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Gustave Courbet's Meeting: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew

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In his own day, Gustave Courbet was generally considered a painter of reality: his compositions were held to be records of sheer, unmediated observation and were praised or criticized as such by contemporary observers.<sup>1</sup> In more recent years, Courbet's dependence upon traditional art and upon popular imagery in particular has been recognized: such works as the *After-Dinner at Ornans*, the *Burial at Ornans*, the *Wrestlers*, and the *Painter's Studio*, have been clearly related to specific pictorial antecedents.<sup>2</sup> Yet one of his major paintings of the decade of the fifties, *The Meeting* (Fig. 1) of 1854, has continued to be viewed as nothing more than the faithful, if typically egotistical, recording of a specific event in a particular locale: the artist's meeting with his patron, Alfred Bruyas, and the latter's servant and dog, on the road to Sète outside Montpellier.<sup>3</sup> The painting has been criticized by Roger Fry for sacrificing "plastic significance for a crude and meaningless veri-

similitude to actual objects,"<sup>4</sup> and a purposeful rejection of all traditional principles of composition has been considered its most striking characteristic.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the artist's fidelity to the sheer data of experience has seemed so uncompromising, his procedure in this work has been likened to that of the lens of a camera;<sup>6</sup> any minor deviations from perceptual objectivity which the painting may seem to exhibit have generally been laid to the artist's notorious self-adulation.<sup>7</sup> Yet *The Meeting* is a document neither of sheer narcissism nor of pure observation, although there is more than a measure of both in it; its composition is unequivocally based upon a source in popular imagery: a portion of a broadside of the Wandering Jew, representing the encounter of the Jew with two burghers of the town, which was later to serve as the frontispiece of Champfleury's *Histoire de l'imagerie populaire* (Figs. 2, 3).<sup>8</sup> While the artist has completely transformed his schematic prototype,

NB A bibliography of frequently cited works, given in short form in the footnotes, will be found at the end of this article.

- 1 See, for example Louis de Geofroy's criticism of the *Burial at Ornans* for its "indifferent reproduction" of whatever happened to come before Courbet's eyes, in the critic's "Salon de 1850," *Revue des deux Mondes*, 9, 1851, 930. Courbet's friend, Champfleury, praised the painting for precisely the same qualities in his article on Courbet published in *Grandes Figures d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1861, 251. Courbet is even supposed to have painted a bundle of faggots from a distance without knowledge of their identity: "I didn't need to know it," he said; "I painted what I saw without realizing what it was." Cited by Francis Wey, "Mémoires inédits," in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 190f.
- 2 For the relation of the *After-Dinner at Ornans* to Louis Le Nain's *Repas de Famille* of 1642, see Stanley Meltzoff, "The Revival of the Le Nains," *AB*, 24, 1942, 264 and figs. 4 and 5. The connection of the *Burial at Ornans* with popular imagery has been dealt with extensively by Meyer Schapiro in "Courbet and Popular Imagery" (166f. and pl. 39), probably the most significant of all studies of Courbet and his milieu. Further sources for the *Burial* are convincingly demonstrated by Robert Fernier ("En marge de *L'Enterrement d'Ornans*," *Société des Amis de Gustave Courbet*, *Bulletin*, No. 10, 1951, 8-10), are discussed by the author of the present article in "Innovation and Tradition in Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*," *Essays in Honor of Walter Friedlaender*, New York, 1965, 119-26, and will be briefly reconsidered once more, below, p. 211. The dependence of Courbet's *Wrestlers* upon Guido Reni's *Heracles and Acheleous* in the Louvre, suggested by Cesare Gnudi and Gian Carlo Cavalli in *Guido Reni*, Florence, 1955, 71, which was mentioned by the author in an unpublished doctoral dissertation ("The Development and Nature of Realism in the Work of Gustave Courbet," New York University, 1963, 187), is further discussed by Alexander in "Courbet and Assyrian Sculpture," 451. The sources of the *Painter's Studio* have been most extensively considered by René Huyghe, Germain Bazin, and Hélène Jean Adhémar in *Courbet: L'Atelier du peintre: Allégorie réelle, 1855* (*Monographies des peintures du Musée du Louvre*, III), Paris, 1944, 14-18, and in Werner Hofmann's *The Earthly Paradise: Art in the Nineteenth Century*, Brian Battershaw, trans., New York, 1961, 19.
- 3 Alexander provides a notable exception, but his contention ("Courbet and Assyrian Sculpture," 448) that *The Meeting* is based on a motif from Assyrian relief sculpture is far from convincing. Robert L. Herbert ("Millet Revisited—II," *BurlM*, 104, 1962, 378 and figs. 16 and 17) has justly pointed out the "patently artificial construction" of *The Meeting* in contrast with two Millet drawings after the work but of course does not go into the problem of the genesis of Courbet's painting in the context of his discussion of Millet's more plausibly lifelike reinterpretations of it.
- 4 *Transformations*, New York, 1956, 47-48.

5 Berger, "Courbet in His Century," 24.

6 *Ibid.*, 24 and 28. An anonymous reviewer of Gerstle Mack's *Gustave Courbet* ("The Challenge of Courbet," *Times Literary Supplement*, 51, June 27, 1952, 414), refers to "the curiously low angle of vision and the 'snapshot' effect" of *The Meeting*, which he feels "anticipate Degas by 20 years." This same reviewer considers *The Meeting* "one of the most significant pictures of the whole nineteenth century."

7 See, for example, Edmond About's discussion of Courbet's self-flattery and the disposition of the shadows in the work: "Neither the master nor the valet cast their shadows on the ground; there is only a shadow for M. Courbet: he alone can stop the rays of the sun" ("Voyage à travers l'Exposition des Beaux-Arts, 1855," in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 120).

8 The work in question, with the title, "Le Juif-errant d'après une image de fabrication parisienne," was to serve as the frontispiece of both the 1869 and 1886 editions of Champfleury's book, but was doubtless known both to Champfleury and to Courbet long before that time; see below, p. 214. Whether or not Courbet simply reversed the composition of the example in question in order to emphasize his own person, or whether he actually based *The Meeting* on a slightly different variant of the same image, where the composition itself is reversed (see Fig. 4, a detail of one such variant, *Le vrai Portrait du juif errant* from Le Mans, chez Leloup), can, of course, not be stated with certainty. Champfleury himself mentions several variants of this particular version in a long list of examples of Wandering Jew images, appended to his essay, "Le Juif-errant," *Histoire*, 95-105. It is, therefore, not inconceivable that Courbet actually based *The Meeting* on a version in which the figure of the Jew appeared on the right-hand side, as he himself does in the painting.

The only specific 19th century reference to the relationship between *The Meeting* and the Wandering Jew theme, possibly a fortuitous one, is a two-verse parody of the traditional *complainte* by one G. Randon, which appeared in the 1867 *Journal Amusant* beneath a caricature of the painting:

Deux bourgeois de la ville,  
Deux notables d'Ornans,  
D'une façon civile  
L'abordent cheminant.

—N'êtes-vous point cet homme  
De qui l'on parle tant?  
—Oui, c'est moi, mes enfants,  
Qui suis Courbet le grand.

Cited in Charles Léger, *Courbet selon les caricatures et les images*, Paris, 1920, 68.

the implications arising from its use are of great significance, both in interpreting the work in question and in reexamining Courbet's artistic position as a whole during the crucial years of the "realist battle," the decade of the 1850's.

Courbet and his supporters generally tended to minimize the role played by pictorial prototypes in his oeuvre, at times even going so far as to deny any familiarity on the artist's part with traditional painting at all. "As an instrument of education and study, Courbet never had anything but his magnificent eye, and that was certainly enough," declared his friend and champion, Max Buchon.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite the artist's disdainful dismissal of "M'ssieu Raphaël" and "M'ssieu Michelangelo,"<sup>10</sup> his condemnation of Titian and Leonardo as "petty thieves,"<sup>11</sup> and his manifest distaste for the "slaves" of Raphael and Phidias in his own century,<sup>12</sup> Courbet's own statements, the reports of his friends, and his works themselves bear witness to the fact that, while he may have rejected that portion of artistic tradition which he considered academic, idealized, artificial, or rhetorical—the art of the Establishment, in short—he was certainly familiar with and admired a certain segment of the art of the past. The Dutch, the Spaniards, and the French "painters of reality," all those who seemed to him faithfully to reproduce the life and appearance of their own times, were much to his taste. "I am already enchanted with everything I have seen in Holland, and it is truly indispensable for an artist," he wrote in 1847. "A trip like this teaches you more than three years of work."<sup>13</sup> He expressed admiration for "Ribera, Zurbarán [and] Velázquez above all"<sup>14</sup> and coupled the latter with Rembrandt in a typically self-aggrandizing aphorism.<sup>15</sup> He executed copies after works by Hals (Fig. 5), Rembrandt (Fig. 6), and Velázquez.<sup>16</sup>

While in the case of popular imagery, Courbet never specifically acknowledged his debt, both his critics and his supporters immediately likened his paintings of the fifties to the

work of the anonymous image-makers.<sup>17</sup> Aside from the internal evidence provided by the paintings themselves, one can be sure that Courbet was familiar with such images, which were currently admired by members of his coterie: the study of folklore, in fact, constituted an integral part of the primitivizing, popularizing strain of social thought and historical research in advanced circles immediately preceding and following the 1848 Revolution.<sup>18</sup> In this connection, one thinks, of course, of George Sand and the worker-poet movement, or of Michelet and his quasi-mystical adulation of "le peuple," but within Courbet's more intimate group of friends, the Franc-comtois poet and critic, Max Buchon, was one of the leading figures in the upsurge of interest in folk art and literature of the mid-nineteenth century. "The most inexorable protest against professors and pastiches is popular art," proclaimed Buchon in 1856. "To approach our popular literature is to ascend once more to our authentic origins, is to get back into possession of our spontaneity, the only creator of lasting productions."<sup>19</sup> Courbet's close friend, the anarchist philosopher, P.-J. Proudhon was equally optimistic about the creative potential of the popular classes: "No more confidence in the heights of society! Let the worker go forward on the same footing as the scholar and the artist. . . . There is no one in reality more a scholar and more an artist than the people," he maintained.<sup>20</sup> But it must have been through his chief supporter, the realist writer and critic, Champfleury, author of the first important study of popular imagery,<sup>21</sup> that Courbet became acquainted with a wide range of examples of this genre, and, in addition, infected with his friend's unbounded enthusiasm for the works of the popular artists. Champfleury praised the works of the *imagiers* for their naïve charm and unerring revelation of the innermost nature of the people. "There are no bad *images* for interested eyes," he stated. "For a long time the people have been interested in these prints; we

9 Max [Maximilien] Buchon, *Recueil de dissertations sur le réalisme*, Neuchâtel, 1856, cited in Charles Léger, "Courbet, ses amis et ses élèves," *Mémoires de France*, 201, 1928, 14. Some contemporary observers even went so far as to make Courbet out as a semi-illiterate, in order to stress the instinctual component of his creativity: "As for reading, he did not overindulge in it," states Castagnary. "By not reading, he remained closer to instinct. The idea escaped him; he grasped the world through form and color" ("Manuscrit inédit," in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 156). Gros-Kost repeats the same idea in almost identical words in his *Souvenirs intimes*, Paris, 1880; see Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 287.

10 Recounted by his close friend, Francis Wey, "Mémoires inédits," in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 194.

11 "Le Titien, Léonard de Vinci sont des filous. Si l'un de ces deux-là revenait au monde et passait à mon atelier, je prendrais un couteau!" Cited by Théophile Silvestre, *Les artistes français*, 1861, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 52.

12 See Théophile Silvestre, *Les artistes français*, 1861, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 50f.

13 Letter from Holland, 1847, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 74.

14 Cited by Silvestre, *Les artistes français*, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 52.

15 "Jamais Velasquez, Rembrandt, ni moi nous n'avons mieux fait." Cited by Castagnary, "Manuscrit inédit," in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 148.

