STARK, DAVID ETHAN

CHARLES DE GROUX AND SOCIAL REALISM IN BELGIAN PAINTING, 1848-1875 (VOLUMES I AND II)

The Ohio State University

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CHARLES DE GROUX AND SOCIAL REALISM
IN BELGIAN PAINTING, 1848-1875
VOLUME I
DISSertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
David Stark, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1979
To my mother and father
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INTRODUCTION

The years 1848 and 1875 mark the beginning and end points of the first fully developed and most innovative phase of social realism in Belgian painting. Social realism in art is only one aspect of "realism" per se, an artistic current which was identified in nineteenth century French painting as early as 1836, received general usage by around 1846,¹ and, with the writings of Champfleury (1823-1889) and paintings of Gustave Courbet (1819-1887), developed by 1855 into a programatic movement antagonistic to romanticism. Realism in art--both in France and elsewhere--has been characterized by its "truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life."² Social realism exhibits these qualities in focusing upon the society of the particular artist's own time and place, accurately revealing the life-styles, and often the problems, of the upper, middle, but most often, lower classes.

Although in theory social realism may be distinguished from its more subjective, emotion-laden predecessor, social romanticism,³ there is in fact considerable overlapping. Historically speaking, use of the term social realism would ideally be tied to the socially conscious art which coincides with the programatic phase of realism, but it becomes permissible and customary nonetheless to extend its usage to include similarly motivated art that precedes or follows the third quarter of
the nineteenth century. It is in this general sense that I will use the term, with the understanding that social realist art reaches its purest, most classic state when practiced during the active period of programmatic realism.

Social realism in mid-nineteenth century European painting is most commonly associated with the painters Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) and Jean-François Millet (1814-1875), who both began to monumentalize the lower classes of France around 1848. The fact that images of the peasantry and proletariat anticipating The Stonebreakers, The Burial at Ornans and The Sower (all c. 1849-1850) had been developing for decades not only in France but other European countries as well comes as no surprise to the specialist in nineteenth century painting, but few full-scale studies have been devoted to the genesis and development of social realism either in France or elsewhere. A recent exception is Howard Rodee's Scenes of Rural and Urban Poverty in Victorian Painting and their Development, 1850 to 1890 (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1975), which reveals the great quantity of little-known social realist works, many now lost, that were produced in England during the latter half of the century. In the present study of a parallel phase in Belgian painting, I will approach the material from an iconographic standpoint, analyzing the paintings' subject matter in relation to the classical and romantic academic themes from which they departed (or, in some cases, modified), the indigenous and foreign prototypes from which they arose, and the social realities which they reflected.
Unlike the situation in England, in which no one social realist significantly overshadowed his colleagues for any length of time, Belgian painting of this type did have a leader, Charles de Groux (1825-1870), an artist upon whom any study of social realism in Belgium must necessarily focus. Today a forgotten figure, often confused with his son Henri (1867-1930), a symbolist painter, Charles de Groux was the focal point in his own day of a lively debate between proponents and detractors of realism in painting, and his soulful images of downtrodden peasants and city-dwellers elicited praise, several decades after his death in 1870 from the post-impressionist giants Vincent van Gogh (1853-1893) and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903).

One individual study exists on De Groux, published the year after his death in 1871 by his friend, the novelist and painter Emile Leclercq (1827-1907). My own study is not intended as a monograph on De Groux and will focus almost exclusively upon his contemporary scenes of the lower classes, although his oeuvre includes history paintings, book illustrations, stained-glass window cartoons and journalistic lithographs as well. Nevertheless, many hitherto unanswered questions about the early phases of De Groux’s career preceding his realist iconography are essential to an understanding of social realism in Belgian painting and will be examined in the course of this study.

One of the most perplexing of such question involves De Groux’s painting The Drunkard of 1853, which "is often considered to mark the début of Belgian realism." Such an assertion does not take into account, however, a Paupers' Bench (now lost) exhibited by De Groux in the Antwerp Salon of 1849, or, even earlier, the presence of two
controversial paintings in the Brussels Salon of 1848: Joseph Stevens' *The Beggars or Morning in Brussels* and Leonard van de Kerkhove's *Misery of Flanders: Emigration of Flemish Beggars*, which expose the calamitous effects of a three-year old economic and agricultural crisis that was ravaging Flanders. It is thus 1848 which, in my opinion, signals the beginning of the phase of social realism practiced by the post-romantic generation of which Charles de Groux will soon become the most prominent exponent. After a prologue which briefly surveys the consistent tradition of lower-class imagery in Flemish and Walloon painting from the time of the Flemish primitives to the mid-nineteenth century, my first chapter will open with an examination of the causes and extent of the 1845 crisis in Flanders, followed by an analysis of a corresponding school of Flemish novelists who frequently injected social themes into their stories. This leads to the starting point of my study, the aborted nonrevolution of 1848 in Belgian politics, a phenomenon which did not, however, extinguish the sparks of artistic revolt in the Salon of that year.

Having thus established a historic and artistic context into which De Groux may be placed, the next three chapters will analyze his career and social realist paintings. The two key problems regarding De Groux's early career, the subject of Chapter II, are those involving his artistic relationship to Courbet and his activities as a student in Düsseldorf. Since Courbet's *Stonebreakers* was exhibited, with considerable stir, in the Brussels Salon of 1851, many writers regard De Groux's supposedly ground-breaking *Drunkard* (1853, M.R.B.A., Brussels) as a direct response to the French realist, conveniently overlooking De Groux's earlier
Paupers' Bench (1849)—and the two year time lag between the Salon of 1851 and The Drunkard.

During those two years, De Groux was in Düsseldorf, rounding out his artistic education after eight years of training in the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. Very little is known about De Groux's stay in Düsseldorf, or why he went to study there at all. He lost the Prix de Rome competition sponsored by the Brussels Academy in 1850, so it appears that Düsseldorf, a leading art center in Europe since 1826 and conveniently close to Brussels, would have been his logical alternative for training abroad. But although the recently rediscovered Ruth and Naomi, painted during his first year at Düsseldorf, conforms, in subject and style, to the precepts of Nazarene history painting officially espoused by the Düsseldorf Academy, De Groux's name never appears on the Academy's enrollment list.

This suggests an affiliation with the nonacademic faction of Düsseldorf genre painters, whose politically left-wing Tendenzbilder (tableaux à thèse) exposed the problems of the oppressed classes in the Rhineland. The impact of this school of painters upon De Groux's iconography has never been systematically examined, but the anecdotal nature and pathetic tone of the works executed during the period of De Groux's career which I shall refer to as his "early realism" (1849-1857) is much closer in spirit to Düsseldorf Tendenzmalerei than to Courbet's objective approach.

Chapter III will examine the transition in De Groux's painting that leads to his mature period in 1857, when his style becomes monumental and smoothly finished, and his approach to subject matter more
restrained and austere, following the lead of Alfred Stevens' large-scale *Soldiers of Vincennes* (Musée de Compiègne), and his brother Joseph's *Episode at the Dog Market in Paris* (M.R.B.A., Brussels), both widely acclaimed in the Universal Exposition of 1855 in Paris. It is during this mature period that De Groux's masterpieces are produced: *The Pilgrimage of St. Guido of Anderlecht* (1857, M.R.B.A., Brussels), *The Coffee Mill* (1857, K.M.S.K., Antwerp), and *Grace Before the Meal* (1861, M.R.B.A., Brussels). These latter works, to my mind, bear the mark of Courbet's monumentalization of the proletariat more than De Groux's earlier works, yet the religious piety which infuses the figures is more closely akin to Millet. The smoother paint application, frieze-like compositional formats and tendency to stiffen figures into frozen, ritualistic poses suggest not only a delayed impact of the Nazarene style now transferred to genre painting, but the influence of fellow Belgian Henri Leys (1815-1869), who painted historic genre scenes set in the Northern Renaissance in an archaic, Gothicizing style close to De Groux's.

