

T.J. CLARK, THE PAINTING OF MODERN LIFE

2 The Courbet Legend

I have as my guarantee the hatred I bear towards men and towards our society, which will last as long as I live.

Courbet to Bruyas, 1854.¹

Baudelaire once planned an essay on Courbet, after their friendship was over. He took as his motto a clumsy phrase from one of the painter's letters to Champfleury, 'Puisque Réalisme Il Y A'; and he began with a page of spleen against Champfleury and his third-rate enthusiasms. Then he jotted down two headings: perhaps they indicate what he would have written, once the anger had subsided -

(Analysis of Nature, of the talent of Courbet, of morality).

*'Courbet saving the world.'*² (1855)

These are cryptic notes, and as so often with Baudelaire, they suggest an effort to hold together in a single thread of narrative very different kinds of knowledge. To do so would be half a challenge to the subject in hand, half a homage to it. To analyse Courbet's talent would mean explaining Nature and his horrors, and mocking the Realist's worship of sanctified vegetables. But it would also mean discussing, with a certain baffled admiration, the eccentric morality of Courbet's art; it would mean taking seriously, for once, the enormous, beery cynicism of his greatest paintings. (One critic in 1853 called the great naked bourgeois who steps from the water in *The Bathers* 'this heap of matter, powerfully rendered, cynically turning its back on the beholder'. That could stand as a motto for Courbet's art as a whole between 1849 and 1856.) And it would mean, above all, putting the talent alongside the pretensions, giving weight to Courbet's immense, rambling philosophy and his desire to save the world. I want to make a living art, I want to be a man: so Courbet thundered in his 1855 manifesto. The last of Baudelaire's headings sums that up. It adapts the proud title that Courbet had invented that same year for his

CLARK
BOBBERT
BAUDELAIRE
2 PORNICKY

posmiwani se
&
mowidew
&
cynicnost
umimawa
splicimosh

portrait of Jean Journet, the Fourierist prophet, ^{proletarian} 'setting out for the conquest of Universal Harmony'. Where Journet went, so the heading implies, Courbet followed: whether to universal harmony, which Journet never reached, or the padded ^{imprisoned} cells of Salpêtrière, which he knew quite well.

What I want to do in this book is follow in Baudelaire's footsteps, or at least set myself the same sort of task. Since there is Realism, and since Courbet's version is a problem still - no less mysterious for being so blatant - I want to keep quite different kinds of explanation in contact. I want to distinguish the art from the life-style, but give each their separate weight. I want to suggest the purpose of Courbet's poses; to find what the egotism and the crazy ambition were for; to see why Courbet cultivated the confusion between his art and his life.

This is not to accept the poses at their face value, nor abandon Baudelaire's irony in the face of Courbet's bluster. It is not, above all, to apologize for Courbet; but at least to rescue him from one particular, patronizing myth. The myth in question goes like this: Courbet, a ^{vain} vain-man, a ^{simpleton} simpleton, a ^{peasant} peasant who could not spell, 'rien qu'un peintre', was led into Realism and politics by various friends, more or less unscrupulous; had them draft his theories; grew fat on their praise; ended by believing that his art was political; and paid for it in the fiasco of the Commune. The myth has many sources, but the main one is Champfleury. 'I am delighted that Courbet is working' - this is one of a score of such passages in his letters in the 1860s -

The way of life in the countryside will be better for him, and healthier, than the brasseries of Paris. The country should make him forget, I hope, his role of saviour of the world through painting. He is a painter, a robust, excellent painter. So let him remain what nature made him, simply a painter.³

Those instructions have been echoed often enough since; they are the staple diet, still, of books about Courbet. If only Courbet had stuck to his easel; if only he had not left us those blundering manifestoes, those vulgar pronouncements on politics; if only he had not listened to Proudhon (or Dupont, or Buchon, or whoever the writer's ideological villain may be): this is the myth in its modern form. And yet Champfleury's letters, the authentic source of the myth, are transparently dishonest: an inimitable mixture of personal pique and aesthetic despair; a giving up of the critical ghost. Take for example a comment like this:

Understand that it is not exactly the subjects Courbet chooses which shock me. If only they were sufficient covering, I wouldn't mind if he showed a bather, some priests, or Proudhon's family.⁴

It is sad, I think, that phrase 'sufficient covering'. Sad from a man who had made a real effort at criticism between 1848 and 1855. It seems almost as if the myth itself were to blame: the myth of Courbet produces the critical bathos in the face of his work. And the question becomes why the myth survived at all, if these were its origins. But to answer that would lead us to France in the 1870s, after the

MYTHOS:
pysny klumpy
sedle
mydel
ne politikain
u chraspen
svaler dila

spatris
hodromy
vabohy
= kshlony
antire?

trichochs / such m...
vtrid ml

Commune, and the world of art in the twentieth century, which is much too far from 1848.

I shall offer instead one example of Courbet as his enemies saw him. This is Alexander Dumas the younger, writing his 'Lettre sur les choses du jour' on 6 June 1871:

From what fabulous crossing of a slug with a peacock, from what genital antitheses, from what sebaceous oozing can have been generated, for instance, this thing called M. Gustave Courbet? Under what gardener's cloche, with the help of what manure, as a result of what mixture of wine, beer, corrosive mucus and flatulent oedema can have grown this sonorous and hairy pumpkin, this aesthetic belly, this imbecilic and impotent incarnation of the Self? Wouldn't one say he was a force of God, if God - Whom this non-being has wanted to destroy - were capable of playing pranks, and could have mixed Himself up with this?