16 See Courbet's letter to Castagnary from Interlaken, November 20, 1869, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 116. An editor's note informs us that the letter was found among Castagnary's unpublished papers with the date 1869 added by the latter. Courbet's copy of Hals's *Hille Bobbe*, signed and dated 1869, after the Munich painting, is in the Kunsthalle, Hamburg; his copy of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait*, after the famous Munich work, signed and dated 1869 and with the inscription "Copie, Musée de Munich," is now in the Louvre. No copy after a Velázquez portrait is, to my knowledge, still in existence, although Gerstle Mack (*Gustave Courbet*, New York, 1951, 232), mentions a copy after "a portrait of Murillo by Velázquez" without further elucidation. See the catalogue, *Exposition Gustave Courbet*, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Besançon, Aug. 23-Oct. 10, 1952, Cat. Nos. 42 and 43 for information about the Rembrandt and Hals copies.

17 Both Champfleury and Louis de Geofroy make the analogy between the *Burial at Ornans* and popular imagery. See Champfleury, *Grandes figures*, 244, and De

become acquainted with their intimate feelings by penetrating these illustrations."<sup>22</sup>

During the decade of the fifties, the period when he created most of his major figural compositions and when the realist impulse was at its height, many of Courbet's works were based on prototypes deriving either from that segment of the art of the past which was meaningful to him as a realist, or from popular images or illustrations, or, at times, upon a combination of both. An examination of the relation of some of these paintings to their sources reveals little haphazard borrowing, but rather, a clear connection with the underlying social impulse that motivated Courbet's works themselves at the time.

References to Dutch and Spanish painting as well as to popular imagery give added resonance and authority to the powerful series of portraits which constitutes the basic substance of the *Burial at Ornans* of 1849–1850, transforming observed reality into what might accurately be termed a history painting of contemporary life.<sup>23</sup> For the underlying disposition of the figures, Courbet turned to a work which was at the time considered one of the great masterpieces of Dutch seventeenth century group portraiture, a monumental, friezelike representation of ordinary people in their customary outdoor milieu: Bartholomeus Van der Helst's *Captain Bicker's Company* of 1643 (Fig. 8).<sup>24</sup> Courbet had probably seen this work, considered to be the rival of Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, during his trip to Amsterdam in 1847, and it had been praised for "un sentiment puissant de la vérité" in an illustrated article about its author which had appeared in the *Magasin pittoresque* in 1848.<sup>25</sup> The Spanish painter, Zurbarán, is probably responsible for the stark, unmodulated contrasts of black, white, and red, as well as the solidity of the shadows, which characterize the *Burial*, and perhaps provided partial inspiration for the very subject of the work itself.<sup>26</sup> Zurbarán was

another artist of the past, who, in the opinion of the nineteenth century realists, had treated everyday life with brutal honesty, thereby raising it above the level of the commonplace.<sup>27</sup> In addition, a popular image, such as the *Degrés des ages*, may be responsible, as Meyer Schapiro has suggested, for the change in the composition of the *Burial* from the one indicated in the original drawing for the work to that of the finished painting.<sup>28</sup>

A masterpiece of Dutch art, popular inspiration, and personal observation of reality entered into the creation of another of Courbet's epics of modern life, perhaps intended as the urban counterpart of the *Burial at Ornans*, the unfinished *Firemen Running to a Fire* of 1851 (Fig. 7), now in the Petit Palais in Paris. Whether or not the subject was actually suggested to Courbet by Proudhon, and whether or not, as legend would have it, the republican chief of the fire brigade of the Rue St.-Victor obligingly turned in a false alarm in order to provide Courbet with authentic documentation,<sup>29</sup> the composition of this enormous canvas is clearly inspired by Rembrandt's so-called *Night Watch*, admired by Courbet on his trip to Holland in 1847, a work which, like Courbet's *Firemen*, might well have been considered a representation of "men . . . accomplishing their civic and domestic functions, with their present-day appearance."<sup>30</sup> Yet, as in the case of the relation of the *Burial at Ornans* to Van der Helst's *Captain Bicker's Company*, the seventeenth century Dutch prototype has been completely recast to meet the demands of a subject taken from contemporary life, as well as those of Courbet's stylistic predilections. The décor and the cast of characters of the *Firemen* are, of course, those of nineteenth century Paris, and, as in the case of the relation of the composition of the *Burial* to its seventeenth century Dutch prototype, Courbet has reduced and simplified the formal and expressive complexity of Rembrandt's group portrait, lining

Geofroy, "Le Salon de 1850," 928. Also see Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery," 164.

18 See *ibid.*, 171–188, *passim*, for a detailed account of this phenomenon.

19 Buchon, *Recueil*, cited in Léger, "Courbet, ses amis et ses élèves," 14.

20 *Carnets de P.-J. Proudhon*, Pierre Hauptmann, Suzanne Henneguy, and Jeanne Fauré-Fremiet, eds., Paris, 1960–61, I, 349.

21 *Histoire de l'imagerie populaire*. See above, p. 209 and note 8 and below, p. 214, for additional information about this important work.

22 Champfleury, *Histoire*, xxxiii.

23 Schapiro ("Courbet and Popular Imagery," 190f.) suggests this interpretation. Since the sources of the *Burial at Ornans* have already been thoroughly investigated (see above, note 2), the discussion of this work and relevant illustrative material will be restricted to a minimum in the present article.

24 Robert Fernier ("En marge de *L'Enterrement d'Ornans*") establishes the relationship between Courbet's painting and the Dutch work, which he erroneously calls the *Banquet du Capitaine Bicker*, confusing it with another large group portrait by Van der Helst, painted in 1648 and now also in the Rijksmuseum in Amster-

dam, in which the figures are seated around a table.

25 H. van der Tuin, *Les vieux Peintres des Pays-Bas et la critique artistique en France de la première moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1948, 125f.

26 Zurbarán's so-called *Funeral of a Bishop*, then in the Soult Collection in Paris, may have provided a source of inspiration for *The Burial*. The painting is now in the Louvre under its correct title, *St. Bonaventure on His Bier*. See Martin S. Soria, *The Paintings of Zurbarán*, London, 1953, Cat. No. 27 and pl. 11.

27 See for example, François Sabatier-Unger, *Salon de 1851*, Paris, 1851, 36 and 62. For the popularity of Zurbarán in the period, see Paul Guinard's introduction to the catalogue, *Trésors de la peinture espagnole: Églises et musées de France*, Palais du Louvre, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, Jan.–Apr., 1963, 23.

28 Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery," 167 and pl. 39.

29 Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre*, Paris, 1906, 100.

30 Proudhon used these words to recommend subject matter appropriate for treatment by the artist of the present in *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale*, Paris, 1865, a work devoted mainly to a study of Courbet, with whom the author had discussed his ideas on art.



up his figures across the surface of the canvas rather than having them emerge from an evocative, shadow-filled background.

The reductive tendency of the composition, as well as the iconography of the *Firemen*, may be due to the intervention of popular, or more accurately, semi-popular, art. The theme of fires and firemen, while hardly touched upon by major artists, had long been a favorite of their more popular counterparts, especially of the *canardiers*, those creators of broadsides consisting of crude woodcuts accompanied by simple commentaries, dealing with crimes of passion, disasters, and other "épouvantables catastrophes";<sup>31</sup> on a more elevated level, publications, like *L'illustration* or the *Magasin pittoresque* used more accurate, circumstantial, and realistic wood engravings, often with nocturnal settings, to document their accounts of such topical events as fires and explosions. It is certainly conceivable that when seeking documentation for his painting, Courbet turned to such wood engravings, for example, the one used to illustrate the account of the fire in Saint Peter's Church in Hamburg in the *Magasin pittoresque* (Fig. 9),<sup>32</sup> or that of the great fire in the Bazar Bonne-Nouvelle in *L'illustration*.<sup>33</sup> In addition, *L'illustration* had published a long article, "Le Sapeur-Pompier," investigating the duties of firemen and the most advanced techniques of fire-fighting, amply documented with wood engravings, one of which, *Sapeurs-Pompiers—Le sinistre* (Fig. 10), comes quite close in subject and composition to the *Firemen Running to a Fire*.<sup>34</sup> Courbet's friend, the *chansonnier* Pierre Dupont, may have provided still another source of inspiration, popular and contemporary, for the iconography of the *Firemen*, in his song entitled "L'incendie," where the firemen are called "soldats pacifiques" and the description of a fire by night seems to correspond closely to the action of Courbet's painting.<sup>35</sup> Like Dupont, Courbet has emphasized the social significance of the scene, not merely by giving a major role to the proletarian figure in *blouse* and cap who assists the fire captain, in the right foreground, but also by the rather obvious opposition that he has

established between the woman of the people, dressed in rusty brown, clutching her baby to her breast and leading a little boy by the hand on the left, and the well-dressed couple on the right, obviously representatives of the bourgeoisie, who are set off from the rest of the painting by their isolated position, their costume, and their color harmony, as observers rather than participants in the active scene.<sup>36</sup>

In two other major works of the fifties, Courbet turned to the art of the past—that of seventeenth century Spain—and to popular imagery: the *Grain-Sifters* (Fig. 11) of 1854, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Nantes, and the unfinished *Toilette of the Bride* (Fig. 13) of about 1858,<sup>37</sup> in the collection of the Smith College Museum of Art. These canvases may be related to paintings by Velázquez, the *Spinners* in the first case, the *Maids of Honor* in the second, both of which Courbet probably knew through engravings, such as those published in Réveil's popular *Musée de peinture* (Figs. 12, 14).<sup>38</sup> Although less well known than his compatriot, Zurbarán, Velázquez had already provided a source of inspiration for Millet<sup>39</sup> and was admired in the decade of the fifties as a recorder of the ordinary, or even the seamy side of life, as a painter of realistic scenes, cripples, and dwarfs.<sup>40</sup> To Courbet, naturally unaware of the complex iconography of the *Spinners*, Velázquez's painting must have seemed a forthright work-scene, rather like the one he himself envisaged in the *Grain-Sifters*, and it is even possible that he sensed a certain underlying social significance in the Spanish painting, with its apparent contrast between the industrious working women in the foreground and the idle courtiers in the rear. The gesture of the central figure of the woman holding the sieve in Courbet's painting repeats, with modifications, that of the wool winder with her back to us in Velázquez's work, and both the pose of the woman picking through the grain in a dish and that of the boy to the right seem to have been loosely derived from those of figures in the Spanish prototype. Even the background element of the sacks of grain to the left in Courbet's painting seems like a free adaptation of the piled-up skeins of wool or

31 J.-P. Séguin, "Antoine Chassaignon, imprimeur, libraire et canardier parisien (1810-1854)," *Arts et traditions populaires*, 3, 1955, 18f., discusses the theme of fires in Parisian *canards*.

32 *Magasin pittoresque*, 10, 1842, 281.

33 *L'illustration*, 13, July 21, 1849, 336.

34 "Le Sapeur-Pompier," *L'illustration*, 1, July 29, 1843, 339-41, illustration on p. 340.

35 Pierre Dupont, *Chants et chansons*, Paris, 1855, III, 110. The illustration facing p. 110, by Andrieux, also reveals some similarities with elements in Courbet's painting, or perhaps points to a common prototype. Dupont's poem had first been published in 1851, and it is certainly possible that Courbet was familiar with it before he began work on his *Firemen*.

36 These two figures would seem to be an earlier counterpart of the well-dressed couple—the so-called *amateurs mondains*—in the right foreground of Courbet's *Painter's Studio* of 1855.

37 The *Toilette of the Bride* is generally dated ca. 1865, although no valid reason has ever been given to substantiate such a late date. More recently, Douglas Cooper has suggested a far more reasonable date of about 1858 for this work, on the basis of its close thematic relation to Courbet's works of the fifties and its formal relationship to the *Painter's Studio* of 1855; see "Reflections on the Venice Biennale," *BurlM*, 96, 1954, 322.