Having thus traced the major stages of De Groux's stylistic evolution, I shall proceed in Chapter IV with an analysis which will be iconographic rather than chronological, attempting to determine the major themes into which De Groux's socially conscious genre paintings may be grouped and the iconographic traditions from which they stem. The works have been divided into four general categories. The theme of drunkards introduced by De Groux in 1853 was one to which he turned many times throughout his career. Although the style varied, De Groux's moralistic presentation of intemperance as a destructive vice remained constant. His scenes of virtue are more numerous, including themes of
alms-giving and religious ritual, the latter which is both public (funerals, processions, pilgrimages, church worship) and private (grace before the meal). Finally, one can pick out a cycle of paintings depicting crisis, usually within the context of a family: conscription, loss of property, illness and widowhood.

Inevitably one is faced with the problem of whether De Groux's exposure of lower class misery was in any way politically motivated—whether he advocated reform through his paintings—or whether he, in fact, intended for his works to indict the church, government or commercial and industrial capitalists for exploiting the proletariat. I shall attempt to demonstrate, in the conclusion of Chapter IV, that De Groux was neither a social reformer nor a social critic. De Groux's approach to his subject matter reveals, I believe, a fatalistic world view whereby poverty is seen as a permanent condition which is never to be eradicated but rather endured, with the aid of Christianity's promise of salvation in the next world.

All of this runs counter to the recently developed "scientific socialism" of Marx, who lived in Brussels from 1845-1848. Ironically, De Groux's social realism is closer in spirit to "social romanticism," a term usually applied to the school of French novelists (Hugo and Sand being the most prominent) whose outlook reflected the utopian socialist theories of Saint-Simon and Fourier. The latter two philosophers had many disciples and active followers in Belgium.

In Chapter V I shall leave De Groux to treat the other Belgian painters working on social themes from around 1857 until five years after De Groux's death, when Charles Hermans' *At Dawn* was exhibited at
the Brussels Salon of 1875, signalling the conclusion of the period under consideration. Besides the Stevens brothers already cited, these other artists include those painters whom critics considered to be followers of De Groux from the time of 1857 Brussels Salon, such as Henri Bource (1826-1899), Emile Leclercq, and the Comte Louis Dubois d'Eische (1822-1864). Since most of the paintings of these minor figures have been lost, it is only through Salon exhibition titles and critical reviews that an idea of their art may be reconstructed.

In 1868, an organization known as the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts was formed in Brussels, whose members include De Groux and the Stevens brothers. Conceived as a meeting-ground for avant-garde artists in rebellion against the still-prevalent romantic classicism of the academy, the group was dedicated to the principle of "modernity" in art, a concept espoused in a pamphlet by the third Stevens brother, Alfred, an art critic. With the shift in emphasis from "realism," with its implications of iconographic democracy and penchant for unpleasant proletarian subject matter, to "modernity," whose exponents favored the pleasures and fashions of the upper bourgeoisie, many painters of socially conscious genre in the 1860s began to concentrate more on the latter.

The transition becomes evident in Hermans' At Dawn (1875, M.R.B.A., Brussels), in which the center stage is occupied by two well-dressed prostitutes and their dapper client, with the proletarian foils pushed off to one corner. I shall conclude my analysis of the first generation social realism with this painting because its favorable reception marks the passage of the large-scale socially conscious genre piece from an avant-garde object of controversy to an accepted tradition to which
Belgian painters will continue to turn in the twentieth century.

Hermans' painting signals other changes as well. After 1870, Belgium's economy turns from scattered, small-scale organization to concentrated large-scale industrial capitalism, and the workers depicted by Hermans are, significantly, miners, thus foreshadowing Constantin Meunier's iconographic preoccupation, which will begin ten years later. Finally, Hermans' loose brushwork, by academic standards, and his attempt to capture the overall tonality of early morning light reveal the assimilation of French impressionism in Belgian painting, or, more accurately, the more conservative "softened impressionism" of Bastien-Lepage and L'Hermite, whose style and themes will be seen in Hermans' immediate successors, and which establishes a twentieth century Belgian tendency to wed proletarian iconography to the latest imported avant-garde movement, notably symbolism and expressionism.

Due to the paucity of scholarly research on De Groux and his fellow realists, many paintings with which I must deal are now lost and remain available only in reproduction. I was able to view most known surviving works in public and private collections in Belgium. Photographs of many paintings now lost were found in the Archives Iconographiques of the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique in Brussels, and additional titles were found in catalogues of Belgian triennial Salons, one of which was held in either Brussels, Antwerp or Ghent during each consecutive year of the period under consideration. Comptes-rendus and contemporary periodicals were also consulted for descriptions and indications of critical reception of the paintings. Since I was able to uncover only very little primary documentation on De Groux, much of my
analysis will necessarily be based upon conjecture, but I am happy that most of my conclusions agree with those of M. Jean Sartiliot, who is preparing a mémoire on Charles de Groux for the Université catholique de Louvain and has generously shared with me his perceptive critical insight on De Groux and graciously provided me with invaluable information.
NOTES


3A prime example of social romantic art in France would be the pathetic scenes of lower-class misery by the painter Octave Tassaert (1800-1874), and, in Belgium, the gruesome, hysterical efforts of Antoine Wiertz (1806-1865). Although it has gone unstudied as a tendency in the visual arts, social romanticism in its literary form is treated in Roger Picard, Le Romantisme social (New York, 1944).

4The most familiar resurgences of social realism as a movement in the twentieth century emerged in Germany, Mexico and the United States between the two World Wars.

5See Mark E. Tralbaut, Vincent van Gogh en Charles de Groux, De Kalmthouste Heide, Les Japonaiseries, Les Femmes (Antwerp, 1953); for information on Gauguin's admiration of De Groux's works, I thank my adviser, Dr. Mathew Herban.

6Emile Leclercq, Charles de Groux (Brussels, 1871); the same essay was reprinted as a chapter in Leclercq's L'art et les artistes (Brussels, c. 1876), pp. 193-221.


8A second version, signed and dated 1854, is in the Muée Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels.
PROLOGUE: A GENERAL SURVEY OF DEPICTIONS OF THE LOWER CLASSES IN BELGIAN PAINTING PRIOR TO 1848

It is very appropriate that a mid-nineteenth century school of social realism should have developed in a country where depictions of the lower classes form a consistent thread which stretches back to the first paintings in oil and continues without interruption up to the period in question. The following survey of representations of the poor and laboring classes in the art of Flemish and Walloon painters is intended to provide the reader with the proper art historical background for viewing the social realist works of Belgian painters after 1848, who frequently drew upon their country's artistic heritage of lower-class imagery to enrich their own art. Such borrowings are to be viewed as a continuation of the nationalistic revival of art from the Flemish past initiated by the previous generation of Antwerp's romantic history painters, whose imitation of Rubens' grand manner provided a means for the new nation of Belgium, created in 1830, to bolster its self-identity. Many of the artists treated in this section will be doubtlessly familiar to most readers, but there are also a number of painters whose imagery focused upon the poor, particularly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, who are all but unknown outside of Belgium. Their inclusion within the survey will help draw attention to these little-known figures,
essential for an understanding of mid-century social realism and fascinating in their own right as well.