This is much better writing than most on the same subject.

Instead of the myth, let us go back to Courbet before he was famous, on the eve of the 1848 revolution. Evidence is scarce from this time, but what we have suggests a Courbet without a persona. (It is as if the life-style is chosen - almost constructed - in the next few years, at the same time that Courbet discovers his style as a painter.) When Baudelaire drew Courbet on a sheet of caricatures, perhaps as early as 1847, he already sported his Assyrian profile, and was already perhaps the poseur. But when Francis Wey saw him for the first time in his studio in 1848, he was still 'a tall young man, with superb eyes, but very thin, sallow, bony, gawky (so he was then), and he nodded to me without uttering a word'. He was already 'bizarre', already 'in revolt at one time or another against most theories, and imbued with a deliberate ignorance, which aimed at making an effect'.⁵ But there is an air of sobriety, even sombreness, about Wey's account of Courbet at twenty-nine; and that is also the tone of the most reliable witness we have - he is the only one who writes free from hindsight - Prosper Haussard in his Salon of 1849:

M. G. Courbet, who has come to Paris from a village in the provinces, promised himself that he would be a painter and be his own master. He has kept his word. After ten years of studying, of painful effort and hesitation, after ten years of hardship, poverty and obscurity, at the very moment when he had run out of money and was ready to give up, here he is - a painter, and very nearly a master already. . . . These hard beginnings, this solitary apprenticeship, and the long trials endured by M. Courbet, are all visible in his paintings, which are marked by a certain sombre and concentrated force, by a sadness of expression and a certain savagery in their style. His landscapes . . . are no more than sketches; yet they have this same grave and penetrating character.⁶

This suggests someone quite different from the Courbet who struts towards The Meeting (painted in 1854), or even the Courbet of 1851 who stated that he was 'not only a Socialist, but a democrat and a Republican as well: in a word, a supporter of the whole Revolution, and, above all, a Realist, that is to say a sincere lover of genuine truth'.⁷ It is a long way from Haussard's painter of 1849, whose works mirror his 'grave and penetrating character', to the Courbet of the 1860s, the

A. Dumas
critique
Courbet
"pigeon"
in 70. Lettres
(digne, phrasé...)

40 1848
P. Haussard
le Courbet
admirer

attem

1849
Courbet
painted
in 1854
1851

60.16.10:

Jules Vallès
Courbet
de révélation
ego ista

Courbet whom Zola described in his notes for *L'Oeuvre*: 'the monster puffed up with his own personality, unselfcritical, who has become God: Courbet, Hugo'.⁸ (Not that this was Zola's last word on either of them.)

Once it was chosen, Courbet's *persona* was often described in print. The finest account is by Jules Vallès, Courbet's friend, novelist and *Communist*; he transcribes the artist's version of the French language in a way which has to be left

intact:

COURBET. Eh lon lon laire, lon la! Quai? quouâ? l'Hi-dâ-ial? Mon maire étai un honge! - La Crrouâ, mon nhâmmi? Mais, si je voullâi, je pourrai me foutrrre un calvaire au cul . . . - En quârrant-huit i gn'îavai qu'deux hômmes de prraîts: moâ et Peurrouddhon. Vous aîtes don un impôteur qu'vous dites que Jâisus-Christ i vivaî o daipens dais fâmmes ai qu'vous voulaî pas dire qu'c'étai un mâquero? Commen qu'vous avai dit ça? . . . l'Hi-dâ-ial?

And circumflexes, and modulations, with bursts of laughter exploding in his beard, which he would then wipe with the back of his hand. His belly danced, he pranced up and down, laughed till he cried, wiped away a tear from the corner of his cow-like eye with his fat fist. . .

The most beautiful animal I have seen, this blessed fellow! Works like an ox, but as gay as a bear-cub; a beast of the fields and a beast of the fair. . . So naively vain, so grotesquely eloquent, disorderly and patient, hard-working and thirsty, with the paunch of Silenus, the pride of Jupiter, the beauty of Sesostris: on top of all this as careful of his purse as Sancho, wishing for windmills on his island, and talking of the 'million' to be won!⁹ (1832)

60.16.10:

Courbet
galer
medved
maire
sme
a
pe

Comptoir
"hupos"

Courbet
"publique date"
de la
pub
alcoholic
f

A hundred other caricatures and anecdotes tell the same story - the same deliberate rustic patois, the enormous stomach, the beer, the vanity, the laugh. The official police report of 1873 put it succinctly: 'the air of a jeering peasant'. A police spy sat next to him in the brasserie one day in 1872 and reported his truculent style of politics (a sad disguise for his own recantation in the previous year): 'It seems he reproached Martin Bernard with abandoning the Commune, and told him that he and Louis Blanc would be the first victims of a new commune.'¹⁰

But this, of course, is Courbet in full decline, dying of alcoholism and political shell-shock, the prisoner of his public face. In the period which concerns us, the *persona* was still under construction; the poses were being chosen, but the reasons for the choices were clearer. In the early 1850s, Courbet was well aware that 'to live the life of a savage', as he decided in the letter to Francis Wey which I used to begin this book, was a dangerous and costly project - a necessity, but a bitter one. For Courbet the alcoholic, Courbet the father of an abandoned bastard, the idea that his public personality was no more than a mask was not just rhetoric. He wrote to his patron Alfred Bruyas in November 1854: 'Behind this laughing mask of mine which you know, I conceal grief and bitterness, and a sadness which clings to my heart like a vampire. In the society in which we live, it doesn't take much

effort to reach the void.'¹¹ This is a rare moment in Courbet's letters, an important one. Its language is the commonplace of Romantic confession, borrowed and ill-digested, like Courbet's pictorial Romanticism of the 1840s. But its very clumsiness is revealing: the way