38 [Etienne Achille] Réveil, *Musée de peinture et de sculpture, ou, Recueil des principaux tableaux, statues et bas-reliefs . . .*, 17 vols., London-Paris, 1829-34. This collection, easily available to artists, as Paul Guinard has pointed out (Louis Réau, "Velázquez et la peinture française du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Velázquez*, 106), contains an engraving of the *Maids of Honor*, entitled "Velázquez Faisant le portrait d'une Infante," 14, 971, and one of the *Spinners* entitled "Fabrique de tapisseries," 14, 987.

39 On the relation between Millet's *Portrait of Antoinette Hébert* and Velázquez's

cloth to the left in the *Spinners*. In the case of the relation of the unfinished *Toilette of the Bride* to Velázquez's *Maids of Honor*, a relationship, incidentally, first suggested by Roger Fry,<sup>41</sup> both the general spatial divisions of the composition and some of the individual figures, such as the girl kneeling in the foreground to put the shoe on the bride, seem to have been derived from the Spanish work. Yet here again, as would only seem natural in the case of a painting the theme of which, as Jean Seznec has pointed out, was taken from Franc-comtois folk tradition, and is itself, in his words, "almost a document of folklore,"<sup>42</sup> popular imagery played a significant role. An image such as the *Coucher de la mariée* (Fig. 15), from Paris, chez Codoni, is close to the *Toilette of the Bride* in its general configuration, and, more specifically, seems to have inspired the pose of the figure holding the sheet to the left of the painting.

What is important in all these cases is not merely the fact that Courbet has made use of prototypes taken from the art of the past and from popular imagery or illustration in many of his major figural compositions of the fifties, but that in almost every instance, the borrowings are meaningfully related to Courbet's conception of realism, both in terms of the actual themes of these sources or of their provenance: from the realistic painters of seventeenth century Holland and Spain and the naïve productions of the popular image-makers or the wood-engravers of the contemporary press, proletarian by definition, as it were. In none of these cases would it be correct to say of Courbet that "almost any form of visual representation would seem to have served as a stimulus to his own conceptions".<sup>43</sup> such a characterization would perhaps be more appropriate for Courbet's work during the decade of the sixties, when, in the words of Meyer Schapiro, the artist moved "toward a more personal, aestheticized view."<sup>44</sup> It would be as ridiculous to seek a social motivation behind Courbet's use of an engraving after a work by Landseer (Fig. 16) for his *Stag Taking to the Water* (Fig. 17) of 1861, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Marseilles,<sup>45</sup> or that of a figure from Dela-

croix's *Massacre of Chios* for the mounted hunter in the *Hunting-Horn* of 1867<sup>46</sup> as it would be to read a social significance into these works themselves. Yet even some of the seemingly neutral landscape themes of the sixties were in fact the products of an underlying social impulse, as Heinrich Schwarz has pointed out in the case of the *Landscape with a Mill near Ornans* of 1869;<sup>47</sup> and what may appear on the surface to be nothing more than an objective rendering of a tree, may actually be a forceful expression of Courbet's regional pride and identification with Franc-comtois tradition. The *Great Oak of Ornans* (Fig. 18) of 1864, in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, exhibited in 1867 with the more significant title the *Chêne de Flagey, appelé chêne de Vercingétorix. Camp de César, près d'Alésia, Franche-Comté*,<sup>48</sup> was probably inspired by a series of articles on "remarkable trees" of all the regions of France which had run in the *Magasin pittoresque* in the fifties. More specifically, Courbet was trying to vie with the "chêne gigantesque de Montravail aux environs de Saintes," the subject of an article with a strikingly similar illustration (Fig. 19) which had appeared in this publication in 1850.<sup>49</sup> In any case, during the decade of the fifties, Courbet was highly selective in his use of pictorial prototypes, his choices controlled by his stated desire to translate the customs, the ideas, and the aspect of his times;<sup>50</sup> controlled, in short, by his intention to create an epic art of everyday reality much as, in his view, had the Dutch and Spanish painters of the seventeenth century, a contemporary art at the same time made enduring by reference to the instinctive veracity and naïve grandeur of popular imagery and vivified by his own bold assault on perceived reality. Courbet's decision to base his important commemorative portrait, *The Meeting*, on a popular image of the Wandering Jew was thus in no way fortuitous, but determined by the implications of the proposed painting itself.

There seems little doubt that Courbet had conceived of the general scheme of *The Meeting* even before he left for Montpellier in May 1854. At this time, he was deeply preoccupied

*Infanta Margarita* in the Louvre, see Guinard in Réau, *ibid.*, 107. This portrait by Velázquez had been published in the *Magasin pittoresque*, 9, 1841, 177.

40 André Chastel in Réau, *ibid.*, 109.

41 *Characteristics of French Art*, London, 1932, 111.

42 Cited in "'La Mariée' en Voyage: Smith's Courbet Abroad," *Smith College Museum of Art Bulletin*, Nos. 35-36, 1954-55, 17.

43 Alexander, "Courbet and Assyrian Sculpture," 447.

44 Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery," 190.

45 Courbet himself hints at the derivation of this work from that of the English artist, when, in a description of his *Stag* in a letter of April 19 and 20, 1861, to Francis Wey, from Ornans (in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 92), he states: "The expression of his head ought to please the English; it recalls the feeling of Landseer's animals." The inspiring engraving had appeared in the *Magasin pittoresque*, 19, 1851, 385.

46 William M. Kane has suggested this source for Courbet's figure in "Courbet's 'Chasseur' of 1866-67," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, 25, 1960, 32-34, and has illustrated both Courbet's painting, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon, and its prototype, in figs. 2 and 3 of the same article.

47 "A Landscape by Gustave Courbet," *Museum Notes*, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 4, No. 5, May, 1946, 2f.

48 See the catalogue, *Gustave Courbet, 1819-1877*, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1959-60, Cat. No. 44.

49 *Magasin pittoresque*, 18, 1850, 220.

50 Courbet characterized his aim in this manner in the so-called Realist Manifesto, the preface to the catalogue of his Realist Exhibition of 1855. It is published in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 60f.

with what he termed the "realist solution" and was already contemplating a joint realist enterprise with his friend and patron, Alfred Bruyas: an independent exhibition of his own works in conjunction with those of the Galerie Bruyas.<sup>51</sup> In a letter written to his patron shortly before his departure for Montpellier, Courbet stressed the unusual importance of their relatively recent first encounter: "I met you. It was inevitable, for it was not we who met each other, it was our solutions."<sup>52</sup> As far as the compositional prototype of *The Meeting* is concerned, it too must have been familiar to Courbet prior to his sojourn in Montpellier. The main figure of the Wandering Jew from the very broadside in which the meeting of the Jew with the two burghers acts as a subsidiary incident had already provided the prototype for his portrait of Jean Journet in 1850.<sup>53</sup> There is thus every reason to believe that the conception of *The Meeting* antedated the occurrence of the incident upon which it was supposedly based.

It was no doubt through Champfleury that Courbet had become acquainted with the broadside of the Wandering Jew in question, as well as its many variants.<sup>54</sup> Champfleury was, in fact, to use it as the frontispiece of both editions of his important work on popular imagery, so much of which was devoted to investigation of the legend of the Wandering Jew; and while his *Histoire de l'imagerie populaire* was not published until 1869, Champfleury had, according to his own admission,<sup>55</sup> embarked on his research into Wandering Jew material at least twenty years prior to its publication, and by the fifties, was certainly one of the leading authorities on the subject in France. His essay, "Le Juif-errant," is even today considered one of the major contributions to research in the field.<sup>56</sup> Closely allied to Champfleury, Courbet would have had ample opportunity to familiarize himself with both written and pictorial representations of the Wandering Jew legend at the time he painted *The Meeting*.

The implications of the Wandering Jew theme were themselves extremely rich and complex, as Champfleury indicates

in his study. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the legend of the Wandering Jew had undergone many metamorphoses in the course of its long and cosmopolitan existence, and had evolved from a simple, apocryphal story of sin, retribution, and eternal wandering, into a socially conscious morality tale, often providing the scaffolding, or more accurately, the pretext, for elaborate left-wing literary productions. "The Jew," says Champfleury, "served for . . . social compositions in which all modern aspirations were heaped together."<sup>57</sup> Best known of these "social compositions" is of course Eugène Süe's roman feuilleton, *Le Juif errant*, Fourierist and Saint-Simonian in inspiration, and dedicated to the "mystique ouvrieriste," in which the Jew and the Jewess, symbols of unceasing persecution, represent the two chief victims of contemporary society: the worker and woman.<sup>58</sup> While Champfleury considered that the literary versions of the story suffered in comparison with "the sharpness of outline, the simplicity of the account"<sup>59</sup> provided by those of the anonymous authors, he nevertheless praised one of the less ambitious attempts to rework the old *complainte*, a socially conscious song, "Le Juif errant," written by the *chansonnier* and poet, Pierre-Jean de Béranger, in which the author, "taking up the idea and not the details, sings about humanity and fraternity in relation to the Wandering Jew."<sup>60</sup> At approximately the same time that Courbet painted *The Meeting*, his friend, the *chansonnier* Pierre Dupont, was working on still another, far more ambitious socially oriented variant on the Wandering Jew theme, the *Légende du juif errant*, criticized by Champfleury as an example of "the poverty of didactic art,"<sup>61</sup> in which the ballad itself was followed by a lengthy epilogue in limping alexandrines, setting forth a vision of the future in which the newly discovered forces of science and industry would unite all humanity in a modern paradise on earth.<sup>62</sup>

The importance of the theme for Courbet, in both its traditional and its contemporary interpretations, is indicated by the fact that he turned to it in at least two other works besides

51 Letter from Courbet to Alfred Bruyas, dated May, 1854 by Pierre Borel (Borel, *Lettres*, 28).

52 Letter from Courbet to Alfred Bruyas of May, 1854 (Borel, *Lettres*, 22). Courbet and Bruyas had met in the spring of 1853, at a time when Bruyas had first seen Courbet's paintings in the Salon of that year, and had purchased the *Bathers*, the *Sleeping Spinner*, and the earlier *Man with the Pipe*.

53 See below, p. 215, for a discussion of this work and its lithograph sequel.

54 See above, note 8.

55 Champfleury, *Histoire*, xlv.

56 For this estimation of Champfleury's work, see George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, Providence, 1965, 401. Anderson's study provides the most complete repository of literary material on the Wandering Jew available.

57 Champfleury, *Histoire*, 2f.

58 Jean-Louis Bory characterizes Süe's novel in this manner in *Eugène Süe: Le roi du roman populaire*, Paris, 1962, 298. *Le Juif errant* was published serially in the *Constitutionnel* from June 25, 1844, until July 12, 1845. What is striking about the

work, as far as the figure of the Wandering Jew himself is concerned is, as Anderson points out, "that Süe casts Ahasuerus as a champion of the workingman—the humble shoemaker of Jerusalem has become a spokesman for labor, and his protest against the fate of the laboring man is the protest of all workers against their oppressors" (*The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, Providence, 1965, 239).

59 Champfleury, *Histoire*, 45.

60 Champfleury, *Histoire*, 43. Béranger's enormously popular song was first published in 1831. For "Le Juif errant," see P.-J. de Béranger, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1834, III, 278–82.

61 Champfleury, *Histoire*, 45.

62 Pierre Dupont, the self-taught son of artisans, was the author of such popular ballads as "The Song of the Workers," "The Daughter of the People," and "The Song of the Firemen"; see above, p. 212. His *Légende du juif errant* was published in a sumptuous folio edition, illustrated with wood engravings by the then unknown Gustave Doré, in 1856 by Michel Lévy Frères, Paris.