As early as the fourteenth century, examples of peasant imagery in Flemish painting are provided by the Flemish primitives' propensity to place religious scenes in contemporary settings and people them with contemporary figures. The Flight into Egypt scene in Melchior Broederlam's Dijon Altarpiece (c. 1394-9, M.B.A., Dijon), for example, pictures Joseph as a modern-day Flemish peasant. It was in the sixteenth century, after the genre elements formerly incorporated in religious scenes\(^1\) began to emerge as independent subject matter, that depictions of the lower classes in a secular context—although usually cloaked in moralizing allegorical trappings—made their appearance.\(^2\)

A major innovator in the development of secular genre was Pieter Aertsen, best known for the profuse still-lifes which spill out into his foreground areas of his paintings, many of which contain depictions of peasants and servants. Some works, like the Peasant Interior (1556, Museum Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp) and Egg Dance (155\(^7\), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) emphasize the boorish proclivities of their lower class subjects and others, like The Cook (1559, M.R.B.A, Brussels) or Woman with Fowl (1590, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) bring out their monumental dignity. Aertsen's kitchen and market still lifes presided over by sturdy cooks and merchants were also taken up by his pupil Joachim Beuckelaer (c. 1530- c. 1575).\(^3\) A very early depiction of Belgian industry is found in The Copper Mine (Uffizzi, Florence) of Henri met de Bles (c. 1500- c. 1584), in which men working at the forge, tending the flotation process, and entering the mine
are spread out along the foreground of a Mannerist landscape.

Concentration on the peasant in Flemish Renaissance painting reaches its high point with Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who, according to Karel Van Mander, disguised himself as a peasant in order to view the rustic way of life more intimately. From his early focus upon a contemporary Flemish farmer and shepherd in *The Fall of Icarus* (c. 1558, M.R.B.A., Brussels), Bruegel goes on to view the Flemish people at leisure, in crowd scenes like *Combat Between Carnival and Lent* (1559, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and at work, close to the soil, his representations of the months of the year (1565). The Peasant Dance (c. 1568) and Peasant Wedding Feast (c. 1568) in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, present boisterous activity introduced in earlier works now from a closer vantage point, and later works, like Parable of the Blind (1568, Museo-Gallerie Nazionale de Capodimonte, Naples) and Crippled Lepers (1568, Louvre, Paris), reveal their pathetically handicapped subjects with compassion. Also relevant within the social realist context are works like the Massacre of the Innocents (c. 1565-6, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) or the Numbering at Bethlehem (1566, M.R.B.A., Brussels), in which the Biblical masses are dressed in sixteenth century Flemish peasant garb in such a way as to parallel the Romans' persecution of the Hebrews with the Spanish Hapsburg's oppression of Flanders.

The grand master of seventeenth century painting in Flanders, Peter Paul Rubens, depicted hale and hearty Flemish peasants in kermesse scenes or at the farm in his Steen landscapes, and his follower Jacob Jordaens incorporated robust proletarian figures in their
rustic milieux in illustrations of proverbs and numerous King Drinks variants. Jan Siberechts (1627-1703) incorporated peasant stock in his landscapes and animal scenes. The proliferation of rustic and lowlife types in works of the numerous seventeenth century "little masters" of genre reflects new tastes for scenes of everyday life of a rising middle class clientele.\(^6\) Seventeenth century genre scenes depicting the lower classes form two currents. The first consists of those artists inspired by Caravaggio's half-length, spot-lit figures engaged in pleasurable activities. Flemish Caravaggisti like Theodore Rombouts (1577-1637), Gerard Seghers (1591-1651), Adam de Coster (1586-1643), and Jan Cossier (1600-1671) continued and expanded the Italian master's circle of genre themes, picturing card-players, music-makers, drinkers, smokers and fortune-tellers. Artists belonging to the second current depicted activities more boisterous and bawdy in littered, smoke-filled interiors. The two major painters of these lowlife scenes were Adriaen Brouwer (1605-1638), who was born and died in Flanders, although he spent approximately seven years in Holland and David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690), "middle-class, prosperous, upright and staid,"\(^7\) as opposed to the profligate, prodigal Brouwer. He repeated the Brouwer's lowlife scenes but progressively eliminated their coarse and vulgar aspects—and consequently a good deal of their vitality.

Among the seventeenth century followers of Brouwer and Teniers, several painted scenes of beggars, a theme used with great frequency by the nineteenth century social realists.\(^8\) This motif, which has its origins in medieval and Renaissance saints' charity or Acts of Mercy
scenes, is gradually secularized in the oeuvre of Guillaume van Herp (1614-1677), painter of many Merry Companies. The role of the holy figure in his St. Francis Distributing Alms is taken over by contemporary monks in Distribution of Bread at the Entrance of a Cloister (Pl. 1; n.d., National Gallery, London). Josse van Craesbeek (1608-1660), a pupil of Brouwer given to painting tavern scenes, drops all religious references in his Couple Giving Alms, in which an upper-class couple aids the plight of a roadside beggar. A Beggar in a Tavern (Pl. 2; K.M.S.K., Antwerp) carrying Van Craesbeek's typical "CB" monogram but not attributed to him by Legrand, sets the alms motif in coarser surroundings. Here, the aged female mendicant is scorned or ignored by boorish patrons.

Other little masters of the seventeenth century who followed Teniers and Brouwers in their concentration on the Flemish peasantry in or outside of inns, taverns, cottages and at kermesses include David Ryckaert III (1612-1661), Matthieu van Helmont (1623-c. 1679) and Gilles van Tilborch (c. 1625- c. 1678). Epigones of Teniers continue into the eighteenth century, but with a new refinement which may be attributed at least in part to the quiet bourgeois intimacy which increasingly characterized Dutch genre from the latter half of the seventeenth century and the fête galante which had evolved in France. Lowlife genre now merged with the "society piece" until the distinction between them all but disappeared. Hence, artists like Jean-Baptiste Lambrechts (1680-1731), Hendrik Goovaerts (1669-1720) and Jan-Jozef Horemans the Elder (1682-1759) and Younger (1714- c. 1790) depicted family gatherings, merry companies, carnival scenes and the
like, in which frequently well-dressed, well-to-do participants behave more decorously than their predecessors of the previous century. Nevertheless, some painters, like François-Xavier Verbeeck (1686-1755) and Jan-Jozef Verhaghen, or "Pottekens" (1726-1795), older brother of Rubensian religious painter Pieter-Jozef Verhaghen (1728-1811), adhered more closely to the social strata and activities of Teniers' figures. Pottekens' *The Hypnotist* (Pl. 3; M.R.B.A., Brussels) is a good example of Baroque lowlife of the seventeenth century carried into the eighteenth. (The skilfully executed foreground vessels explain the artist's sobriquet, which means "little pot.").

