his slovenliness, a contradiction growing out of the monumental projection of Barbizon-like *études*. What bothered them was his capacity to convey the sense of the literal weight and texture of objects with an economy of means, thus bolstering the claims of the independent sketchers against the academic and official finishers. He managed

to establish the look of gravity through the viscosity of his medium while retaining the consistency of the light values, and this technical ambiguity contributed still further to the perturbations in his already confused field of mixed peasant/bourgeois social relations.

Funeral at Ornans

The most hysterical outcry of the critics was reserved for *Funeral at Ornans* (fig. 3.10). A bigger target than *The Stonebreakers*, it may have been easier to attack. The size of *Funeral at Ornans* is twenty-one feet long and eleven feet high and has come down to us with fifty-one life-size and larger-than-life-size figures (Buchon counted fifty-two in 1850). Courbet's original title for the work, entered by him in the Salon register, was "Tableau of Human Figures: History of a Funeral at Ornans," suggesting both his Faustian aspirations for the work and his desire to raise a local incident to the level of history painting. He momentarily dubbed it his "declaration of the principles of realism" and elsewhere presented it as the "funeral of romanticism." It is a canvas that vies in magnitude with the battle scenes of Steuben and Vernet in the Galerie des Batailles, and it strives for similar accuracy in reproducing the site, costumes, accessories, and physiognomies. Instead, however, of depicting military celebrities engaged in heroic combat, it modestly limns a community of relative unknowns ranged sedately in a queue.

The event takes place in the new cemetery of Ornans opened in September 1848 on a hill in the stark open countryside outside of the town. (Ornans is unseen on the lower ground of the Loue river valley between

3.10 Gustave Courbet, *Funeral at Ornans*, 1849–1850. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



while
ignity
l field

Ornans
sier to
n feet
i-life-
le for
uman
aspi-
f his-
ciples
" It is
ernet
ucing
er, of
limns

Sep-
own.
ween



the spectator and the limestone cliffs on the horizon.) On the left is the Roche du Château, where we see houses in the locality of the Château d'Ornans, a former residence of the dukes of Burgundy, and on the right are the majestic cliffs of the Roche du Mont. Courbet's narrative seems to hover between an inaugural event or civic ritual and an act of burial: hardly anyone present is mindful of the deceased, and several faces wear expressions of boredom, impatience, and indifference. Even the dog in the foreground, typically a symbol of loyalty and watchfulness, turns his head away from the proceedings. The diversity of expressive states suits the incoherent assembly that mills around without a single vivid formal gesture or dramatic focus to unify them, save for the harsh landscape panorama that encloses them.

It may be recalled that Courbet interrupted his work on *Funeral* in November 1849 to take up *The Stonebreakers*. I believe that the two are dialectically related, both subjects constituting a working through of Courbet's unfolding socialist and collectivist ideals. (Courbet always measured his intellectual progress in terms of specific stages or phases connected with peak moments of his career.⁵⁶) Courbet employed no professional models for his colossal canvas, an unprecedented gesture in an enterprise of this scope. *Funeral* was literally a community project, as the painter tapped into his immediate district to document what could have been an actual neighborhood event. What most excited the painter in the process of painting the large picture was the local community's enthusiastic participation in his project. As he wrote Champfleury early the next year:

Here models are for the asking. Everyone would like to be in the *Funeral*. I could never please them all, I would even make quite a few enemies. Those who have already posed are the mayor, who weighs four hundred [pounds]; the priest; the justice of the peace; the cross bearer; the notary; Deputy-Mayor Marlet; my friends; my father; the choirboys; the gravedigger; two veterans of the revolution of '93, in the clothes of that time; a dog; the deceased and his bearers; the beadles (one of the beadles has a nose as red as a cherry but broadly proportioned and about five inches long, something for Trapadoux to fool with!); my sisters, and other women as well, etc. I had hoped to get by without the two precentors of the parish, but there was no way to do it. Someone warned me that they were offended, that they were the only church people I had not included. They complained bitterly, saying that they had never done me any harm and that they did not deserve such an affront, etc.⁵⁷

It was as if the individuals of his village were conscious of their mission to body forth for the benefit of the Salon spectator their social and political significance.⁵⁸

Visually, this common point of reference is shown as a freshly dug open grave in the center foreground, cut off abruptly by the lower framing edge, which seems to extend the physical matter of this focus straight

into the spectator's space (or face). Assuming that the serpentine procession of mourners loops around the grave site, this motif would then invoke the viewer's participation in the interment ceremony and in the community as well. The obsequies are about to commence, as the pallbearers barge into the scene from the left carrying the draped coffin, the curate thumbs the pages of his prayer book, his assistants take their places, and the gravedigger kneels impatiently by the open grave. The lateral disposition of the cortege of mourners and officiants is seconded by the panoramic landscape in the distance, whose projecting cliff lines echo the parallel rows of heads and sustain the tug of the horizontal, frieze-like movement.