*The Meeting*. He himself had created one of the topical "socialist" variants on the Wandering Jew theme in 1850, in the form of a lithographed "popular image," accompanied, like the anonymous broadsides, with a *complainte* to be sung to a traditional air.<sup>63</sup> This work, *The Apostle, Jean Journet, Setting Off for the Conquest of Universal Harmony* (Fig. 20), represents a well-known radical evangelist, a Fourierist missionary, as he goes off to convert the world, staff in hand. The pose of Jean Journet in Courbet's lithograph is clearly related to the traditional imagery of the Wandering Jew,<sup>64</sup> and, as we have already indicated, might well have been derived from the main figure in the same broadside, later published as the frontispiece of Champfleury's book, in which the Jew meeting two burghers of the town acts as a secondary image.<sup>65</sup> The Wandering Jew in Courbet's lithograph has been transformed, as in so many of the contemporary variants of the legend, from a helpless victim into an active witness to a new social order. The accompanying verses, similar in their narrative content and crude style to those of the anonymous Wandering Jew *complaintes*, stress the humanitarian mission of this wanderer:

Bientôt, apôtre intrépide,  
Je me guide  
Au flambeau de vérité;  
Dans le borbier je m'allonge,  
Je me plonge,  
Pour sauver l'humanité!<sup>66</sup>

In later years, Courbet was to turn once more to the theme of the Wandering Jew, in *A Beggar's Alms* (Fig. 21), signed and dated 1868, in the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, "his last large protest canvas against the injustices of the world," according to Benedict Nicolson, painted at a time when such socially motivated themes were rare in his work.<sup>67</sup> While the painting is certainly not one of Courbet's greatest triumphs, as Nicolson points out, it is, nevertheless, as he maintains, "a fascinating document in the later history of realism,"<sup>68</sup> and reverts, in its genesis, to 1854, the very year of the creation

of *The Meeting*, when Courbet was contemplating a painting of a gypsy family.<sup>69</sup> Specific motifs in this work are also related to those in paintings of the middle fifties: the ragged woman with her baby in the background of *A Beggar's Alms* is probably derived from the same drawing in Courbet's Louvre Sketchbook which provided the source of the mother and child, described by Courbet as "an Irishwoman suckling a child," in the left foreground of the *Painter's Studio* of 1855;<sup>70</sup> the "gypsy" boy who receives the coin in the Glasgow painting bears a striking resemblance to the admiring youth who stands to the left of Courbet in the earlier work. Yet the central incident of the old mendicant presenting a coin to a ragged urchin, depicted in *A Beggar's Alms*, owes its inception once more to the legend of the Wandering Jew, in one of its later and more socially oriented metamorphoses: a broadside consisting of the customary *image* and *complainte*, published by Wentzel in Wissembourg in 1860, and discussed at considerable length by Champfleury in his essay. According to Champfleury, the basic essence of the legend of the Wandering Jew, its "allegory of charity," had finally been revealed in the Wissembourg broadside, where, in a cartouche interrupting the ornamental border at the base, the Jew is represented dropping a coin into the hat held out to him by a poor man.<sup>71</sup> "For the first time," concludes Champfleury, "the print has shown the Wandering Jew as human. His role is finished. He is saved. Punished for his lack of charity, he is uplifted by charity."<sup>72</sup>

It is certainly likely that Courbet had in mind this variant of the Wandering Jew legend, dwelt upon in great detail by Champfleury, when he created *A Beggar's Alms*. The protagonist of this painting should not be considered a simple beggar at all, but rather the footsore Wandering Jew as he was depicted in the Wissembourg broadside, charitably offering one of his traditional five *sous* to a creature even less fortunate than himself; the awkward figure is represented in not entirely successful combination with the gypsy family painting Courbet had contemplated in 1854 as one of a series of

<sup>63</sup> Schapiro ("Courbet and Popular Imagery") discusses this work and its implications in great detail, 167f., and suggests its relation to the Wandering Jew of popular prints as well as to the pilgrim St. Jacques of religious broadsides.

<sup>64</sup> Alexander's suggestion ("Courbet and Assyrian Sculpture," 448) that Journet's pose in the lithograph (and in the now-destroyed painted portrait upon which it was based) was derived from that of Sargon in Assyrian relief sculpture, with the figure turned "ninety degrees to show Journet stepping toward the viewer," seems farfetched in light of the much closer prototype provided by the Wandering Jew *image*.

<sup>65</sup> See Fig. 2 and p. 209 above. The fact that the figure of Journet in Courbet's lithograph faces to the left, whereas the figure of the Jew in the popular image, reproduced as the frontispiece to Champfleury's book, faces right, gives added support to this hypothesis, since the composition would have been reversed in the printing of the lithograph.

<sup>66</sup> Stanza 5 of the *complainte*, to be sung to the "Air de Joseph," surrounding the

broadside of *L'Apôtre Jean Journet, partant pour la conquête de l'harmonie universelle*, printed in 1850 by Vion, 27 Rue St.-Jacques, Paris. The author of the *complainte* is unknown.

<sup>67</sup> Nicolson, "Courbet's 'L'Aumône,'" 74.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 73f. and 74, n. 1.

<sup>70</sup> For the drawing, fol. 33r, in Louvre Carnet RF 9105, see Aragon, *L'exemple de Courbet*, Paris, 1952, pl. 87, 183. For Courbet's description of the Irishwoman in *The Painter's Studio*, see his long letter to Champfleury of January, 1855, in René Huyghe, Germain Bazin, and Hélène Jean Adhémar, *Courbet: L'Atelier du peintre: Allégorie réelle, 1855 (Monographies des peintures du Musée du Louvre, III)*, Paris, 1944, 23.

<sup>71</sup> Champfleury, *Histoire*, 76f. and 102.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.



roadside scenes along with the *Stone-Breakers*<sup>73</sup> and, possibly, *The Meeting*, which could, in a sense, be considered an epic of the open road. All three of these works, *Jean Journet*, *The Meeting*, and *A Beggar's Alms*, are later examples of that transformation of traditional Christian or classical iconography into the idiom of the secular and the contemporary so typical of the first half of the nineteenth century, effected, for example, in the transformation of a Christian martyr or the Christ of the Deposition into a dead revolutionary hero in David's *Death of Marat*, or that of the enthroned Zeus into a contemporary political leader in Ingres' *Napoleon I on the Imperial Throne*, a transformation which was to achieve its apotheosis in Manet's half-ironic, half-serious updating of traditional sources in the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and the *Olympia* in the sixties. It is obvious, then, that the image of the Wandering Jew meeting two burghers of the town was not a mere compositional convenience for Courbet when he set about painting *The Meeting*, but was rather considered by him to be a meaningful framework, rich in associative values, for his own conceptions at this period.

The image of the artist as a wanderer, manifested by Courbet's identification with the Wandering Jew from the popular woodcut was, of course, not a new one when Courbet embodied it in *The Meeting*. On the metaphorical level, many romantic artists and writers had envisioned themselves as marginal creatures, restless voyagers at home nowhere on the face of the earth. Balzac, for example, had denominated himself "the Wandering Jew of thought . . . always afoot, forever on the move, with no rest, with no emotional satisfaction . . ."<sup>74</sup> In the realm of more concrete existence, many of the creative figures of Courbet's own time, particularly the young realists, acted out their roles as wanderers in the form of extended walking trips—voyages of discovery and self-discovery—in which informal attire, casual manners, and freedom of behavior were of the essence in the enterprise. In 1849, the Goncourt brothers undertook an extensive journey through France, "le sac au dos et le bâton à la main," dressed and

equipped like the poor art students of the time in smocks and caps with packs and parasols on their backs.<sup>75</sup> Two years earlier, in the summer of 1847, Gustave Flaubert had undertaken a similar voyage with Maxime Du Camp in the wilds of Brittany, which the former describes in the following terms: "Packs on our backs and hobnailed boots on our feet, we have done about 160 leagues on foot along the coast, sometimes sleeping completely dressed, due to lack of sheets and bed, and eating scarcely anything but eggs and bread. . . ." Flaubert goes on to praise the virtues of the trip: "The sea . . . the open air, the fields, the freedom—I mean true freedom: that which consists in saying what you want . . . and in walking at random. . . ."<sup>76</sup> In 1854, Courbet's friend, the *chansonnier* Pierre Dupont, published his hymn to the joys of the open road in the form of a song, "Le voyageur à pied," provided with an appropriate illustration of the traveler, "Guêtré, lavé, la tête fraîche,/ L'oeil limpide comme un miroir,/ Le sac au dos. . . ."<sup>77</sup> Courbet himself was even more explicit about the liberating qualities of vagabondage. In a letter of 1850 to his friend, Francis Wey, he declared: "In our overcivilized society, I must lead the life of a savage; I must even free myself from governments. . . . I have, therefore, just started out on the great, wandering, and independent life of the gypsy."<sup>78</sup>

In *The Meeting*, Courbet has represented himself not merely in the image of the wanderer, but as a voyager with a cause, conceiving of himself as the traveling apostle of realism in much the same way that he had depicted Jean Journet as the traveling apostle of Fourierism four years earlier.<sup>79</sup> Courbet was certainly not devoid of messianic impulses; it is to this aspect of his character that Baudelaire scornfully referred when, in 1855, he summed up realism as "Courbet sauvant le monde."<sup>80</sup> Courbet himself made the high aim of his enterprise explicit in a letter of 1855 to Alfred Bruyas, written shortly before the opening of the Realist Exhibition which the latter did so much to bring into being: "And you may be sure that you are thereby serving a holy and sacred cause, which is the cause of Liberty and Independence, cause to which I have con-

73 Nicolson, "Courbet's 'L'Aumône,'" 73f.

74 Cited by Shroder, *Icarus*, 103 and 263f., n. 22. Baudelaire was to extend the image of the artist as a wanderer to its ultimate point in his poem, "Le Voyage" (1859), in which the Wandering Jew figures as a simile for man fleeing Time:

. . . Il est, hélas! des coureurs  
sans répit,  
Comme le Juif errant et comme les  
apôtres,  
A qui rien ne suffit, ni wagon ni  
vaisseau,  
Pour fuir ce rétiaire infame . . .

(Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Y.-G. Le Dantec and Claude Pichois, eds., Paris, 1961, 126). For the image of the great man as a wanderer in the 19th century, see Werner Hofmann, *The Earthly Paradise: Art in the Nineteenth Century*, Brian Battershaw, trans., New York, 1961, 238f.

75 Cited in François Fosca (pseud.), *Edmond et Jules de Goncourt*, Paris, 1941, 30f.

76 Gustave Flaubert, Letter dated July 13, 1847, from St.-Malo to Ernest Chevalier, *Correspondance*, Paris, 1922, I, 230.

77 Pierre Dupont, "Le voyageur à Pied," *Chants et chansons*, 25.

78 Published in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 78.

79 See above, p. 215 and Fig. 20.

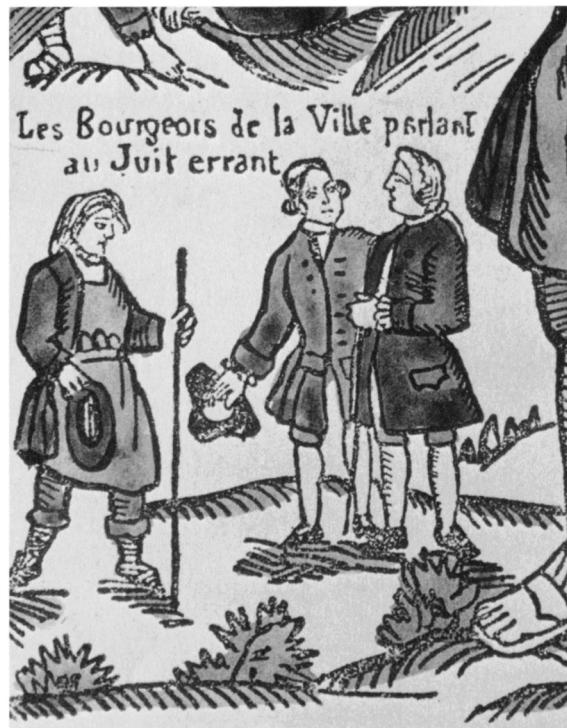
80 Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 637.