The most remarkable little master of the eighteenth century is Léonard Defrance (1735-1805) of Liège, who had a peripatetic career and politically active life. His left-wing sympathies are reflected not only in his scenes of turn-of-the-century revolutionary events but also in his numerous views of the interiors of factories and mines showing workers at their tasks. Defrance's wanderings began at the age of eighteen, when he went to Italy. He travelled through France in 1759, thereafter returning to Liège. Subsequent travels included a trip to Holland. Throughout his later career, he maintained contacts with French genre painters Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Jean-François Detroy and Louis-Léopold Boilly. A supporter of the Liège revolution of 1789, which broke out one month after the fall of the Bastille in France and involved an attempt by the province of Liège to secede from Joseph II's Austrian Hapsburg empire, Defrance took part in 1794 in the destruction of the Cathedral of Saint-Lambert in Liège, a symbol of the Ancien Régime.
Defrance's genre scenes, small in size, depict fluidly brushed
doll-like figures involved in situations both light (The Declaration of
Love, Women Drinking Coffee, The Card Game, Cabaret Scene)17 and
serious. Into the latter category fall scenes treating historical
events of the late eighteenth century in a genre context. The Aboli-
tion of Convents under Joseph II (Pl. 4; c. 1783, Musée Communal
Herstalien d'Archéologie et de Folklore, Herstal) documents the en-
lughtened despot's elimination in 1783 of sixty-three contemplative
orders "absolutely useless to religion, to the State and its inhabi-
tants,"18 by showing the residents of a cloister being cast out into
the streets, as a statue of Joseph in ancient Roman military garb looms
above the confusion. This painting is an early representation of
scenes in the life of the Belgian clergy, a subject to which socially
conscious painters of the nineteenth century will increasingly turn,
with attitudes both sympathetic and critical. Within the next decade,
Defrance turned his attention from the fate of Belgium's nuns to that
of her aristocracy in Scene of a Revolutionary Tribunal (formerly col-
lection of Countess de Liedekerke) and Interior of a Prison during the
Revolution (location unknown).

Defrance clearly sided with the Third Estate rather than the clergy
or aristocracy, and his most interesting genre scenes take place in
factories (Visit to a Tobacco Mill [Pl. 5; n.d., Musée d'Art Wallon,
Liège]) or mines (Excavation of St. Anne Marble in a Quarry, n.d. Musée
Marmottan, Paris).19 In all such paintings, a clear dichotomy is drawn
between the laborers and an inevitable party of well-dressed aristo-
crats or bourgeois inspecting the worksites. Although Defrance does not
stress the hardships borne by the workers, he does, in *Visit to a Tobacco Mill*, for instance, place child laborers in the foreground who gawk at the unfamiliar finery of the noblewomen before them.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw a host of genre painters who produced scenes of humorous or sentimental anecdotes enacted by the lower classes to sell to an ever-growing bourgeois clientele. The derivation of compositions and motifs from Brouwer and Teniers is patent—often the scenes were set in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, like Hendrik Dillens' *Two Cavaliers Drinking* (Pl. 6; 1841, M.S.K., Kortrijk), a costume genre piece à la Teniers. British influences also came into play. David Wilkie's versions of seventeenth century lowlife scenes minus their vulgarity had their effect. Other currents entered from Germany and Austria with Biedermeier genre of Carl Spitzweg, Ludwig Richter and Ferdinand Waldmüller and their idealized peasants, while, in France, Boilly's and Martin Drölling's marriage of David's neo-classical style to scenes of contemporary middle-class life inspired certain Belgian painters. Examples of scenes in the lives of the common folk by some of the minor genre artists of Belgium working in the early nineteenth century give an idea of the era's taste for innocuous narrative. One can cite any number of lost paintings of this type, such as Paul Noël's (1789-1822) *Vegetable Market in Amsterdam with a Drunkard Falling on a Stall* (1821), Ignatuis van Regemorter's (1785-1873) *The Fishmarket in Antwerp* (c. 1830) and Henri De Coene's (1798-1866) *News from the Market: Peasants Meeting on a Country Road* (1827).
By far the most successful painters in this field were Ferdinand De Braekeleer (1792-1883) and Jean-Baptiste Madou (1796-1877). The former painter's conscious debt to his seventeenth century predecessors is evident in his Visit of Brouwer to Craesbeek (Pl. 7; n.d., M.R.B.A., Brussels). Here De Braekeleer pictures Craesbeek at his easl copying one of his master's genre scenes while Brouwer sits behind him with a glass of wine in his hand. A work like The Count of Mid-Lent at the Children's School (Pl. 8; 1839, M.R.B.A., Brussels) is typical of the bulk of De Braekeleer's output, with its large cast of well-scrubbed, middle-class figures artfully disposed across the lower half of a spacious setting, its profusion of anecdotal detail and passages of technical proficiency.

Madou is relevant to this study not so much for his painting, a medium in which he debuted relatively late (1842) and in which the figures are frequently costumed in eighteenth century garb, but rather for his documentary drawings and lithographs, which established his reputation as "The Belgian Menzel." Collections of lithographs printed during the first decade of Belgium's independence such as Les Costumes du peuple belge (Pl. 9; 1835) or Soixante-dix vues pittoresques de la Hollande, de la Belgique et du Luxembourg (1842), included images of the lower strata of nineteenth century Belgian society which surpassed contemporary genre painting in their accuracy, objectivity and scope. They are, in fact, closer in spirit to the works of social realists of the third quarter of the century. Madou himself, although continuing to paint into the 1870s, did not transfer his slice-of-life realism onto his canvases, which eventually came to focus on smaller groups of
figures, but were still set in the eighteenth century (The Village Politicians, 1874, M.R.B.A., Brussels).24

The nineteenth century painter who merits the most attention as a precursor of social realism is Jozef Geirnaert (1790-1859) of Ghent. One of his teachers was Guillaume-Jacques Herreyns (1743-1837), director of the Antwerp Academy (founded under the impulse of Teniers the Younger in 1648) and a Rubenist. On the other hand, his instructor in Ghent, Jozef Paelinck (1781-1839) had studied under David in Paris and was hence a proponent of Neo-Classicism. To the latter Geirnaert owed his firm handling and smoothly finished surfaces, but his preferred subject matter was genre rather than ancient history.

Geirnaert painted historical subjects, but usually set in the middle ages or later centuries (Godemard in Prison, n.d., Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Kortrijk; The Arrest of the Count of Egmont, n.d. location unknown). Many, if not most, of his costume pieces however, depict genre incidents rather than significant historical moments. Lost, undated paintings such as Albert Dürer at the Tomb of the Van Eycks, Jan Steen and Van Goyen, and Leonardo Da Vinci Painting the Portrait of the Fornarina are typical examples.25 Geirnaert painted many nonhistorical genre subjects of a trivial, anecdotal nature, such as The Marriage Proposal (location unknown), which won him a gold medal in the Paris Salon of 1835, but more interesting than these is his cycle of genre scenes depicting political events and social problems of his own day.

One such work is the Election Campaign before the Inn (Pl. 10; 1831, M.R.B.A., Brussels), in which a gesticulating, somewhat caricaturized priest vies for the attention of middle-class passers-by in the street,
who alternately gawk or yawn.26 The sign posted on the wall of the inn at the left, reading "District de Gand, Election, 1831," indicates that the scene takes place during the year in which the newly established Kingdom of Belgium drew up her constitution. The election pictured could be either local or national, in which latter case candidates for the new Belgian Congress or Chamber of Representatives would be involved. In 1830, the two parties of the Belgian provinces, the Catholics and Liberals, had put aside their differences to form a Unionist party for the purpose of liberating themselves from the Dutch-dominated Kingdom of the Netherlands ruled by William I of Orange. In appearance, members elected to the new nation's first Congress and Chamber of 1831 were all undivided Unionists, although the Belgian historian Pirenne conceded that "... often the choice of the electors was determined by the liberal or Catholic convictions of the candidates."27 The clerical orator depicted by Geirnaert in Ghent, capital of the heavily Catholic province of East Flanders, would seem to serve as a telling illustration of this situation.