Auguste Blanqui
une d'après nature lorsqu'il était
chez moi en mai 1840 David d'Angers

I PIERRE JEAN DAVID D'ANGERS Portrait of Blanqui 1840



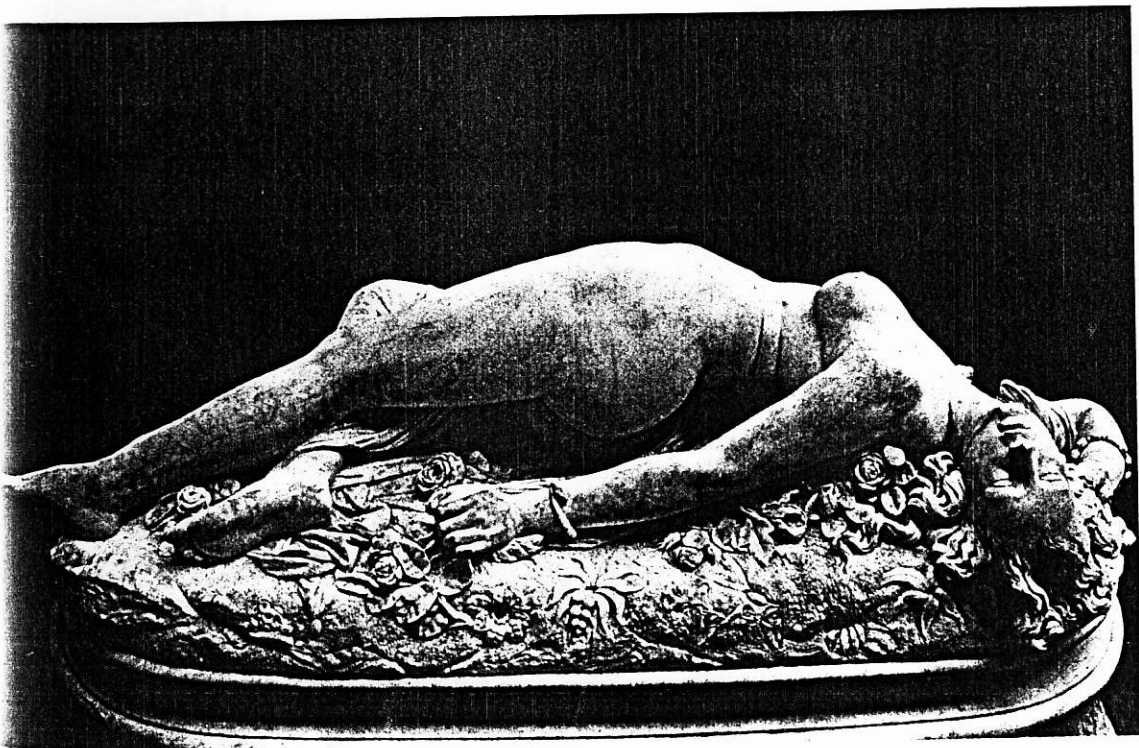


2 EDOUARD MANET
View of the Paris World's Fair 1867

3 AUGUSTE RENOIR
Portrait of Alfred Sisley and his Wife 1868

4 ERNEST MEISSONIER
Portrait of Madame Sabatier 1853

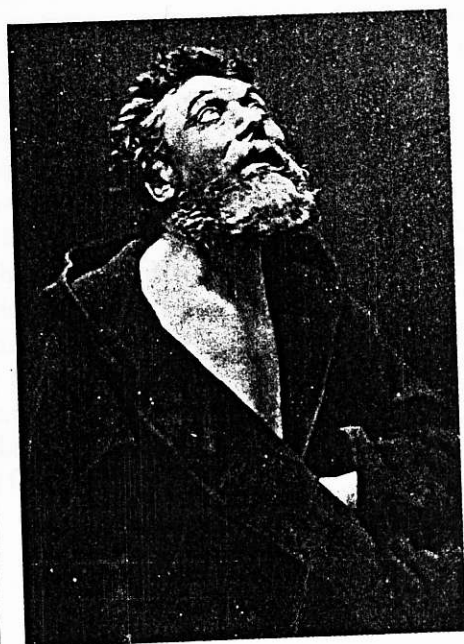
5 AUGUSTE CLÉSINGER
Woman Bitten by a Snake 1847



6 GUSTAVE COURBET
The Apostle Jean Journet 1850



L'APÔTRE JEAN JOURNET
Travail pour la conquête de l'harmonie universelle.



7 NADAR
Jean Journet 1857

the pale, sombre young man of 1848 suddenly reappears, only to be stoically repressed in the next sentence or two. Courbet himself is not at home in this vein; and the next sentence is a return to his public voice: he had met a Spanish woman in Lyons, and 'She prescribed a remedy which cured me completely'.