1



2



3



4

1. Courbet, *The Meeting*. Montpellier, Musée Fabre (photo: Archives photographiques)

2. "Le Juif-errant d'après une image de fabrication parisienne," Frontispiece from Champfleury's *Histoire*

3. Detail of Fig. 2

4. *Le vrai portrait du juif errant*, popular image from Le Mans, chez Leloup, detail (photo: Lancelot Lengyel)





5



6



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5. Courbet, copy of Hals's *Hille Bobbe*. Hamburg, Kunsthalle (photo: Vizzavona)

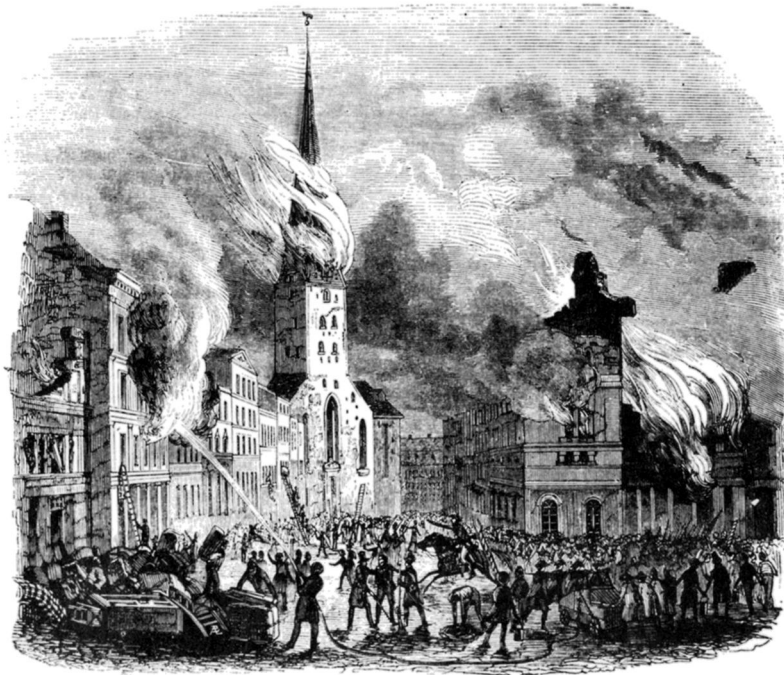
6. Courbet, copy of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait*. Paris, Louvre (photo: Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts)

7. Courbet, *Firemen Running to a Fire*. Paris, Petit Palais (photo: Bulloz)





8



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8. Van der Helst, *Captain Bicker's Company*. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

9. *Fire in Saint Peter's Church, Hamburg, May 7, 1842*, wood engraving in the *Magasin pittoresque*, 1842

10. *Sapeurs-Pompiers—Le Sinistre*, wood engraving in *L'illustration*, 1843





11



12



13



14



15

11. Courbet, *Grain-Sifters*, Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts (photo: Archives photographiques)

12. *Fabrique de tapisseries*, engraving after Velázquez, from Réveil, *Musée de peinture*

13. Courbet, *Toilette of the Bride*. Northampton, Mass., Smith College Museum of Art (photo: Bulloz)

14. *Vélasquez faisant le portrait d'une Infante*, engraving after Velázquez, from Réveil, *Musée de peinture*

15. *Le coucher de la mariée*, popular image from Paris, chez Codoni (photo: Lancelot Lengyel)



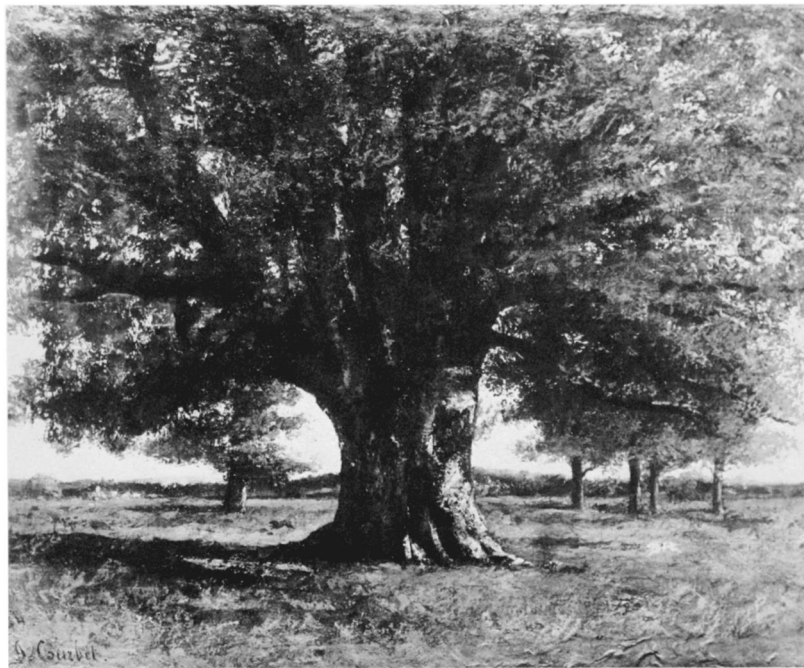
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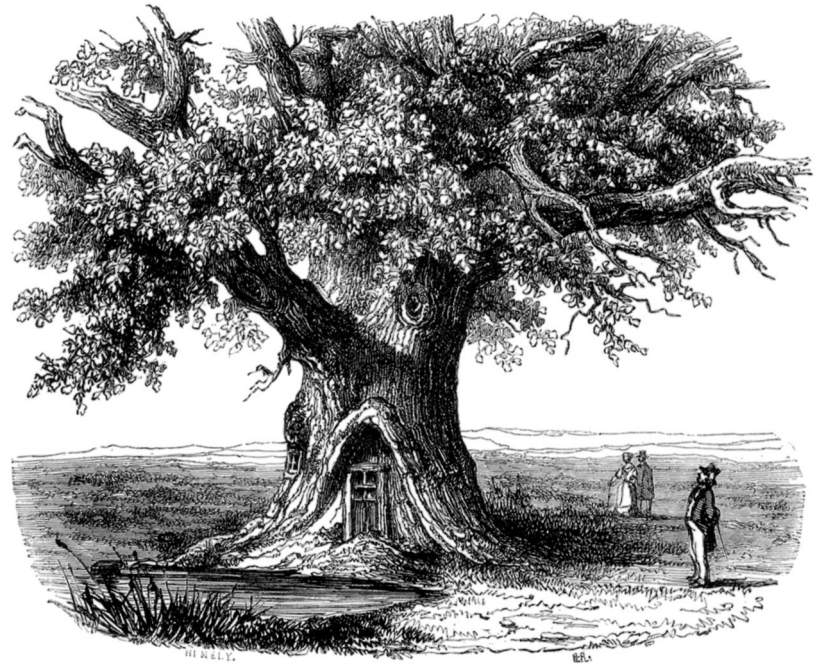
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19



16. *La mort du cerf*, after Landseer, wood engraving in the *Magasin pittoresque*, 1851

17. Courbet, *Stag Taking to the Water*. Marseilles, Musée des Beaux-Arts

18. Courbet, *Great Oak of Ornans*, Philadelphia, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

19. *Chêne gigantesque de Montravail*, wood engraving in the *Magasin pittoresque*, 1850



## Complainte.

1.  
 Ah! dans ce temps d'ignorance,  
 De démenie,  
 S'il existe un tendre cœur,  
 Qu'il regarde, qu'il pâlisse!  
 Qu'il frémissse,  
 Qu'il partage ma douleur!  
 2.  
 Qu'il transmette ma mémoire,  
 Mon histoire,  
 Au siècle le plus profond;  
 Au sein de chaque famille,  
 Que la fille,  
 Le soir bénisse mon nom!  
 3.  
 Un jour, nos belles montagnes,  
 Nos compagnes,  
 Le vallon où j'étais né,  
 Tout s'évanouit dans l'ombre,  
 J'étais sombre,  
 L'homme était infortuné.  
 4.  
 J'étais sombre, solitaire,  
 La prière  
 Succède à tous mes plaisirs;  
 Que de craintes, que de larmes,  
 Que de larmes,  
 Que de cris, que de soupçons!  
 5.  
 Bientôt, apôtre intrépide,  
 Je me guide  
 Au flambeau de vérité;  
 Dans le brouillard je m'allonge,  
 Je me plonge,  
 Pour sauver l'humanité!  
 6.  
 Qui redra ma souffrance,  
 Ma vaillance,  
 Dans ce combat de géant;  
 Qui redra mes orages,  
 Mes ouvrages,  
 Dans ce martyre incessant?



## L'APÔTRE JEAN JOURNET

Partant pour la conquête de l'harmonie universelle. —

13.  
 J'ai vu faible, sans haleine  
 Sous la peine,  
 L'enricillard prêt à pérorer,  
 J'ai vu le jeune homme impie,  
 Dans l'orgie,  
 Écarter de son loisir.  
 18.  
 J'ai vu cette ange déchu  
 Dans la rue  
 Fourmiller ses appas;  
 J'ai vu sa gorge si purée  
 La paume  
 De l'orgie et des simatés.

14.  
 J'ai vu couchés sur la glace,  
 Crier grâce,  
 La mère et son nouveau-né,  
 Point de cœur qui compatisse  
 Au supplice  
 De ce groupe infortuné.  
 19.  
 Dieu reçoit le sacrifice,  
 Et l'hospice  
 Va finir tant de malheurs;  
 Mais nul au près du suaire  
 Solitaire  
 Ne verra verser des pleurs!

15.  
 J'ai vu jouer la colombe  
 Sur la tombe  
 Envies de mille fleurs;  
 J'ai vu bientôt le rompire  
 Lui sourire  
 Pour l'accabler de mathans.  
 20.  
 Temple, enfin, lève la tête,  
 Vois la fête,  
 Amore de ton bonheur;  
 Le Seigneur nous est propice  
 Sa justice  
 Nous devant Redempteur!

16.  
 J'ai vu la fatale empreinte,  
 Vierge sainte!  
 On se peut envenimer;  
 J'ai vu le démon farouche  
 De sa bouche  
 Éléver l'archange opprimé.  
 21.  
 Il apparaît dans ce monde  
 Qu'il inonde  
 De paix, de gloire et d'amour;  
 Quand la fourbe, la colère,  
 La misère  
 Le divorcent à son tour.