Another incident associated with Belgium's struggle for independence treated by Geirnaert is found in The Petitions in Belgium (1829, Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels).28 Two massive petition campaigns were organized by the newly formed Unionist party in 1828 and 1829. The petitions, carrying approximately 40,000 and 360,000 signatures, respectively, were presented to the Orangist government and called for general reforms from King William's regime, which discriminated against the Flemish and Walloon provinces. Geirnaert's work depicts the interior of the home of a large working
class family being persuaded by Unionists to sign the documents. As one daughter bends down to sign, watched by her mother, her sister (to the left, carrying a pitcher) listens to the argument of a stern-faced clergyman pointing upward to indicate that her decision to sign corresponds to God's will.

The Flemish clergy did have a lot to gain from independence, since William I had declericalized Catholic schools throughout the Netherlands. One of the specific demands of the petitions was free (meaning Catholic) education. Judging from Geirnaert's unflattering treatment of the priests in this and the previous work, it seems probable that the artist was somewhat critical of the political sway which the Catholic Church had over the lower classes. Another more overtly anti-clerical treatment of the Church's role in the petition movement is found in Van Hemelrijk's lithograph The Petition (1829, Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels), in which a rotund clergyman encourages a doddering old aristocratic woman to add her signature to the list.

Besides such depictions of specific political events, Geirnaert also treated lower-class misfortune in more generalized, pathetic terms. In The Expropriation (Pl. 11; 1835, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent), a family's belongings are carried out of the house by three men and heaped in the foreground as the mother and eldest daughter weep and the husband implores an elderly man (probably a town official), who shrugs helplessly. The glum subject is nevertheless rendered in a pleasantly attractive and large-scale (104 x 132 cm.) fashion. The piles of belongings form skillfully rendered foreground still lifes in
front of the picturesque house. The reactions of the variously aged family members, from baby to grandmother, provide a study in varieties of human expression reminiscent of Greuze (cf. also the voters in Geirnaert's The Election Campaign), and a harmonious, eye-pleasing color scheme plays over the smoothly finished figures carefully arranged in a cohesive pyramid.

In an undated Young Boy Giving Water to an Unfortunate (Pl. 12; Collection Royale Belge, Château de Ciergnon), Geirnaert takes up the alms theme, dressing his figures in modern clothing, but setting them in front of architectural ruins. Beggars amidst ancient ruins date back to the works of the seventeenth century Dutch painter Pieter van Laer ("Il Bamboccio") which are set in Rome, but Geirnaert's background is general rather than specifically Roman, and may serve merely to draw a parallel to the decrepit condition of the old, tired fiddler being aided by the boy. The sentimentalized pathos has been inherited from the eighteenth century, and the glamorized youth in picturesque tatters can be traced back further to Murillo.31

One of Geirnaert's pupils in Ghent, Joseph Pinnoy (1808-1866), achieved some degree of popularity for his genre scenes such as Young Peasant Resting (1834) or The Poultry Vendor (1834), both unlocated. His Street-Organ (Pl. 13; n.d., Museum voor Schone Kunst, Ghent) very obviously derived from Wilkie's Blind Fiddler (1806, Tate Gallery, London), pictures a blind street musician surrounded by his wife and child, performing in the house of a simple but comfortable family who has just come in from the cold. The organ-grinder's expressionless, shabbily-dressed son, standing to the left of his father, contrasts
sharply with the host family's well-fed little boy on the other side, delightedly pointing to the dancing figures on the blind man's instrument. Pinnoy follows his master's—and Wilkie's—interest in human expressions and still life detail but is not as skillful as either. 32

In 1842, Belgian genre painting joined hands with the school of socially conscious Flemish novels which began to flourish around 1830 (Chapter I). The painting in question, Eugène de Block's What a Mother Can Suffer (Pl. 14; 1842, location unknown) was based on the short story of the same title by Henri Conscience, the most famous representative of the Flemish literary movement. 33 De Block (1812-1893), whose instructors included Ferdinand de Braekeleer, debuted in the Brussels Salon of 1833 and specialized in sentimental bourgeois genre with titles like The Bible Reading (1869, M.R.B.A., Brussels) and The Convalescent (1869, M.R.B.A., Brussels) and School is Out (before 1879, K.M.S.K., Antwerp). In 1839, De Block treated the theme of social injustice—using a medieval setting, however,—in The Poacher: Feudal Scene. Its entry in the catalogue of the Brussels Salon of 1839 carried the following explication: "A poacher, having gone into hiding for a certain period in order to escape the vengeance of the seigneur upon whose land he had poached, returns to find his family driven out of their home, seated on the remains of the burned cottage." 34

De Block's fame rests largely upon What a Mother Can Suffer, a contemporary genre scene, exhibited in both the Brussels and Paris Salons of 1842. The painter placed his dimly lit scene in the center of a veil of surrounding shadows, through which a mother's body can be seen in profile, her face hidden by her hands as she weeps over her daughter
laying in the bed beside her. A second infant seated on the floor by the foot of the bed to the left, is also weeping. The painting illustrates a scene occurring toward the beginning of Conscience's story in which the two noblewomen Adela and Annah, on the lookout for some unfortunates to help in a poor section of Antwerp during the winter of 1841, stumble in upon an appropriate interior:

... The four walls there were the only silent witnesses of the suffering and unimaginable pain, and the view of the heart-rending spectacle which was revealed filled the heart not only with sadness, but also with a certain feeling of contempt for society... A sick child hardly more than one year old was laying in a bed in the middle of the room. Its pale face, its emaciated little arms, its sunken eyes have one good reason to believe that the poor thing would soon be claiming a place at Stuivenberg [Antwerp's cemetery]. Seated on a heavy stone close to the child, a woman who was still young hid her eyes in her hands...

From time to time a sigh issued from her tired lungs and tears streamed across the fingers that hid her features.

Soon another child's voice is heard begging for food.

The voice crying out belonged to a little boy of five or six, huddled by the corner of the chimney, so doubled-up that he was hardly discernible. He trembled and shivered as if he has a fever, and by listening closely, one could hear his teeth chattering from the cold.

The basis for the story—and the painting—comes several paragraphs later, when the author, explaining the mother's own hunger and fear of her daughter's imminent death, asks whether she stops to think of her own misery.

No! A mother is always a mother, happy or miserable, rich or poor. There is no feeling more deep, no passion more vast than that which bonds a woman to her child, and that feeling, that passion is all the more fervent and profound for those who know how much pain, agony and sweat their children have cost them.

The poor know this more than anyone!35
What a Mother Can Suffer immediately became an enormously popular painting. The jury of the Paris Salon of 1842 awarded it a third-place medal. The image was further disseminated by means of an etching which De Block did of it. The work even inspired a variant by The Dutch painter Petrus Marius Molijn (1819-49) called The Death Bed. An indication of the regard in which critics held the painting is revealed in the comments of Adolphe Siret in his review of the Brussels Salon of 1848, in which De Block exhibited a lost Family Scene. Passing over the latter, Siret states that he would have preferred to see a work of greater importance and eventually hopes to see a pendant to What a Mother Can Suffer.