We do not know much of Courbet's sexuality, beyond the comic promiscuity depicted in a letter to Buchon and in another to Alfred Bruyas. In 1847 his mistress Virginia Binet bore him a son; and some time in the early 1850s she left him, taking her son with her. All that survives of that crisis is a letter to Champfleury, didactic, pathetic: 'I shall miss my boy very much, but art gives me enough to do without burdching myself with a household; moreover, to my mind a married man is a reactionary.'¹² This was anathema to Champfleury, a solid family man; much later he recalled Chenavard and Courbet poking fun at Proudhon in 1852 for his new-found bourgeois domesticity (he had married three years earlier, a few days after taking his *Confessions d'un révolutionnaire* to the press).¹³ That was one of the few occasions when Proudhon came in for Champfleury's sympathy.

So this is the 'life of a savage' which Courbet chose in 1850: a disguise which was necessary (the letter to Wey is certain of that), but bought at some considerable cost. The question must be: what was the advantage in the elaborate disguise, what did it enable Courbet to do? I think the answer is this: the mask let Courbet remain inside Paris - at the very centre of the world of art, in a way quite different from Millet or Daumier - without becoming part of it. He acted the part of invader, outsider, vulgarian, in order to stay in the middle of things, but keep his own distance from them. My point is more or less the opposite of Champfleury's in the letter I cited: I think the evidence shows that Courbet needed the brasseries of Paris in order to sustain his painting of rural life; he played the rustic - believing in the role, of course - in order not to be a bourgeois, but to have access to everything that only a bourgeois knew.

Courbet wanted knowledge: there is no doubt of that. He pretended total ignorance of things, but he thrived on other people's sophistication. For a painter who, according to the myth, was nothing but an eye and a technique, Courbet surrounded himself with an unlikely collection of friends. Who frequented the Brasserie Andler and the Cénacle de Bas-Meudon? Who but the intellectuals and philosophers of artistic Paris: Chenavard, the very type of artist-philosopher, acquainted with Hegel himself; Marc Trapadoux, mystic and Bohemian, 'brahmin' as Courbet called him in 1849, biographer of St John of the Cross; Francis Wey, friend of Rémusat and the official Republicans of the *National*, king of the roman-feuilleton, author of a weird and provocative *Almanach démocratique* in 1848; Jean Wallon, the philosopher of Murger's *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, translator of Hegel's *Logic*, author of *De la nature hyperphysique de l'homme*; Champfleury, complex opportunist, in 1847 still planning a history of Egyptian art and at the same time writing pantomimes for the Funambules; Baudelaire; Planche, critic, academic, eccentric, friend of Balzac, enemy of Realism; Pierre Dupont and Gustave Mathieu, the worker-poets of 1848; the young Jules Vallès, just escaped from school; Proudhon, from time to time.

Courbet
reign
Femmes
"burfozem"
domestic
induct
rodium

Courbet
burat vol
disidit
sed ditor
uprobied
Pensée
de l'œil
rd MASTAKA
à l'œil
k. n. n. n. n. n.

l'ide
l'olom
Courbet
l'etern
Seym
prens
"sphis hlenet"
Tolstoy

-naivni
-prostostde

In some strange way, Courbet was ^{benign} the force that held the Brasserie Andler together (Herr Andler admitted it, rather ruefully: Courbet was good for business). He thrived on its mixture of the gross and the intellectual; the others sat and laughed at his hour-long tirades against the Ideal and in favour of Alsatian beer: they laughed but they listened, night after night. Courbet was, in fact as in legend, a naif, almost an illiterate, with wild spelling and disintegrating syntax spilling over page after page. Yet he was also, in his own cantankerous way, a theorist, a doctrinaire. Proudhon himself groaned under the onslaught of the twelve-page letters, beer-stained and crumpled, which greeted his drafts of *Du principe de l'art*.

Baudelaire
kritikou
Courbet - bechle

Courbet - bechle
naivni
naivni (chumplo)
naivni fraze

Courbet -
dikleku
"videm"

What Baudelaire feared and despised in Courbet was not his naivety but his theoretical determination, his manic resolve to push the theory of Realism to its logical conclusions: he had taken up Champfleury's half-laughing, casual catch-phrase and taken it seriously, ruthlessly even; he was the theorist of Champfleury's opportunistic practice. 'As for Courbet, he has become the clumsy Machiavelli to this Borgia. . . . Courbet has made a theory out of an innocent farce, with a strictness of conviction which is positively dangerous.'¹⁴ And what was fearsome about that was the way in which theory, in Courbet's hands, became an instrument of personal domination (at least over such a fragile psyche as Baudelaire's). As Baudelaire put it later in *Pauvre Belgique*, 'the philosophy of our friend Courbet, poisoner with a vested interest. (Paint only what you see! I.e. you will paint only what I see.)'¹⁵

Courbetna
dikleku
naivni
naivni
naivni
naivni

Courbet the theorist is an unfamiliar animal, but not simply a figment of Baudelaire's imagination. There is other evidence. In spite of the spelling and the syntax, there is plenty of intellectual force in Courbet's letters between 1848 and 1855. When late in 1849 he wrote Francis Wey a description of his own *Stone-breakers*, Wey took it over, word for word, as the centrepiece of a chapter in his own novel *Biez de Serine*. This was a calculated tribute (which the critics misunderstood, thinking Courbet had based his picture on Wey's story), but appropriate. The letter itself solved problems:

There is an old man of seventy, bent over his work, pick in air, skin burnt by the sun, his head in the shade of a straw hat; his trousers of rough cloth are patched all over; he wears inside cracked wooden clogs, stockings which were once blue, with the heels showing through. Here's a young man with his head covered in dust, his skin greyish-brown; his disgusting shirt, all in rags, exposes his arms and his flanks; leather braces hold up what is left of a pair of trousers, and his muddy leather shoes are gaping sadly in many places. The old man is on his knees, the young man is behind him, standing up, carrying a basket of stones with great energy. Alas, in this occupation you begin like the one and end like the other! Their tools are scattered here and there: a back-basket, a hand barrow, a ditching-tool, a cooking-pot, etc. All this is set in the bright sun, in the open country, by a ditch at the side of the road; the landscape fills the whole canvas.¹⁶ (1849)

Courbet's rapid, accurate phrases; his visual accuracy at the expense of verbal

awkwardness; his casual interjection of a moral ('Alas, in this occupation, you begin like the one and end like the other!') which hardly interrupts the flow of description, which refuses to be a verbal climax: all this is language that Wey, or Champfleury, or Buchon, still struggling in 1849 to adapt older styles of rhetoric to new purposes, could justly envy. (It will be argued of course that Courbet simply did not see the problem. What, after all, had he to do with the writers his friends admired and imitated, people like Hoffmann, or Chateaubriand, or George Sand? But this does not explain away his management of description in this passage; or his effect on writers who knew Hoffmann and George Sand too well.)

Baudelaire's phrase 'clumsy Machiavelli' is a good description, an essential one. Even the 1855 Manifesto has the appearance of personal thought, not dictation from Champfleury or Bruyas. It is a struggle to appropriate a multitude (too many) of other people's ideas, but also to define their use for his own project, to turn a sequence of complex ideas into a creed. The result is confusion, but it is Courbet's confusion, no one else's.

We have come a long way from the Courbet of caricature, the naïf, the rustic, arranging his Assyrian profile for the camera of Nadar or Carjat. Let's go no further, for the camera does not lie. The naïvety is the essence of the man: all we have to do is learn to take that naïvety seriously. Seriously enough to see its purpose, the advantage for Courbet in his laughing mask, his *vie de sauvage*.

The advantage, in one word, was distance - detachment from the stifling, chaotic agreement which prevailed among the members of the Parisian avant-garde; openness to ideas and experience which were profoundly alien to that world and its coteries. To be in Paris but not of it: that was what Courbet wanted. To use the ideas and inventions of the avant-garde for his own ends: that was the ambition, spelt out in the letters to Francis Wey. One could not do this simply by changing places, though Courbet in his thirties was an adept at that - moving from Brussels to Montpellier, Munich to Berne, Salins to the Indre, with a mixture of unease and exhilaration. In the end one came back to Paris, to the Salon, to the brasserie, to one's own reputation. How to survive in that world? And not merely to survive, how to dominate, instruct, antagonize? One needed camouflage, and that Courbet had in plenty - obstinate patois, provincial manners, the pose of a peasant - but to dominate one needed more than that. This was where the naïvety did its work: it was, for Courbet, a strategy of exposure to Paris, a kind of power over the city's confusion.

Buchon saw this clearly when he talked, in a famous passage, of the advantages of Courbet's spontaneity:

Courbet's greatest advantage, in the midst of the chaos surrounding him, is undoubtedly his rich spontaneity. . . . I have mentioned Courbet's spontaneity. Let me now mention the sureness of his glance, the subtlety of his moral sense, the ease with which he follows and often dominates the movement of current sane ideas [saines idées ambiantes], helped only by

Courbetov
 myjednomim
 [Lem. si klesby
 redom]
 ved. bounelr
 pr jeler sekte
 "pretele"
 "stamj shyl
 rebridny"
 lukny
 Admoral
 a dleky
 osvit.

Manifesto 55
 byl program
 a usvedenim
 pane Courbete
 na "svetle".

gungl
 Courbetov
 Anstetny
 "proustetke"

Cous. dleky
 myst idje
 a moshke
 Paris. anstetny
 pro vte hny
 osvite' dinstny.

rdist se
 +
 mubid
 dleky. Parisi
 sunj odpor
 sbe proude-
 hny
 sedleky.

Baudelaire's *Le Peintre*

Courbetom
Rustic
SPONTANEITY
Simplicity
Opéra!
a dot red
sur chéri!

his great intuitive power. Courbet has never had anything in the way of instruments of education and study except his magnificent vision, and that has been quite enough.¹⁷

The point here is not the general praise of Courbet's simplicity, but the fact that Buchon saw what it was for. It did not cut Courbet off from social and moral awareness; on the contrary, it was the source of his political assurance, his open responsiveness to the *saines idées ambiantes* of his time. (And the *ambiance* was not just Paris: Courbet's politics in 1850 had a different frame of reference, and that is why they proved so explosive in Paris itself.) There are moments when naivety does not close horizons, but opens new ones: does not shut a painter within the confines of his craft, but breaks those limits completely.

couple
→
prophetic & lecture
Sedite & didactic
extremist

The Courbet I propose is both rustic and theoretician – a peasant in order to be doctrinaire, doctrinaire in order to stay a peasant. He is the *naïf* surrounded by intellectuals, the jeering peasant with the enormous paunch, in the brasserie with Chenavard, or Proudhon, or Villiers de l'Isle Adam. He is above all an extremist, an *excentrique*, a *réfractaire*. Which leads us back to Baudelaire's phrase: 'Courbet saving the world'.