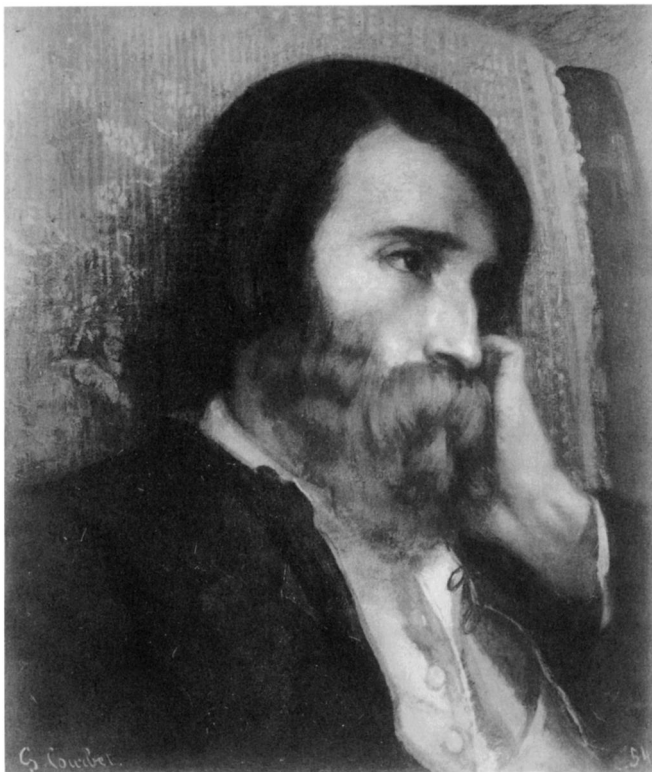
## Air de Joseph:

7.  
 Quand le monde me regarde,  
 Faible bande,  
 J'entonne mon chant d'amour,  
 Et quand son œil me domine,  
 Me fascine,  
 Pour m'absorber sans retour;  
 8.  
 Dieu soutient ma confiance,  
 Je m'avance  
 Vers l'inférieure cité,  
 La Babylone moderne,  
 La cavasse,  
 Le volcan d'iniquité.  
 9.  
 Qu'ai-je vu dans cette fange,  
 Le mélange,  
 De mille crimes divers,  
 Dans ce gouffre de misère,  
 De colère,  
 J'ai reconnu les enfers.  
 10.  
 J'ai vu, criminel exemple!  
 Un beau temple  
 Ewahi par des voleurs;  
 J'ai vu, patron de l'heure,  
 J'ai vu Meurire  
 Décider à tant d'horreurs.  
 11.  
 J'ai vu l'enfance adorée  
 Entourée  
 Dor, de pourpre et de rubis,  
 J'ai vu l'enfance couronnée  
 Sous l'écrin  
 Des haillons et du mépris.  
 12.  
 J'ai vu languir la richesse  
 Dans l'ivresse  
 D'un sacrilège sommeil;  
 J'ai vu, sublime couronné  
 L'indigence  
 Attendre en vain son réveil.

17.  
 J'ai vu la jeune imprudente,  
 Tendre amante,  
 S'abandonner au méchant;  
 Et j'ai vu dans la misère  
 Cette mère  
 Nouer de pleurs son enfant.  
 22.  
 Que son courage sublime  
 Nous ranime;  
 Et d'épines couronnés,  
 Enfonçons par la constance  
 L'insolence  
 De nos bourreaux d'ennemis!



21



22



23

21. Courbet, *A Beggar's Alms*. Glasgow, Art Gallery and Museum

22. Courbet, *Portrait of Alfred Bruyas*. Montpellier, Musée Fabre (photo: Archives photographiques)

23. Courbet, *Portrait of Alfred Bruyas*. Montpellier, Musée Fabre (photo: Bron)





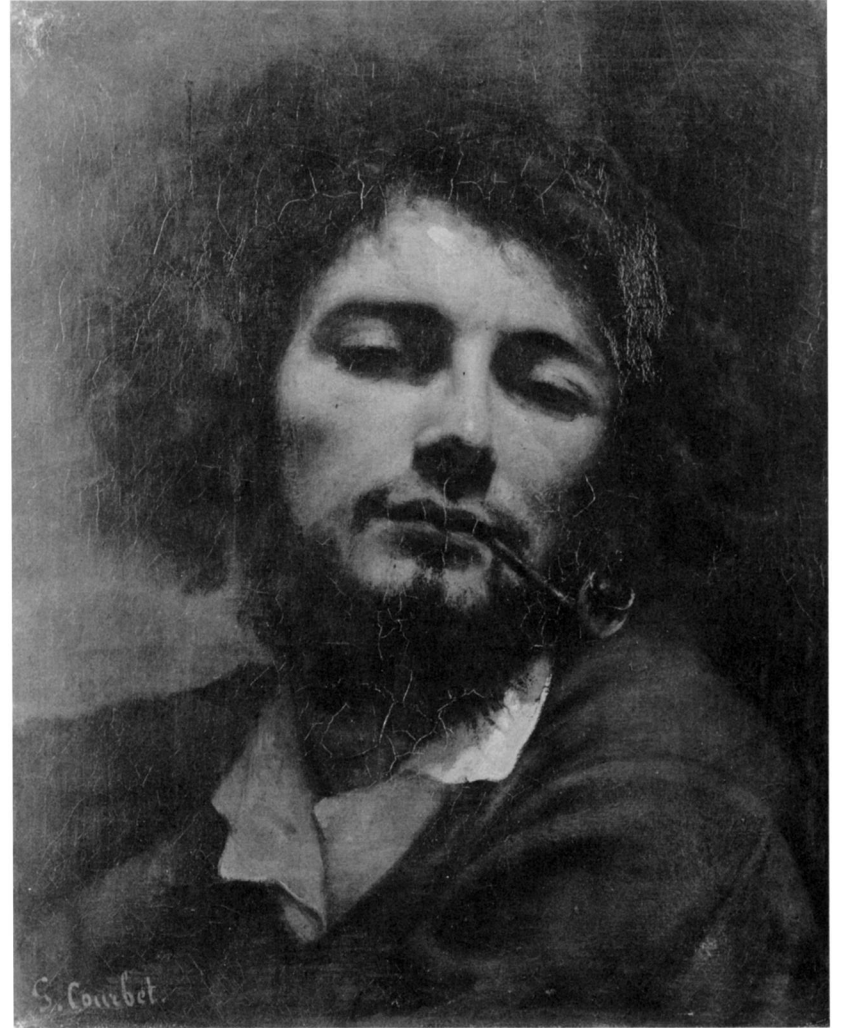
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24. Courbet, *Self-Portrait: The Wounded Man*. Paris, Louvre (photo: Archives photographiques)





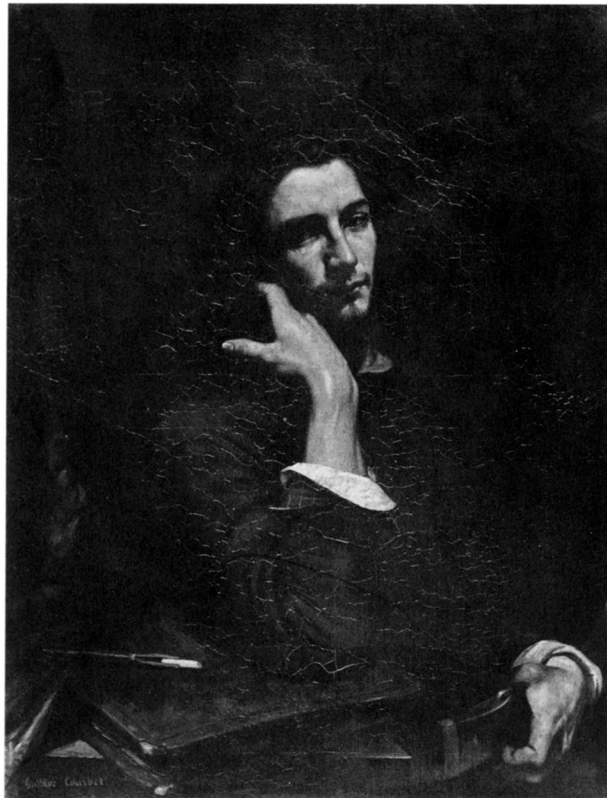
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26

25. Courbet, *Lovers in the Country*. Lyons, Musée des Beaux-Arts (photo: Giraudon)

26. Courbet, *Self-Portrait: The Man with the Pipe*. Montpellier, Musée Fabre (photo: Giraudon)



27



28



29

27. Courbet, *Self-Portrait: The Man in the Leather Belt*. Paris, Louvre (photo: Giraudon)

28. Courbet, *Ponds at Palavas*. Montpellier, Musée Fabre

29. Courbet, *Self-Portrait in the Striped Collar*. Montpellier, Musée Fabre (photo: Bulloz)



secrated my entire life."<sup>81</sup> Yet once again, it is important to realize that such a magisterial concept of the role of the artist was not simply a personal idiosyncrasy of Courbet's, but was part of a more general notion about the function of the artist in society. Earlier in the century, the Saint-Simonians had evolved a semi-mystical idea of the artist as a priest or messiah who was to exercise "un véritable sacrédoce";<sup>82</sup> one of the Saint-Simonian writers had even gone so far as to assert that *only* the artist, under proper Saint-Simonian auspices, needless to say, was worthy of leading humanity.<sup>83</sup> These notions about the messianic function of the artist found their climactic expression in Victor Hugo, who literally envisioned the poet as a prophet leading mankind onward to a utopian future:

Le poète en des jours impies  
Vient préparer des jours meilleurs.  
Il est l'homme des utopies,  
Les pieds ici, les yeux ailleurs.  
C'est lui qui sur toutes les têtes,  
En tout temps, pareil aux prophètes,  
Dans sa main, où tout peut tenir,  
Doit, qu'on l'insulte ou qu'on le loue,  
Comme une torche qu'il secoue,  
Faire flamboyer l'avenir!<sup>84</sup>

Courbet, as a realist, holds a more prosaic staff, rather than a torch, in *The Meeting*, but such ideas as those expressed in "La fonction du poète" may well have been sympathetic to him at the time.<sup>85</sup> While the basic outlines of his pose in *The Meeting* may have been determined by those of the Wandering Jew in the popular image, a high sense of confidence and conviction of the importance of his mission as a realist is conveyed by striking deviations from the popular prototype; by the assertive upward tilt of the artist's head, by the forceful turn of his body into the spatial setting, by his aggressive domination of the pictorial environment, by his surefooted stance, emphasized by the emphatic contact of his staff with the earth.

Still another significant alteration of the popular prototype

is Courbet's substitution of the figure of Bruyas' servant, Calas, for the second burgher in the popular image. Since the painting was probably planned before Courbet's departure for Montpellier, and since, furthermore, it is extremely doubtful whether the incident presumably recorded in *The Meeting* actually took place at all, this substitution could hardly have been effected in the interests of accurate *reportage*.<sup>86</sup> It should rather be considered an expression of Courbet's own sense of solidarity and identification with the people. He himself took pride in being provincial and plebeian: his rustic manners, his large appetite, his hearty handshake, his accentuated *patois*, his pride in his physical strength, even his technique of painting with his hands, a rag, or the palette knife, using the cheapest colors disposed in ordinary jars<sup>87</sup>—all were consciously popular and, as such, belligerently opposed to the characteristics of aristocrat, bourgeois, and post-romantic dandy alike in Paris. He intensely disliked being referred to as an artist: "Les artistes, je les méprise";<sup>88</sup> he refused what he considered the false distinction of a decoration, saying "this aristocracy does not seem enviable to me."<sup>89</sup> Like his friends, Buchon and Proudhon, he felt that the people were not only the truest sources of inspiration for an artist, but also his most comprehensive public as well: "The people enjoy my sympathies. I must address myself to them directly, so that I may draw my knowledge from them, so that they may make me live."<sup>90</sup> In *The Meeting*, it is the simple, peasant-like servant, as much as his master, who "recognizes" genius, and, in formal terms, offers the apparently fortuitous but nonetheless significant counterbalance for the figure of the artist himself. Edmond About's sarcastic comment that the servant looks as though he were serving in the Mass<sup>91</sup> is not so wide of the mark: he is, in fact, acknowledging the advent of the messiah of realism.

The *image* of the Wandering Jew also provided a meaningful compositional and iconographic framework for Courbet's conception of his relation to his patron. Since the time that *The Meeting* first appeared in the 1855 Exposition Univer-

81 Borel, *Lettres*, 89.

82 See Saint-Simon's "Dialogue entre l'artiste, le savant et l'industriel," of 1825, cited by H. J. Hunt, *Le socialisme et le romantisme en France: Etude de la presse socialiste de 1830 à 1848*, Oxford, 1935, 18.

83 Emile Barrault, *L'appel aux artistes*, Paris, 1830, cited in H. J. Hunt, *ibid.*, 34.

84 Victor Hugo, "La fonction du poète" (1839), II, 81–90, in *Oeuvres choisies*, P. Moreau and J. Boudout, eds., Paris, 1950, I, 850.