Bien des années pourront passer sur ce tableau et sur nos souvenirs, mais jamais l'impression qu'il a laissée dans notre âme ne s'en effacera. Il y a certains mots, certaines réparties, certains paysages qui vivent dans notre mémoire par leur sublimité ou par tout autre côté saillant, il en est ainsi du tableau que nous venons de citer; Ce qu'une mère peut souffrir était un poème. Personne de nous l'a oublié et ne l'oubliera.

Numerous examples of the death-bed motif, which can be traced back to Poussin (and further, to Lamentation and ancient Roman prototypes) and appear with great frequency in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century painting, have been treated by Robert Rosenblum. De Block differs most strongly from his predecessors in his Caravagesque reduction of compositional elements to a few spotlit essentials and his insistence upon a proletarian rather than a bourgeois setting. What a Mother Can Suffer is central to a consideration of social realism after 1848, since it will serve as an essential point of departure for decisive early works of Joseph Stevens and Charles de Groux.
Several other surviving paintings by lesser-known Belgian artists done during the late 1840s also treat themes of lower-class distress in a sentimental way. Domestic tragedy is the subject of The Departure of the Wayward Husband (Pl. 15; 1846, M.R.B.A., Brussels) by François Joseph Luckx (1802-1849). This painter of history, portrait, genre and flower paintings was trained at the Academy of his native Malines as well as in Paris. In the painting in question, his meticulously rendered interior with its porcelain-like finish recalls seventeenth century Dutch masters Gerrit Dou or Frans van Mieiris, but the sentiment is Greuzian. A man with his belongings in a sack casts a last glance at his wife and three small children. His spouse turns away, rolling her eyes in despair, as one of the three children she clutches steals a peek at her departing father, who is embraced by an elder daughter. The man appears to be wearing the costume of a sailor ready to depart on another long voyage, to the consternation of his abandoned family. The theme of domestic crisis derived from Greuze's themes will become as much a part of the fully developed social realists' iconographic repertoire as treatments of social inequities.

A survey of entries by Belgian artists in the Brussels Salons of the 1830s and 1840s reveals numerous titles of paintings depicting figures from the lower classes. Major categories are peasants, merchants and artisans, workers, alms and beggars, and orphans and widows. It is impossible to determine from the titles alone whether the artists presented their subjects in contemporary Belgian settings and costumes, like Geirnaert, Pinnoy or De Block, in which case they would be fitting precursors for the social realist works to come, or
whether they are set in centuries past, and thus continue the tradition of the little-master pasticheurs. It seems most probable that both tendencies would have been seen. Whatever the case, one suspects that despite the century, the subjects would have been approached with the romantic sentimentality or anecdotal nature seen in the paintings of the time that have been located.

A final artist who must figure into a discussion of Belgian painters of the lower classes belonging to the generation preceding 1848 is Antoine Wiertz (1806-1865), a leader of romanticism in Belgium. Wiertz was a megalomaniac creator of mural-sized canvases done with an eye to rival Rubens and Michelangelo. Unfortunately, Wiertz’ ambitions often outstripped his abilities, and works like the eight-meter Body of Patroclus (1845, Musée Wiertz, Brussels) rival their predecessors only in size.

The painter did produce large-scale canvases dealing with social issues, but with a predilection for the grisly and the bizarre which justifies the use of the reform "social romanticism" for his art. In Hunger, Madness and Crime (Pl. 16; 1854, Musée Wiertz, Brussels), the starving mother of an illegitimate child (by an unscrupulous rich man) has chopped up her baby and tossed a leg in her pot.48 A family of shrieking, barefoot children desperately lunge toward a coffin being carried away in The Orphans (Pl. 17; n.d., Musée Wiertz, Brussels). Most of Wiertz’s socially conscious paintings were done after 1851, following his disappointment with the failures of 1848 and consist of metaphysical allegories promoting utopian visions of the future or gruesome scenes to encourage pacifism. His œuvre also contains more
modest efforts, however, in which observed life governs the painter's hyper-active imagination. *The Artist's Mother* (1838, M.R.B.A., Brussels), shown at her spinning wheel, and *The Bootmakers* (Musée Wiertz, Brussels) depicting happy, picturesque artisans on the road, are more successful in their small-scale, understated genre realism than Wiertz's bombastic treatments of more "important" themes.49

It is appropriate to conclude this discussion of pre-1848 lower-class iconography with Wiertz, whose socially conscious paintings overlap chronologically with those of the social realists, but are firmly tied to the high-pitched emotional tenor of Belgium's romantic generation of 1830. It is important to note, however, that the decisive painting of De Groux's early career, *The Drunkard* of 1853 (M.R.B.A., Brussels), can certainly be characterized, if only on the basis of its melodramatic presentation, as romantic in character, comparable and probably influenced by French romantic realists Octave Tassaert and Jules Breton. De Groux reveals his debt to his Flemish predecessors, on the other hand, in the *Drunkard's* brown tonalities, free brushwork and Baroque composition, pointing back to Brouwer, Teniers or their steady stream of eighteenth and nineteenth century epigones. Upon reaching his mature style, De Groux delves back further in his country's artistic past and adopts stylistic characteristics of the Flemish primitives. Receptive to these early painters' infusion of mundane reality with religious mysticism, De Groux evolved a parallel means of spiritualizing his realistically rendered scenes of the life of Belgium's poor and consequently forged a link between Belgian art's most avant-garde movement and the earliest roots of realism in the painting of his artistic ancestors.
One of the most familiar examples of a religious scene taking place in a contemporary setting is Robert Campin's (or Master of Flémalle's) Merode Altarpiece (c. 1420-30, Metropolitan, New York).


Hay Harvest (National Gallery, Prague), Wheat Harvest (Metropolitan Museum, New York), Return of the Herd and Dark Day (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), all from 1565.


Caravaggist Jan Cossier also painted Two Old Beggars (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kassel).

See, for example, the David-before-Saul page of Jean Pucelle, Belleville Breviary (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), in which the Virgin distributes alms to beggars in the lower right-hand corner; and the Master of Alkmaar, Feeding the Hungry panel from the Seven Acts of Mercy, 1504 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

Legrand, p. 174. Metal plaque, 71 x 96. No location given.

Ibid., Fig. 53. Present location unknown (In sale of Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1952-1953).

The work is attributed by the K.M.S.K., Antwerp to Guillaume van Herp.

Lesser-known Flemish imitators of Teniers the Younger include his uncle and brother, both named Julien Teniers, the former's dates being 1572- c.1650, and the latter's, c. 1616-1679; an Abraham Teniers (1629-1670); Corneille Mahu (1613-1689); Victor Mahu (before 1689 - c.1701); Thomas Apshoven (1622-1655) and brother Ferdinand II van Apshoven (1630-1694); Erasme de Bie (1629-1675). Legrand, pp. 178-186.

Ibid., p. 186.
For a general treatment of seventeenth and eighteenth century followers of Brouwers and Teniers, see Legrand, pp. 125-188; and Fierens, L'art en Belgique, pp. 328-331 and 393-399.

See Maria Louis, Léonard Defrance, peintre liégeois (Tongres, 1930); Sander Pierron, L'art populaire (Brussels, 1922), pp. 61-64, briefly surveys Defrance's career and treatment of the worker.

Respectively, M.B.A. et de la Céramique, Verviers (n.d.); Musée d'Ansembourg, Liège (1763); Musée d'Art Walon, Liège (n.d.); M.R.B.A., Brussels (n.d.).


Other paintings by Defrance of factories and mines include Interior of a Foundry, Interior of a Slitting Mill (all in Musée d'Art Walon, Liège) and A Tannery (Musée Marmottan, Paris), all undated.