Courbet chose a funeral ceremony as the unifying motif around which to assemble the members of the provincial community, and to orchestrate a massive group portrait on the scale of both Dutch guild and company portraits and allegorical/historical composite murals such as Ingres's *Apotheosis of Homer*, Chenavard's ill-fated Universal Palingenesis cycle for the Pantheon, and Delaroche's Hemicycle at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Unlike these precedents, however, and even earlier funeral paintings of Christ, the saints, or historical figures glorified in Poussin's *Funeral of Phocion* and El Greco's *Funeral of Count Orgaz*, which focus on the specific identity of the deceased to enshrine immortality, Courbet's enormous canvas brings neighbors and relatives to the grave site of an unknown person.

By thus insisting on the anonymity of the deceased, Courbet refused any intimation of transcendence or promise of the afterlife. The departed survives only in the memory of those left behind, not in a heavenly ascent or gravestone marker. Courbet's funeral rite approximates the Jewish doxological prayer for the dead, the *Kaddish*, in which neither the name of the deceased nor that of relatives is mentioned but instead praise is rendered to God for blessings to the "whole house of Israel" and hope expressed for the speedy establishment of His kingdom on earth. Although we feel a powerful sense of absence of a once-palpable presence, it is experienced through the attraction of the crowd to the yawning grave site. It is the community that endures and who will selectively retain the image of the person mourned, thus insuring a certain version of immortality that will vary from individual to individual. If the deceased's identity remains undisclosed, every one of the mourners was recognizable and identifiable.⁵⁹ Courbet's burial scene is a site of reconciliation and locus of memory—a commemorative event in which the community takes precedence over the individual. This is a scene of *public* as opposed to *private* mourning, a communal grief distributed among all the social strata in town and village. Though nothing of consequence seems to be recorded, Courbet's painting is preeminently political in emphasizing the community in its varied social composition united around a common point of historical memory.

Although attempts have been made to identify the defunct, the fact that neither Courbet nor his friends, relatives, and early biographers ever cared

to do so confirms that the person being buried was always less important to the painter than those who came to bury him.⁶⁰ Courbet depicted a cross-section of the population of his hometown district rather than a memorial; indeed, his stated attitude to the mourning process at this time attests to a surprising indifference to the dead. Apologizing to the Weys in March 1850 for not writing on the occasion of the death of Francis's father, Courbet confesses:

I don't know whether I have told you my philosophy toward the dead. First of all, I don't mourn the dead, convinced as I am that one mourns not for them but for oneself, out of egoism. I would perhaps grieve for them if the life of one man was directly useful to the life of another, but I don't believe that is the case, for I would not appreciate a man whose existence was based on another. I would not grieve for a man for I would use the time I spent grieving to free myself of him, etc.⁶¹

This is a rather bizarre admission and probably overstates the case, but given his reaction to the death of grandfather Oudot less than two years before it may represent his hardened response to the trauma. The callous disregard for the feelings of the Weys may represent Courbet's strategy for camouflaging a sense of guilt, but it agrees with the attitudes of other realists—Meissonier and the German Adolph von Menzel, for examples—whose capacity to record scenes of death and destruction with cool objectivity depended on clinical detachment and affective distancing from their tragic or horrific aspects.

This is an attitude born of the combination of disillusionment and sudden self-knowledge in the failure of the 1848 revolution. In the case of Courbet, the coincidence of the demise of his maternal grandfather—the hero of '93—with the bafflement of republican hopes in '48 could only have intensified his letdown. The withholding of emotion (associated with romanticism) and a more "realistic" appraisal of events was related to fear of further disappointment and humiliation. At the same time, Courbet's declared desire to "free" himself from the influences of others as an alternative to grieving was consistent with his freshly won struggle to unlearn the false ideals inculcated in him since birth. Hence the association of his realist sensibility with the repudiation of conventional bourgeois morality and residual romantic expression. Viewing with detached objectivity the cycle of destruction from 1789 to 1848—the mounting toll of society's laboring victims, and the social and religious rituals that tried to redeem the unequal distribution of justice—Courbet put on display a pageant of a localized community to disclose the mainsprings of the social mechanism.