85 Courbet did, in fact, express his solidarity with Hugo in a letter to the poet of November 28, 1864, written while the latter was in exile in Guernsey. In this letter, Courbet refers to Hugo's *Châtiments* with enthusiasm and adds that he joins with him in the salvation of "democratic art in France": "We are strong enough, despite the renegades, despite present-day France and its insane herds; we will save the art, the intelligence, and the honesty of our country" (Courthion,

*Courbet raconté*, II, 100f.).

86 Still less should this figure be considered a mere space-filler, as has been suggested by Alexander, "Courbet and Assyrian Sculpture," 448.

87 See the account of Courbet by Théophile Silvestre, *Les artistes français*, 1861, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 30, and that by Dr. Paul Collin in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 258, as well as Schapiro, "Courbet and Popular Imagery," 170, for details of Courbet's often self-conscious popularism.

88 Cited by Castagnary, "Manuscrit inédit," in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 150.

89 Draft of a letter to Maurice Richard, Minister of Fine Arts, Paris, June, 1870; see Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 121.

90 Letter to Francis Wey, 1850, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 78.

91 "Voyage à travers l'Exposition des Beaux-Arts, 1855," in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 120.



selle, critics have been struck by the extreme diffidence of Bruyas' gesture, and the painting was immediately subtitled "Bonjour, M. Courbet" or "La Fortune s'inclinant devant le Génie." "His admirer and friend comes to meet him and salutes him most politely," remarked Edmond About in his Salon account of this work. "Fortunio, I mean, M. Courbet, doffs his hat to him with a lordly gesture."<sup>92</sup> More recently, Klaus Berger has remarked on Bruyas' "old-fashioned ceremonious gesture."<sup>93</sup> This gesture is, in fact, determined almost completely by that of the corresponding figure in the popular image; and, even more important, the verses of the traditional *complainte* accompanying the *image*, describing the Wandering Jew's meeting with the two burghers, habitually emphasized, as Champfleury points out,<sup>94</sup> the cordiality of their reception of the wanderer. The burghers are almost invariably characterized as "fort docile" and their invitation to the Jew is always couched in language of an extreme courtesy:

On lui dit: bonjour, maître,  
De grace accordez-nous  
La satisfaction d'être  
Un moment avec vous . . .<sup>95</sup>

Neither the artist's arrogance nor the Wandering Jew prototype, however, completely determined Courbet's conception of his relation to Bruyas, as he depicted it in *The Meeting*. On a personal level, Courbet seems to have felt genuine respect and warm affection for his unconventional and generous patron, despite his usual violent hostility toward anyone or anything that represented authority, and in his letters as well as his portraits he gives the impression of regarding his *maecenas* as a partner in the realist enterprise, rather than as a mere financial supporter. "With your antecedents, your intelligence, your courage, and your pecuniary means, you can save us during our lifetime and make us skip over a century," he wrote to Bruyas in 1854.<sup>96</sup> In addition to representing him in *The Meeting* and in the right-hand group of figures in the *Painter's Studio*, Courbet painted three portraits of Bruyas, two

during the summer of his visit in 1854 (Fig. 22),<sup>97</sup> and one in 1853 (Fig. 23), in which the sensitive and sickly Bruyas is shown with his blue-veined hand resting on a green book imprinted with the words: "Etude sur l'art moderne. Solution: A. Bruyas,"<sup>98</sup> certainly an expression of confidence and esteem on the artist's part. And while one might suspect somewhat mixed motives in some of the artist's more effusive encomiums of Bruyas, passages of his letters to his patron certainly convey a sense of deep attachment. "When I have decided to love someone, it is for life," he wrote to Bruyas in 1854. "You are my friend; you cannot doubt it."<sup>99</sup> Bruyas, on his part, was no doubt charmed by Courbet's vitality and sheer productivity, qualities that he felt sorely lacking in himself, and he gave evidence of his admiration for the painter by constant encouragement and support, purchasing his paintings, lending him money, most significantly for the construction of Courbet's Pavilion of Realism in 1855, and even sending him photographs when requested to do so.<sup>100</sup> Certainly, the affection and friendship that bound the two men, commemorated by *The Meeting* and expressed in the work by Bruyas' grave gesture of welcome and Courbet's more open acknowledgment of pleasure, was mutual.

This sense of the equality of artist and patron, or even of the superiority of the former, suggested by *The Meeting* was not unique to Courbet's painting. Sentimental, anecdotal, pictorial representations of the elevation of the artist vis-à-vis the patron, such as Ingres' *Death of Leonardo da Vinci*,<sup>101</sup> where the dying artist is tenderly supported in the arms of Francis I, or Robert-Fleury's *Charles V Picking up Titian's Paint Brush*,<sup>102</sup> in which the monarch stoops down to assist the aged painter, are simply superficial symptoms of a more serious nineteenth century phenomenon. The drastic change that occurred during this period in the relative status of patron and protégé was, of course, a natural concomitant of both the more general social revolution of the times and the notion of the magisterial function of the artist himself. Romantic artists,

92 *Ibid.*, 119f.

93 Berger, "Courbet in His Century," 24.

94 Champfleury, *Histoire*, 91f.

95 Lines from the *complainte* accompanying a popular image of the Wandering Jew from Pont-à-Mousson (Meurthe), chez Haguenthal, in the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, Paris.

96 Letter from Courbet to Alfred Bruyas, probably of December, 1854 (Borel, *Lettres*, 75). The anonymous author of the review of Gerstle Mack's *Gustave Courbet* ("The Challenge of Courbet," *Times Literary Supplement*, 51, June 27, 1952, 414), suggests that this letter may have been written as late as January, 1855.

97 Both of these, head and shoulder portraits, are in the Musée Fabre at Montpellier. The more important of the two, in which Bruyas faces to the right, leaning his head in his hand, against the background of a lace antimacassar, the portrait that obviously provides the basis for Bruyas' likeness in *The Meeting* (see below, p. 220), is reproduced in color by Guy Dumur, "La Galerie Bruyas," *L'oeil*, No. 60, December, 1959, 86. In the other portrait of 1854, Bruyas turns to the left in pure profile and wears a green cravat.

98 This portrait, in which the subject is represented in three-quarter length, was also in the Galerie Bruyas and is now in the Musée Fabre in Montpellier. Bruyas commissioned some thirty-five portraits of himself during his lifetime.

99 Courbet, Letter of November, 1854, from Paris, to Alfred Bruyas (Borel, *Lettres*, 47).

100 See Courbet's letters to Bruyas of November, 1854 (Borel, *Lettres*, 52) and of about April, 1855 (Borel, *Lettres*, 80), and Guy Dumur, "La Galerie Bruyas," 92.

101 See Georges Wildenstein, *Ingres*, London, 1954, 183, Cat. Nos. 118 and 119; 220, Cat. No. 267; 185, figs. 64, 65, and 66. The original version, signed and dated 1818, is lost.

102 Joseph Nicolas Robert-Fleury, *Charles-Quint ramassant le pinceau du Titien*, exhibited in the Salon of 1843, reproduced in the *Magasin pittoresque*, 11, 1843, 165.

103 Chateaubriand, Letter dated Feb. 5, 1823, in *Correspondance*, iv, 91, cited by Shroder, *Icarus*, 46.

104 Alfred de Vigny, Text dated 1848, in *Oeuvres*, II, 1264, cited by Shroder, *Icarus*, 46.

alienated from the middle class that was nevertheless their source of livelihood, had long attempted to replace the aristocracy of birth with one of talent. Chateaubriand, for example, had written in a letter to Mme. Récamier in 1823: "Talent ought to have privileges. It is the oldest aristocracy and the most certain, that I know,"<sup>103</sup> and Alfred de Vigny noted in his journal in 1848: "David d'Angers, when he sculpted my bust wanted to write on it, in spite of me, the *count of Vigny*. I insisted that my name stand alone, saying that if two or three members of Posterity remembered my name, it would be that of the Poet and not that of the Noble."<sup>104</sup> A graphic illustration, rather similar in form to the incident represented in *The Meeting*, of the tendency of the aristocracy of art to replace that of birth or money is presented in an amusing, and perhaps apocryphal, incident presumably reported by Beethoven concerning his and Goethe's encounter with nobility: "Yesterday, as we were walking back, we met all the Imperial family, we saw them coming from afar, and Goethe let go my arm to get out of their way onto the side of the road. . . . For myself, I pulled my hat down over my eyes and bore down on to the very centre of the company, hands crossed behind my back! Princes and courtiers parted and stood aside, the Archduke Rudolph took off his hat to me, the Empress was the first to salute me; their lordships *know* me. . . ." <sup>105</sup> The same recalcitrant spirit toward authority is exhibited in Courbet's own dramatic refusal of the Comte de Nieuwerkerke's cordial offer of government patronage: "You can imagine," Courbet relates in a letter to Bruyas, "how furious I became after such an overture; I replied that I understood absolutely nothing of all that he had just said to me, first of all because he assured me that he was a government and that I felt myself in no way included in that government, that I, too, was a government, and that I defied him to do anything at all for mine that would make me accept."<sup>106</sup> While in *The Meeting*, Courbet, like his counterpart in the popular image, may take his hat off to return his patron's salutation, the implications of the gestures

are clear: by the middle of the nineteenth century, the independent, self-respecting artist feels that he has every right to be saluted by fortune.

Coming at a climactic point in the painter's career, and as the end term in a whole series of self-portraits, *The Meeting* is both a mature expression of Courbet's conception of himself as an artist, and, at the same time, an important example of his style and viewpoint as a realist. Courbet's earlier self-portraits reveal the artist as a rather narcissistic, self-conscious if extremely gifted young man, whose good looks are emphasized by the dark shadows and mannered gestures of the current romantic school. In 1844, he had represented himself as a wounded hero (Fig. 24), in the manner of Dumas or Byron,<sup>107</sup> basing his pose on that of Delacroix's wounded St. Sebastian,<sup>108</sup> or, at about the same time, as a romantic lover (Fig. 25), against the backdrop of a turbulent sky, under the inspiration of George Sand.<sup>109</sup> In the later forties, he had depicted himself as a young bohemian, peering out languidly through half-closed eyelids, puffing on a pipe (Fig. 26), rather in the manner of Brouwer's *Smoker* in the Louvre;<sup>110</sup> or he had conceived of himself as a modern rival of the great portraitists of the past, such as Titian, whose *Man with the Glove* in the Louvre was certainly the source of the old-masterly sobriety if not the romantic self-adulation, of the *Man in the Leather Belt* (Fig. 27).<sup>111</sup>

Within this series of self-portraits, *The Meeting* constitutes a decisive turning point, a rejection of romanticism and eclecticism on both the stylistic and psychological levels. In May, 1854, Courbet had written to Bruyas: "I have made many portraits of myself during my life, corresponding with the changes in my state of mind—I have written the story of my life, in short. . . . There remains one more of them for me to do, that is the man firm in his principles: the free man."<sup>112</sup> It would certainly seem as though Courbet had *The Meeting* in mind when he made this statement, and that the work must be regarded not only as a portrait of the artist as a Wandering Jew,

105 Published by Eugen Weber, ed., *Paths to the Present: Aspects of European Thought from Romanticism to Existentialism*, New York, 1960, 123. Weber, who dates the Beethoven letter August 15, 1813, instead of August 15, 1812, which is the more usual dating, mentions that the authenticity of the document is in doubt. I am grateful to Prof. H. W. Janson for having brought the Beethoven letter and its relevance to Courbet's painting, to my attention.

106 Courbet, Letter to Alfred Bruyas of December, 1854, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, II, 81. The Comte de Nieuwerkerke was at the time Director-General of the Imperial Museums and Commissioner of the Fine Arts of the Imperial Household.