Courbet
&
Jean Journet

If there was one man who served as a model for Courbet it was Jean Journet, the half-mad, fearless, ridiculous prophet of Fourierism, whom Champfleury had described in an 1847 *feuilleton*,¹⁸ and Courbet had painted 'setting out for the conquest of Universal Harmony' in 1850 [6]. Courbet became Jean Journet, as Baudelaire ironically implied: adopted his manic style, decided (in the 1850 letter to Wey) that he too would embark on 'the great vagabond and independent life of the Bohemian'. He became Journet, even in pictorial terms: he had based the 1850 portrait of Journet on a popular image from Le Mans of the Wandering Jew; and he used the same image as the source of his own definitive self-portrait in 1854, *The Meeting*.

Courbet
Same scene
Journet
Jean Journet

To read Champfleury's essay on Journet is – in spite of the patronizing, trivial tone – to discover the prototype of Courbet's life-style. Journet was desperate, prodigious, unstoppable: raining pamphlets from the balcony of the theatre before the police closed in; breaking up a literary *soirée* at Lamartine's; persuading Dumas to give him an annual income; pouring scorn on Fourierist 'revisionists' like Considérant – 'omnivorous omniarch', he called him, Journet's language kept pace with his personal style. Two examples: prophesying doom, very accurately, on 20 February 1848: 'The frenzy is mounting from hour to hour, the abyss is gaping for its prey, the cataclysm is upon us. It is upon us, and none of us but knows it!'¹⁹

Or, more brilliantly, chiding Lamartine for his reception at the *soirée*:

Poet, you have eyes so that you may not hear. You are deaf to the cries of children and the groans of the aged. You are blind to woman's tears and man's despair. Poet, down with hypocrisy, enough of this feigned religiosity. The farce is played out: faint star, hide thy light! The sun of understanding is flooding the horizon. The Last Judgment will precede the social resurrection. Everything is stirring, seething, preparing; O future, future! 'May God enlighten you!'²⁰

Shades of Baader in the Reichstag, or Douanier Rousseau at his banquet. Talking of Journet, taking him seriously for a moment as a model for Courbet's life-style, leads us to the most important problem: what was Bohemia, and to what extent was Courbet a member of it? First of all, what Bohemia was *not*. It was not the sly, ^{supreme} skilful dream-world which Champfleury had pioneered in his *Confessions de Sylvius* of 1845, and to which Henry Murger gave definitive form. About this *Sainte Bohème*, as Théodore de Banville called it, the best remarks were made by Albert Cassagne:

The *metteurs en scène* of Bohemia knew how to fashion it ^{adroitement} adroitly to make it agreeable to [the bourgeois public]. They knew how to use real resemblances between the Bohemian life and the life of the bourgeois student in the Latin quarter, in order to establish a useful confusion, a confusion which is already manifest in [Murger's] *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*. To sing of Bohemia was thus, to a degree, to sing of bourgeois youth.²¹

The reality of Bohemian life in the 1840s and 1850s was quite different. In the early days, for a few years after the 1830 revolution, Bohemia had been a comfortable part of the *avant-garde*, supported by doting fathers and therefore carefree, fashionable, unscrupulous (Gautier, Houssaye, Nerval, Roger de Beauvoir had been its leading lights). But that group had broken up and gone its separate ways, into various kinds of accommodation with the market and the official world of art. Bohemia, after that, was an unassimilated class, wretchedly poor, obdurately anti-bourgeois, living on in the absolute, outdated style of the 'Romantics', courting death by ^{starvation} starvation. Nerval lived through that change in the definition of Bohemia, and died in madness and hunger; Journet was committed to the Salpêtrière more than once.

It was this Bohemia, this confused, indigent, shifting population, with its Romantic postures, that Jules Vallès tried to rescue from Murger and myth in his book *Les Réfractaires*, published in 1865. He tried to show the real Bohemia: a world of grinding poverty, of absolute refusal of bourgeois society, rather than the sowing of flippant wild oats. It was not an irrelevant book for Vallès the Socialist and revolutionary to write; for Bohemia in mid nineteenth-century Paris was a real social class, a real locus of dissent. And if we want to locate it within the complex social structure of Paris, we should put it alongside not the students of the Latin quarter but the *classes dangereuses*. It was this dangerous element - this mob of unemployed, criminals and *déclassés* of every sort, the first victims, the first debris of industrialism - which made up one part of the rebel fighting force in June 1848. The great social historian of the June Days, Rémi Gosses, closes his description of the class origins of the insurgents by saying that the last category of the rebels comprised 'social outcasts of all kinds: tramps, street-porters, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, errand-boys, and all those who lived by the thousand little occupations of the streets of Paris, and also that confused, drifting mass known as *la Bohème*'.²²

These are words which throw Bohemia and Bohemianism into new relief. They rescue them from Mimi and Sylvius, and reinstate them as part of working-class

Bohème - J
Murger
Bohème

8
père
très:

Banville:

Art. styl
Bohème
- Div. styl
Kunststil
Shade
à l'usage
Chari

Bohème:

30 let - Bohème
Gothic - mmo
Folien - spole
Lithographie
Bohème

Bohème

Bohème
Vol. 19. stol -
↓
Bohème
les classes
dangereuses
[Espérance
à l'usage]

B. volume
 (Daumier,
 Courbet,
 Baudelaire)
 romanika
 opusita
 ROMANTISMUS
 and style
 |
 "Kopie" (the m)
 First
 individual
 mistake
 is. stat.