Like Comte and Marx, Courbet conceived of his work as an expression of the process of historical change. Realism constituted the aesthetic equivalent to positivism in representing the final stage of historical development. In *Funeral* he depicts aspects of the social role of religion, the conquests of

natural science, and the possibilities of human progress. His subject allowed him to carefully assemble a microcosm of society which he could classify and to which he could apply a strict empirical approach. As in the case of *The Stonebreakers*, he could stay within the realm of immediate experience and still contribute to an understanding of the laws governing human affairs. The small-town society comprehensively represented in *Funera* served as a test case for realist documentation of historically progressing society, passing from the stages of the rule of priests and exploitative labor to the highest stage of society, when the mind breaks with all illusions inherited from the past, formulates laws based on careful observation of the empirical world, and reconstructs society in accordance with these laws.

The clergy—the first estate—are there in full array: they include the bald-headed curate Bonnet at the left dressed in a black, silver-embroidered cope, looking for the right page in his prayer book; his two beadles, Jean-Baptiste Muselier and Pierre Clément, wearing the Franche-Comté uniform of flared red cap and scarlet robes edged with black; behind them the church organist, Promayet (father of Alphonse), in white surplice and black cap; two choirboys carrying candle, holy water stoup, and brush and the cross-bearer, also surpliced, named Colart; and behind him the sacristan, Cauchi, in a tall, black, triangular-shaped toque. Next comes the notables, or prominent citizens of the town, who dominate the central section: the portly mayor, Claude-Hélène Prosper Teste de Sagey, and to his right, occupying the pictorial center, Hippolyte Proudhon (no relation to the philosopher), a well-known lawyer of Ornans, and Courbet's equally prominent father, Régis, facing the spectator just to the right of the mourner crying into his handkerchief, and behind them Urbain Cuenot bareheaded, and probably Adolphe Marlet, wearing a top hat. This circle of male figures is completed by the two veteran republicans of '93, Cardet and Sécretan, the latter garbed in festive eighteenth-century dress including knee breeches, silk stockings, tail coat, and bicorne (cocked hat). He extends his hand, palm upward, toward the open grave, as if to comment on the meaning of death (or the futility of life—"See how it all ends!").

Consistent with Catholic custom, the women form a separate group and in their mourning cloaks seem to coalesce into a mass of black, relieved only by the whites of handkerchiefs and some lace bonnets. Like the cliff face of Roche du Mont rising above them, they provide a bulwark of support for the community, as well as expressing the collective grief of their households. Above the mayor, the heads of two of the tearful women—Joséphine Bocquin's ample black hood swells to a crescendo—crown all the rest, bringing up the extreme rear of the cortege and projecting directly into the rock face of the Roche du Mont. Farther to the right, we come upon "Mère Gagey," the craggy-faced woman in white bonnet fifth from the far right and looking away from the central group. She was the spouse of Claude François Gagey, Courbet's old stonebreaker, and her head is located close to the rocky mass in the background. Courbet's sisters are the

three figures in black hoods in the foreground just right of Sécretan: Juliette covers her mouth with her handkerchief, Zoé's face is buried in her handkerchief, and Zélie bows her head pensively. Their mother, née Sylvie Oudot, also wearing a black cloak, is at the extreme right, holding the hand of a young daughter of the mayor's family and thus sharing the load of the communal grief beyond her familial duties.

Courbet's spread of the social strata of the town is complicated in this ritual, since many of the rustic participants are *endimanchés*, dressed in their Sunday-best or mourning clothes, blurring the differences in rank and station. In addition, even artisan and peasant members of the tiny population literally wore more than one hat in having to serve double functions in times of emergency and on special occasions, or, as in the case of the rural stonebreakers, to supplement their meager incomes. For examples, the beadles, Muselier and Clément, were by occupation vine-grower and shoemaker respectively, and the cross-bearer, Colart, was also a vintner. The most remarkable of the participants, the gravedigger kneeling on one knee beside the gaping cavity, Antoine Joseph Cassard, was another vine-grower who supplemented his income by digging graves.