For information on the graphic work of Madou and his contemporaries, see J.M.H. van der Marck, Romantische Boekillustratie in België (Roermond, 1956).


Huebner, p. 70.

28Lithograph, presumably after a painting, reproduced in Dhondt, p. 39. Two more unlocated paintings by Geirnaert mentioned by Immerzeel and Siret also treat the subjects of Belgium's independence: Belgium Before (the Revolution of) 1830, and Belgium After (the Revolution of) 1830.

29Van Kalken, pp. 536-539.

30Reproduced in Van Kalken, p. 538. On Van Hemelryk, see Van der Marck, pp. 91-4, 236, 238.

31This painting may be L'aveugle et son conducteur, exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1851 (no. 547).


33Wat een moeder lijden kan (Antwerp, 1841).

34Brussels Salon of 1839 (no. 117). De Block also painted Le vieux braconnier, exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1842 (no. 103). Cf. Poucher on the Look-out (1834, location unknown) by W. H. Heine of Düsseldorf, which also championed the poucher as an unjustly persecuted outcast of society.


40 Cf. Greuze, Punished Son, 1778 (Louvre, Paris), and Pierre-Alexandre Wille, fils, Last Moments of a Beloved Wife, Paris Salon of 1785 (Musée Municipal, Cambrai), both of which take place in bourgeois households.


43 J. B. van Eycken, Le retour des champs (1833); J. van Laethem, Berger (1833); Jh. De Coster, Le joyeux paysan (1836); A. Denoter, fils, Les moissonneurs (1836); Auguste Morren, Un berger et ses moutons (1836); Wulfaert, Paysanne flandare avec son enfant (1836), L. Rousseaux, Le paysan politique (1839); François Verheyden, Une fête après la moisson (1839); V. Degronckel, La fille du moissonneur (1845); Joseph Gyselincxx, Un jeune paysan montre à sa famille le prix qu’il a reçu à l’école (1845); E. Noterman, Un vieux braconnier pleurant son chien mort (1845).

44 J. Dens, Marchande de poisson (1833); D. Donny, Femme de Bruxelles vendant des crabes (1833); Th. J. Jambiers, Le rameleur et le chaudronnier (1833); Sert Hélène, Une bouquetière anversoise (1833); J.-B. van Eycken, Un cordonnier (1833); E. Noterman, Le gai chaudronnier (1839).

46 C. Coene, Repos d’ouvriers (1836); J. D. Coninkx, Le repos d’un ouvrier (1839).

46 D. Donny, Un vieillard aveugle avec son enfant demandant l’aumône (1833); Coomans, Un mendiant (1836); Fanny Geefs, L’aumône (1839); Van Ysendyck, La charité (1839); François Voordecker, La charité (1839); Elisa Levi, L’aumône (1839); J.-J.-F. Staalaert, L’aumôge et sa fille (1842); Ch. Tschaggeny, Messager ardennais, causant avec un mendiant (1842); N. J. Horgnies, Le maître des pauvres (1845).

47 Henriette Pitet, Deux orphelins (1833); J. van Laethem, La veuve d’un garde de chasse (1833); Jenny Lesbroussart, Les orphelins (1836); Fanny Geefs, Les orphelins (1839); V. Degronckel, La veuve des pauvres (1845).


49 For basic information and bibliography on Wiertz, see Fierens-Gevaert, Antoine Wiertz (Turnhout, 1920).
CHAPTER I

THE HUNGRY FORTIES AND THE NON-REVOLUTION OF 1848

In 1848, most countries in Europe were swept up in a maelstrom of revolutionary violence and political turmoil while the tiny country of Belgium, which had only come into existence eighteen years earlier, rode out the year virtually untouched by the cataclysmic events which affected her neighbors. Despite the political tranquility, however, 1848 marked the third year of a calamitous economic crisis in the textile industry that had been ravaging the nation's Flemish population, resulting in widespread famine, disease and unemployment. Whereas painters of neighboring countries like Germany and France mirrored political confrontations or the bloody aftermaths of revolutionary violence of 1848, Belgian artists had no victims to eulogize or uprisings to depict. Nevertheless, a number of seminal paintings exhibited in the Belgian Salon of 1848 which reflect the devastating effects of the economic crisis in Flanders mark the début of the school of social realism of which Charles de Groux would become the leader.

The visual images which alluded to the crisis in Flanders are complemented and preceded by a wealth of written material, both documentary and fictional, which chronicle the plight of Belgium's poor during the 1840s. Extensive government and medical reports document not only the 1845 crisis but the deplorable working and living conditions which
preceded it. Simultaneously, a school of Flemish literature dating back to 1830 and climaxing in 1848 took up the unfortunate lot of Belgium's impoverished classes in a wide number of novels, short stories, plays and poems. In order to fully grasp the significance of the social realist imagery of the Salon of 1848—and to provide an idea of the social conditions of the figures portrayed by De Groux and his colleagues during the 1848—it is perhaps useful first of all to examine some of the problems which beset the lower classes as treated in both the documentary reports and literature of the preceding decade. The legitimacy of such an approach to the social realist art in question is borne out when one considers Eugène de Block's recourse to Henri Conscience's fiction in What a Mother Can Suffer (Pl. 14) and reveals itself to be particularly germane in relation to the most decisive painting of the 1848 Brussels Salon, Joseph Stevens' The Beggars or Morning in Brussels (Pl. 32; M.R.B.A., Brussels) which appears to depict victims of an 1847 decree expelling Flemish famine victims from the Belgian capital, a problem taken up in a short story by Domien Sleeckx in 1848.

Part 1. The Plight of the Lower Classes in Belgium, 1830-1848

Causes of the mid-century economic crisis in Flanders which precipitated the widespread suffering mirrored in the Brussels Salon of 1848 can be traced to the chronic economic troubles which had persisted from the time of Belgium's founding in 1830. In that year, the five Flemish and four Walloon provinces of modern-day Belgium detached themselves from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, an entity which had been set up by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and melded the Belgian and Dutch
provinces into a single nation that was to serve as a buffer against France. By revolting in 1830, Belgium freed itself from Dutch hegemony but was immediately plunged as a result into economic turmoil. The new nation suddenly found itself deprived of the main outlets for its principal industries, textile and metal goods. These had been Holland and its colonies. Direct access to Germany via the Schelde and Rhine was cut off, and a tariff barrier slashed trade with Germany and France as well.

Even during general economic growth and prosperity under Dutch rule, the lower classes profited little. An economic historian points out that "La situation des classes populaires ne s'est donc pas améliorée au même rythme que la croissance de l'industrie. La paupérisme, cette plaie de l'ancien régime, n'a pas cessé de ronger la Belgique." Poverty in Belgium was characterized as both an "endemic" and a "chronic" state by analysts in the nineteenth century.

With the loss of foreign markets in 1830, Belgian textile, coal and metal industries were virtually paralyzed for approximately five years. The textile center of Ghent, for example, was left with 30,000 unemployed workers during this period. The crisis was partially solved by a protectionist economic policy which set up a national bank, subsidized industries and sponsored a railway project (the first on the continent) which restored transportation to Germany by skirting Holland to the south, and provided work for the unemployed. The textile industry received a boost from import tariffs imposed in 1834 and 1842, staving off English and German competition, and a limited tariff agreement with France was drawn up in 1842.
These latter measures were only stopgaps, however, for nothing could be done to halt the steadily damaging competition of English linen woven by machine. Nor did the policy of economic intervention which benefited business and industry do anything to prevent the exploitation of the worker or contribute to social reform. Several extensive reports from the early 1840s written by doctors, civil servants, or sponsored by the government reveal the miserable conditions in which the Belgian worker lived.