Paris. This was the Bohemia to which Vallès gave credence and definition. This was Daumier's Bohemia: the ragpickers and organ-grinders of Gossez's list come straight from his canvases. This was Courbet's Bohemia, this was Journet's, this was Baudelaire's ('Perhaps the future belongs to the *déclassés*? . . .': letter to Ancelle, 5 March 1852).²³ It was a life-style and a social situation. It meant a dogged refusal to abandon the aims of Romanticism, a manic and self-destructive individualism, a 'cult of multiple sensation': 'Wine and Hashish compared as means for multiplying individuality,' as Baudelaire put it in 1851. It meant a place between the *classes dangereuses* of proletarian Paris and the intelligentsia; between two classes which were themselves strange, intricate misfits in any class system, and remained unsure of whose side they were on. So that in June the intelligentsia stayed loyal - ferociously loyal - to the Government, and many of Baudelaire's friends fought with the Latin Quarter detachment: and the *classes dangereuses* closed ranks with the Garde Mobile, and slaughtered rebels with the best of them. Courbet hesitated and abstained on utopian grounds. Baudelaire fought for the rebels, with Bohemia. One wonders what Journet did and said in June.

The effectiveness of the Bohemian style was this: in a city which still half-believed in the first dreams and ideals of capitalism, in the fairy world of arcades, exhibitions, the bazaar, the entrepreneur and the vote for everyone, the Bohemian caricatured the claims of bourgeois society. He took the slogans at face-value; if the city was a playground he would play; if individual freedom was sacrosanct then he would celebrate the cult twenty-four hours a day; *laissez-faire* meant what it said. The Bohemian was the dandy stood on his head: where the dandy was the bourgeois playing at being an aristocrat (hence his pathos), the Bohemian was the bourgeois playing at being a bourgeois - the heroic, absurd, mythical bourgeois of 1789. (One could say that the Bohemian style only works in a capitalism with a myth of itself, a belief in its future. Hence the failure of its British variants; hence its reappearance in California.)

Courbet's game was even more infuriating, in its way. He shifted identities from picture to picture, year to year. Was he peasant or Bohemian? Was there a reason for being both? In 1851, when the great Bohemian self-portrait *Man with Pipe* accompanied the Journet portrait and the *Burial at Ornans* to the Salon, which picture was Courbet? (However naive it may seem to us, it was the kind of question which critics asked in 1850.) The critics could accept the self-portrait easily enough: what hurt, what puzzled them, was its relation to the other pictures, to the other allegiances they suggested.

No doubt some will say that these allegiances and ambiguities never occurred to Courbet. The central tenet of the Courbet legend is, after all, that to be naive and untutored means to have extremely simple ambitions, a very narrow field of vision - to be interested in the technique of painting not just primarily (which goes without saying: any artist is involved first with his material and its problems) but exclusively. This is simply a non sequitur, a theory of naivety which has to be supported by proofs, like any other. I think the proofs are lacking. What evidence we have points to Courbet's naivety as a source of complexity, not of simplicity.

Of course the various implications ^{especially} of his life-style and his paintings that I have described so far did not all occur to Courbet, in the sense that he gave them verbal expression. But that is the privilege of painters. Who was more silent than Daumier; who was more verbose than Chenavard? There are silences which demand explanation, just as there are statements ^{which} ask to be ignored.

^{whereas} 'I have simply wished to base upon a thorough knowledge of tradition the reasoned and independent feeling of my own individuality,' Courbet said in 1855.²⁴ That was not such a simple wish as it sounds.

Courbet's
myself
de m'habiller
à l'école
à l'école
au milieu

- Courbet's night's a year painting
- Courbet's poetic inflection VERSUS - first a silence
- 'de l'école Courbet' (Bakelme)
- Courbet's "role" (Museum, Museum)
- Courbet's blanket arabic

Proudhon's language with Courbet's in his 1861 statements.

2. *The Courbet Legend* (pp. 21-35)