107 *The Wounded Man*, refused by the Salon of 1844 and probably retouched in 1854, now in the Louvre.

108 *The Wounded Man* seems clearly related to Delacroix's *St. Sebastian Aided by the Holy Women* of 1836, in the Église de Nantua; for a reproduction of this work, see Louis Hourticq, *Delacroix: L'oeuvre du maître*, Paris, 1930, 61.

109 *The Lovers in the Country*, signed and dated 1844, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyons. It is no doubt to this self-portrait that Courbet refers, when, in a letter to Alfred

Bruyas of May 1854 (Borel, *Lettres*, 20), he mentions "the portrait of a man in the ideal and the absolute love [sic] of the manner of Goethe, George Sand, etc." There exists another version of the *Lovers in the Country* in the Petit Palais, published in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, facing p. 49, where it is dated 1845.

110 *Self-Portrait: The Man with a Pipe*, Montpellier, Musée Fabre, probably painted in 1846 and refused for the Salon of 1847. It is probably to this work that Courbet refers when he speaks of "the portrait of a fanatic, an ascetic, of a man disillusioned by the idiocies that served for his education. . ." in the letter of May, 1854, to Bruyas (Borel, *Lettres*, 19). While the *Smoker* in the Louvre may not actually be by Brouwer, in Courbet's time it was certainly considered a self-portrait by this artist; see Ludwig Goldscheider, *Five Hundred Self-Portraits*, Vienna and London, 1937, 41f. and pl. 89.

111 Exhibited in the Salon of 1849 under the title, *Portrait of the Painter, a Study from the Venetians*. I am inclined to agree with Georges Riat (*Gustave Courbet, peintre*, Paris, 1906, 66) who dates the work ca. 1845.

112 Letter from Courbet to Bruyas, May, 1854 (Borel, *Lettres*, 20).



but as a portrait of Courbet as a free man, in the sense implied by the letter. Within the context of Courbet's series of self-portraits, the *Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory of Seven Years of My Life as an Artist*, the centerpiece of Courbet's Realist Exhibition of 1855, may be seen as a monumental aftermath, the Wandering Jew come home, as it were, home to a world that is at once that of created art and observed reality. In it Courbet has depicted himself, his painting materials, the rejected studio properties of romanticism and classicism, with a nude, unidealized "inspiring muse" at his side, his variegated proletarian sources of inspiration to his left, his literary and artistic friends to his right, engaged in the very act of creation itself. "Here," as Harry Levin has put it, "the real allegory is that of the self-portraying artist, whose world is the studio and whose studio is the world, whose symbols are actualities and whose ideology is his art."<sup>113</sup>

*The Meeting*, then, must be considered one of the major statements of Courbet's realist undertaking. In its formal qualities, as well as in its thematic implications, it is a forceful pictorial paradigm of Courbet's creative outlook at its height, embodying a viewpoint toward, rather than a mere reproduction of, reality. While the composition may have been based on that offered by the popular image, and the latter may account for certain of its expressive qualities, like the dignified stiffness and restraint of the poses of Bruyas and his servant, there is little of the naïve schematization or simplification of popular imagery in the actual appearance of the work.<sup>114</sup> On the contrary, the idiosyncratic lineaments of each of the observed, individual elements of the painting have been exploited by Courbet to their fullest. The forcefully modeled silhouettes of Calas, Bruyas, the black-and-white dog, and of the artist himself, stand out as discrete, densely painted units against the glowing turquoise sky. The artist's delighted response to the light-filled, brightly colored atmosphere of the Midi seems to have anticipated Van Gogh's: the whole tonality of this work is far lighter and more intensely saturated than that of his previous paintings, and he has accurately recorded the characteristic details of the foliage of the region around Montpellier in the foreground.<sup>115</sup> The landscape background is obviously based on a painted sketch "sur le motif," probably one

similar to the later *Ponds at Palavas* (Fig. 28), now in the Musée Fabre,<sup>116</sup> while his own head and that of his patron are modeled after portraits (Figs. 22, 29) that he created during the course of his visit.<sup>117</sup>

Characteristically, Courbet has made no attempt to unite the figures by means of an underlying color orchestration, nor has he suggested the interrelation of figures and atmosphere through blurred contours or loose, open brushwork. From the formal point of view, *The Meeting* is indeed the sum of its various individual units, a work in which traditional principles of composition have been resolutely rejected in favor of an additive pictorial organization,<sup>118</sup> an organization which, in its informality, its lack of accentuation, of suave transitions from part to part, or of externally imposed coherence, seemed to Courbet the embodiment of the very nature of experienced reality itself.<sup>119</sup> As a visual entity, the work is spontaneous, direct and fresh in its handling, objective yet intensely personal in its impact: one can see why Salon visitors in 1855 may have found it unconventional or even offensive on the stylistic level as well as on the thematic one.

Viewed within the context of nineteenth century painting as a whole, however, *The Meeting* is truly a work lying midway between the past and the future. Adventurous in his choice of themes, his rejection of *poncif* and preconception, innovating in the random, additive quality of his compositions, the deliberate stiffness and awkwardness of his forms and his insistence on the materiality and density of the pigmented surface, unconventional in his choice of sources and subjects, Courbet, in *The Meeting*, as in the other major realist masterpieces of the fifties, is nevertheless still connected to the great tradition of Western picturemaking. He reveals this by the very fact that he feels it necessary to turn to preexisting imagery at all, in order to provide a basis for his new vision of the contemporary. The grandiosity of conception of these paintings and the monumentality of their scale imply a new and more suitable kind of history painting, rather than a complete rejection of this time-honored genre and all that it implied. His very manner of working was traditional: his major masterpieces were always carefully built up in the studio on a dark underpainting, generally on the basis of sketches

113 Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn*, New York, 1966, 70.

114 Meyer Schapiro has observed the same phenomenon in Courbet's style ("Courbet and Popular Imagery," 184).

115 Information communicated to the author by M. Jean Claparède, curator of the Musée Fabre, Montpellier, in 1963. I am extremely grateful to M. Claparède for his generous assistance in providing me with information about *The Meeting* and Courbet's stay in Montpellier.

116 The *Ponds at Palavas* was executed during the course of Courbet's 1857 sojourn in Montpellier, but is remarkably similar in tonality and composition to the

background of *The Meeting*. No specific sketch for the background of the latter is still in existence, to my knowledge, but since Courbet often executed such preliminary studies on cigar boxes, he may well have considered them unworthy of preservation.

117 See above, p. 218 and note 97 for the portrait of Bruyas in question. The prototype for Courbet's own portrait in *The Meeting*, the *Self-Portrait*, in the *Striped Collar*, was later to serve as the model for the artist's likeness in the *Painter's Studio* of 1855. Interestingly enough, in this small self-portrait, Courbet has represented himself wearing Bruyas' green jacket with the distinctive striped collar,

or previously existing works, rather than completed in one or two sessions in the open air.

Although it would be a ridiculous oversimplification to consider Courbet's realist paintings of the fifties mere propaganda, or to insist too strongly on the connections between his art and his political beliefs or his popular and provincial background, Courbet's sense of reality was nevertheless conditioned by these values. The word "realism" obviously had a special connotation for Courbet, which he summed up, awkwardly it is true, by stating that the basis of realism was the negation of the ideal and of all that followed from it; and that it was in this way that he had achieved the emancipation of reason, the emancipation of the individual and, finally, democracy. In short, for Courbet, realism and democracy were inseparably linked. "Realism," he affirmed, "is in essence the democratic art."<sup>120</sup>

While a work like *The Meeting* establishes an image of reality that is vividly contemporary, specifically localized, and egregiously personal, yet it is a reality conceived of in terms quite different from those more adventurously disengaged ones that were to inspire the Impressionist's attempt to capture the ever-changing, ephemeral surface of appearance on their canvases. It was Monet and Degas who were to struggle to achieve liberation from all preexisting or predetermined modes of perception and notation in order to create a stylistic paradigm for a reality that was *nothing but* appearance at a given moment, a reality freed from the last vestiges of extrapictorial value, to achieve a realism, in short, which accepted completely the world of appearance as reality and as the *only* reality for the artist. A comparison of *The Meeting* with a similar composition by Degas, such as the *Place de la Concorde* (Viscount Lepic and his daughters), of about 1875,<sup>121</sup> with its cutoff view of the main figures, its tangential spatial organization, its deliberately casual unbalances, its sophisticated denial of expressive or compositional focus, its exaggerated jump from foreground to background, suggesting, but not necessarily imitating the indifferent yet accurate recording of a passing event by the instantaneous photograph, and with its poignant suggestion of the necessarily transient nature of all such events or encounters, brings Courbet's relatively tra-

ditional approach to reality, and its pictorial concomitant, into sharp relief. "Je ne peins pas l'être, je peins le passage":<sup>122</sup> Montaigne's dictum might well apply to the Impressionist's enterprise, never to Courbet's. A painting of human figures in a landscape, like Monet's *Wild Poppies* of 1873,<sup>123</sup> where figures, setting, and atmosphere are regarded as a single, indissoluble if impermanent, visual entity, reveals the extent to which, for Courbet, the picture is still considered a *subject* to be developed in the studio on the basis of sketches and prototypes and with a unifying theme, no matter how richly endowed with perceptual veracity, rather than an evanescent *motif*, to be seized on the spot, all at once, in the open air, with the more conventional human attitudes willfully subordinated to the imperatives of immediate sensation.

Yet it was Courbet who, in paintings like *The Meeting*, opened the way for the Impressionist revolution. His realism did not imply a finicky verisimilitude nor a painstaking reduplication of minute detail; it was rather that courageous confrontation of reality, that sounding of the hollowness of rhetoric, outworn traditions, and formal conventions, which is the realist's mission. Like the great realist novelists, Stendhal and Flaubert, who found their themes in the most trivial *faits divers* of the popular press, in the actions and lives of the most ordinary people, rather than those of the grand, the exotic, or the mighty, so Courbet could turn for his subjects to the lives of his friends and contemporaries, seeing them neither as symbols of elevated ideals, nor as personifications of some higher level of value. And, as in the case of the novels of the great realist writers, just because of this refusal of transcendence, beyondness, or shopworn idealism, just because of this insistence on the intractable opacity of things and the intransigent presentness of human beings, Courbet's paintings crystallize the spirit of the age and expand to assume their own, new epic dimensions. While *The Meeting* is not merely the representation of an isolated incident, it could be, and is, among other things; its meaning is not contained in some supererogated message or in an underlying symbolic content, but rather is openly revealed by the pictorial structure itself. The inspiring motif of the Wandering Jew is an element in this structure, expanding but in no way explaining it, and as such,

the very jacket that his patron wears in *The Meeting*.

118 See Berger, "Courbet in his Century," 24.

119 Berger (*ibid.*, 22-30) has given the most convincing account of the formal component of Courbet's realism.

120 Statement by Courbet that appeared in the *Précurseur d'Anvers*, August 22, 1861, cited by Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre*, in Courthion, *Courbet raconté*, I, 160f.

121 Paul André Lemoisne, *Degas et son oeuvre*, Paris, 1946-49, II, No. 368. The painting, formerly in the Gerstenberg Collection in Berlin, is now believed to be

destroyed. A good reproduction is to be found in Jean Sutherland Boggs, *Portraits by Degas*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962, pl. 88.

122 Michel Eyquem de Montaigne, *Les essais de Michel de Montaigne*, Pierre Villey, ed., Paris, 1922-23, III, 27.

123 For a reproduction of this work, in the Louvre, see William C. Seitz, *Claude Monet*, New York, 1960, 97.



is directly related to Courbet's conception of realism. The motivations that led him to assimilate his meeting with Bruyas and his servant to that of the Wandering Jew with two burghers, or even to conceive of a popular image as a suitable pic-

torial prototype at all, are the same as those that led him to choose a contemporary, personal event like that depicted in *The Meeting* as the subject for a major painting.

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