The brawny peasant gravedigger cuts a curious figure at the side of his excavation; isolated from the rest by his kneeling position and disengagement from the mourning process, head erect and alert, hand authoritatively flexed on his upraised thigh, he eyes with impatience the clumsy pallbearers who bulldoze their way through the crowd and get a severe look from a jostled choirboy. Although he alone kneels—the quintessential symbol of inferiority in nineteenth-century genre painting—his commanding torso and robust physique surmount the conventional designation and invest him with a singular dignity and authority that surpasses even that of the clergy and civic officials.

In the process of excavating the grave, Cassard has disinterred the skull and bones of an ancient inhabitant of the region—perhaps suggestive of the life-and-death cycle of the communal theme. Buchon, in a revision of the text of his Besançon ad for the exhibition at Dijon, was singularly drawn to the gravedigger, who reminded him of “the old dances of death,” of the skeletal figure of Death personified, who “forced kings, popes, emperors—all the great men of the world and all the oppressors of the poor—to pirouette to his tune, whether they liked it or not.”⁶² Buchon probably had in mind Sand's prologue to *La Mare au diable*, which incorporated Holbein's woodcut series into her realist-rural discourse, but instead of deploying the *danse macabre* to point up the hardships of rural life, he affirms the image as an instrument of radical thought.

Calling the gravedigger “the gatekeeper to the hereafter,” Buchon next makes an unexpected connection between him and the old stonebreaker, coyly concluding: “In the mind of the painter he might well be nothing but the psychological antithesis, the counterbalance [to the stonebreaker]—I would say almost the avenger.” This is a significant statement from

three figures in black hoods in the foreground just right of Sécrotan: Juliette covers her mouth with her handkerchief, Zoé's face is buried in her handkerchief, and Zélie bows her head pensively. Their mother, née Sylvie Oudot, also wearing a black cloak, is at the extreme right, holding the hand of a young daughter of the mayor's family and thus sharing the load of the communal grief beyond her familial duties.

Courbet's spread of the social strata of the town is complicated in this ritual, since many of the rustic participants are *endimanchés*, dressed in their Sunday-best or mourning clothes, blurring the differences in rank and station. In addition, even artisan and peasant members of the tiny population literally wore more than one hat in having to serve double functions in times of emergency and on special occasions, or, as in the case of the rural stonebreakers, to supplement their meager incomes. For examples, the beadles, Muselier and Clément, were by occupation vine-grower and shoemaker respectively, and the cross-bearer, Colart, was also a vintner. The most remarkable of the participants, the gravedigger kneeling on one knee beside the gaping cavity, Antoine Joseph Cassard, was another vine-grower who supplemented his income by digging graves.

The brawny peasant gravedigger cuts a curious figure at the side of his excavation; isolated from the rest by his kneeling position and disengagement from the mourning process, head erect and alert, hand authoritatively flexed on his upraised thigh, he eyes with impatience the clumsy pallbearers who bulldoze their way through the crowd and get a severe look from a jostled choirboy. Although he alone kneels—the quintessential symbol of inferiority in nineteenth-century genre painting—his commanding torso and robust physique surmount the conventional designation and invest him with a singular dignity and authority that surpasses even that of the clergy and civic officials.

In the process of excavating the grave, Cassard has disinterred the skull and bones of an ancient inhabitant of the region—perhaps suggestive of the life-and-death cycle of the communal theme. Buchon, in a revision of the text of his Besançon ad for the exhibition at Dijon, was singularly drawn to the gravedigger, who reminded him of “the old dances of death,” of the skeletal figure of Death personified, who “forced kings, popes, emperors—all the great men of the world and all the oppressors of the poor—to pirouette to his tune, whether they liked it or not.”⁶² Buchon probably had in mind Sand's prologue to *La Mare au diable*, which incorporated Holbein's woodcut series into her realist-rural discourse, but instead of deploying the *danse macabre* to point up the hardships of rural life, he affirms the image as an instrument of radical thought.

Calling the gravedigger “the gatekeeper to the hereafter,” Buchon next makes an unexpected connection between him and the old stonebreaker, coyly concluding: “In the mind of the painter he might well be nothing but the psychological antithesis, the counterbalance [to the stonebreaker]—I would say almost the avenger.” This is a significant statement from