1. Cited Borel (1), pp. 71-2.
2. B.O.C., p. 637. The notes were probably written late in 1855.
3. 29 Oct. 1864, cited Troubat (2), p. 177.
4. 'Remarquez que ce ne sont pas précisément les sujets choisis par Courbet qui me choquent. S'ils étaient recouverts d'un manteau suffisant, peu m'importe qu'il montre une baigneuse, des curés ou la famille de Proudhon.' 23 Apr. 1865, cited Troubat (2), pp. 180-1.
5. Wey Mss., cited C., II, 184-5.
6. 'M. G. Courbet, venu du village à Paris, s'est dit qu'il serait peintre et son maître à lui-même. Il s'est tenu parole. Après dix ans d'études, d'efforts et de tâtonnements douloureux, après dix ans de privations, de pauvreté et d'obscurité, au moment même d'être à bout de courage et de ressources, le voilà peintre et, peu s'en faut, déjà maître. . . Ces durs commencements, cet apprentissage solitaire et ces longues épreuves de M. Courbet se lisent sur ses ouvrages empreints d'une certaine force sombre et concentrée, d'une expression triste et d'une manière un peu sauvage. Ses paysages . . . ne sont que des esquisses; mais de ce même caractère grave et pénétrant.' *Le National*, 7 Aug. 1849.
7. 'Non seulement socialiste, mais bien encore démocrate et républicain, en un mot, partisan de toute la Révolution et par dessus tout, réaliste, c'est-à-dire, ami sincère de la vraie vérité.' Letter to *Le Messager*, 19 Nov. 1851, cited R., pp. 93-4.
8. B. Nat. Mss. Nafir. 10316 fol. 286, cited Hemmings, p. 216.
9. 'Journal d'Arthur Vingtras, Courbet, portrait-charge', in *Gil Blas*, 9 May 1882. See Vallès (2), pp. 250-1.
10. 'L'air d'un paysan goguenard'; 'Il y aurait reproché à Martin Bernard d'avoir abandonné la Commune, et il lui aurait dit que lui et Louis Blanc seraient les premiers victimes d'une nouvelle commune.' Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Courbet file, Ba. 1020. For the spy's report, see 1872, Fiche 173.
11. Cited Borel (1), p. 55.
12. Cited M., p. 86, written in winter 1851-52.
13. See Troubat (2), pp. 125-7, undated letter to Buchon.
14. B.O.C., p. 635.
15. B.O.C., p. 1429.
16. 'Là est un vieillard de soixante et dix ans, courbé sur son travail, la masse en l'air, les chairs hâlés par le soleil, sa tête à l'ombre d'un chapeau de paille; son pantalon de rude étoffe est tout rapiécé, puis dans ses sabots fêlés, des bas qui furent bleus laissent voir les talons. Ici, c'est un jeune homme à la tête poussiéreuse, au teint bis; la chemise dégoûtante et en lambeaux lui laisse voir les flancs et les bras; une bretelle en cuir retient les restes d'un pantalon, et les souliers de cuir boueux rient tristement de bien de côtés. Le vieillard est à genoux, le jeune homme est derrière lui, debout, portant avec énergie un panier de pierres cassées. Hélas! dans cet état, c'est ainsi qu'on commence, c'est ainsi qu'on finit! Par-ci par-là est dispersé leur attirail: une hotte, un brancard, un fossoir, une marmite de campagne, etc. Tout cela se passe au grand soleil, en pleine campagne, au bord du fossé d'une route; le paysage remplit la toile.' Cited C. II, 75-6.
17. Where Buchon wrote this passage is obscure. It is usually quoted from Léger's transcription, in *Mercure de France*, 1928, and

Léger calls it there an extract from Buchon's 1855 *Recueil de dissertations sur le réalisme*. But it does not in fact come from that book, and I have not found the original source.

18. Reprinted in Champfleury (2), pp. 72-101.
19. See Champfleury (2), p. 101.
20. See Champfleury (2), p. 84.
21. Cassagne, pp. 121-2.
22. Gossez (2), p. 451.
23. B.C.G., I, 151-2.
24. *Exhibition . . .*, cited C., II, 60.

3. Courbet's Early Years (pp. 36-46)

1. See M., pp. 29-30.
2. Cited R., p. 42.
3. E.g. the portrait of Théodore Cuénot, c. 1846, in the Courbet exhibition, Ornans, 1969. Along the top is written 'Ce Portrait est un don de l'auteur à mère Cuénot supérieure de l'hôpital d'Ornans et en souvenir de M. Théodore Cuénot bienfaiteur de cet hospice mort en 1847'. The Cuénots were family friends of the Courbets.
4. In 1844 Courbet had two pictures rejected: perhaps the *La Nuit de Walpurgis* and a picture which might have been the first version of *L'Homme blessé*, entitled *L'Homme délivré de l'amour par la mort*. In 1845 he had four rejected: *Portrait de Juliette*, *Le Hamac*, *Les Joueurs d'échecs*, an unidentified *Portrait d'un homme*. In 1846, seven pictures were sent back; and in 1847, the *Violoncelliste*, *L'Homme à la pipe*, and *Portrait d'Urbain Cuénot*.
5. 'Aux murs deux gravures, les deux seules reproductions d'un collègue, la *Promenade des curés* et les *Seminaristes aux champs*, d'Amand

Gautier; un couple de charbonniers érotiques figurant au besoin Adam et Eve; des études bizarres, enfantines, la *Halte du soldat* et *l'Homme casqué*, des dames embuisonnées de dentelles, une platée de cerises noires; le fameux *Sauvage traversant les rapides*, cette toile fantastique dont on n'a jamais pu s'expliquer l'incubation; un *Combat maritime* (sa deuxième toile!) cascade d'orangeade et de groseille à terrifier le flagorneur le plus impudent - la coquetterie d'atelier du maître consistait précisément dans cet étalage presque affecté des infirmités de son début - une *Pythonisse* prêtée au Dominiquin; enfin ses essais statuaire.' Published in *La Lanterne*, 26 Jan. 1878, collected in Arch. de la Pref. de Police, Ba. 1020, Fiche 562.

6. Poe, pp. 145-6.
7. Novalis, pp. 7-9 (translation slightly modified).
8. E.g. Prud'hon's *Portrait de l'impératrice Joséphine*, the various Arab subjects of Vernet or Decamps, Deveria's *Naissance de Henri IV* (1827 Salon), Léopold Robert's Italian peasant subjects. Couture showed *Le Trouvère* in the 1843 Salon, and later painted an *Orgie parisienne*, complete with Pierrot and Harlequin.
9. A much disputed date, but this seems the most likely on grounds of style. It may have been retouched later, perhaps c. 1849. It is not the exhibit in the 1849 Salon called *Le Peintre*; this was a drawing with quite different dimensions.
10. The pseudo-Géricault is now in the Musée Fabre, Montpellier, the Deroy is at Versailles.
11. There has been confusion about which picture the *Portrait of Monsieur X**** really is. Léger says it is the Besançon self-portrait; its style and the closeness of its dimensions to those in the Salon registers suggest he is right.