The most extensive of these reports is the three-volume, 1690-page Enquête sur la Condition des Classes Ouvrières et sur le Travail des Enfants, which appeared in 1846-1848, sponsored by the Royal Commission of 1843 for Improvement of the Conditions of the Working Classes and Indigents of the Nation. The conditions exposed—usually through interviews with business heads, chambers of commerce, mining engineers or commissions of public health rather than workers themselves—were indeed deplorable. Food usually consisted of only two meagre meals a day composed of soup, bread and potatoes. Meat, if eaten at all, was infrequent and inferior in quality. Housing consisted of one-room dwellings for entire families, characterized as "low-roofed, damp, or cramped cold, without air or light," and, in some cases, enclosures are bluntly referred to as "filthy cesspools."

The effects of such inadequate food and housing, along with sanitation deficiencies and miserable working conditions took their toll from early childhood: "Les enfants restent généralement chétifs et perdent de bonne heure leurs facultés physiques et morales," reported an observer at Molenbeek St. Jean. Physical ravages suffered by textile
spinners in Brabant (the province in which Brussels is located) were described as follows:

... d'une figure pâle, étoilée, souvent amaigrée par la misère et un travail excessif, on voit ces ouvriers, les enfants surtout, étoilés avant l'âge. Leur ventre est développé, pâteux, leur digestion pénible; les scrofules, le rachitisme, le carreau, impriment à leur économie le cachet de la dégradation physique. Leur poitrine est étroite, le système musculaire peu prononcé, leur intelligence nulle; ... d'un teint pâle, d'une constitution chêvive, [les jeunes filles] sont victimes des affections chlorotiques, anémiques, sont mal réglées, souvent incapable de devenir mères, et, si elles le deviennent, ce n'est qu'en courant les plus grands dangers pour elles et pour leurs enfants.11

Abuse suffered in sweatshops varied with the type of product being produced. After finding out that wool intended for cloth was washed in urine, the Medical Commission of Antwerp was "convinced that the [fumes] could not help but exercise a harmful effect upon the health ..."12 of the workers. Water from a cesspool involved in lead manufacture in Brussels was repumped for household use. A certain ten- to twelve-year old child in Brussels worked morning to night in a dark, airless "pigsty," sifting gold and silver. In a chemical factory, two workers (of a total of five) died of pulmonary consumption from toxic fumes that had caused death by asphyxiation of chickens wandering in the interior court.13

Conditions were hardly better in larger-scale industries like the mines in Hainaut where workers emerged like "dead men coming out of a tomb," after having been exposed to deadly respiratory and digestive hazards during the course of their perilous workday.14 In the textile factories in Ghent, which, by 1838, were among the most modern in the world,15 one fifth of the workers had suffered injuries from machines at
the time of the 1843 investigation, not including those killed or permanently impaired. Most victims, moreover, were children. Yet, typical of the docility and dogged piety of the Flemish workers, a collection was taken in one factory in order to pay for a mass in honor of the Virgin, in the hope that her intercession might head off an unusually large number of accidents that had been plaguing the factory.\textsuperscript{16}

The recurrent theme throughout the report which seems most disturbing of all is the brutal conditions to which child laborers were subjected. The average age at which a Belgian child began to work was nine years,\textsuperscript{17} and the workday was usually twelve hours long—or at least, reported doctors in Ghent, "when the work lasted no longer than twelve hours, the children do not complain of fatigue."\textsuperscript{18} The situation in the mines was even more devastating. The Chamber of Commerce of Charleroi reported:

Il est une partie des travaux imposés aux enfants dans les mines de houille qui nous paraît nuisible à leur santé. Souvent ils sont employés à hiercer, c'est-à-dire à tirer ou pousser les chariots chargés de charbon pour les conduire depuis l'endroit où travaille le mineur proprement dit, jusqu'au puits d'extraction: c'est un travail très fatigant. Obligé quelquefois par le peu de hauteur de la galerie, à ramper, le jeune ouvrier s'attache au corps une sangle, terminée par une chaîne accrochée au chariot ou wagon. Il se traîne alors, comme il le peut, sur les pieds et les mains, tandis qu'un autre enfant, placé derrière le chariot, le pousse devant lui avec la tête et les mains. Ceux-là sont écrasés dans les fosses, suivant l'expression des ouvriers.\textsuperscript{19}

Other children, forced to sit in the dark, damp tunnels and open and close doors for the miners, "arrivent souvent à un état d'imbécilité qu'ils conservent toute leur vie, indépendamment de l'altération de leur constitution physique."\textsuperscript{20} Three years after the Commission's investigation, a Dr. Hanot reported on the continuing
practice of making children push carts through the mines and the physical, mental and emotional deterioration it caused during the initial "période d'acclimatation," as he called it. The child becomes marked by a "teinte de souffrance intérieure qu'on lit dans ses traits. Aussi le voit-on bientôt pâlir et maigrir; son appétit diminue; il devient triste." 21

In spite of the descriptions of exploitative treatment which permeate the 1843 Commission's report, blame for the problems was often thrown upon the workers themselves—a reflection of the bourgeois constituency of the report's contributors. According to the Central Council of Public Health of Brussels, machine-related injuries "ne peuvent être attribuées qu'à l'imprudence ou à la maladresse de ceux qui les ont reçues." 22 In regard to the health of the workers, many Chambers of Commerce and industrialists asserted, despite extensive evidence to the contrary within the report, that the physical condition of the workers was satisfactory and that illness and debilitation were attributable not to low wages or hazardous conditions, but the abuse of alcohol and moral decay. The Chamber of Commerce of Brussels, for example, concedes that low wages 23 and rising prices may contribute somewhat to the workers' distress, but, they claim,

la véritable lèpre de la classe ouvrière c'est la démoralisation, l'ivrognerie à laquelle elle se livre généralement et les occasions qu'elle trouve trop fréquemment de dépenser le fruit de son travail soit dans les débits de boissons distillées, soit dans les cabarets, soit dans les trop nombreuses kermesses qu'elle fréquente toujours avec un extrême empressement. 24

Besides the material deprivation and health and safety abuses revealed in the 1843 Inquiry, the Belgian worker was also subjected to a
host of legal and judicial restrictions. Law required that a **livret obligatoire** ("mandatory booklet"), bearing confirmation by an employer that the employee had satisfactorily completed his work at a given place, be presented in order for an individual to be hired by someone else. After 1845 the worker was subject to penal sanction if he was without a **livret**. The booklets were often kept by the employer until termination of employment, so that the worker suffered yet another incursion upon his rights and freedom.25

Although the Belgian Constitution of 1831 guaranteed workers the right of free association, a section of the penal code prohibited strikes, thus making unions illegal until the abolition of the sanction in 1866.26 Needless to say, workers had no right to vote either. The high illiteracy rate among the working class (75% to 90% in the 1840s)27 was a primary factor in retarding the development of organized popular resistance, since it rendered the Belgian worker ignorant of the left-wing theories and activities held and practiced by his better educated counterparts in France. In spite of isolated organizations of a employees in a few small-scale urban industries, no workers in any of the major industries began to attempt union organization until 1857 in the Ghent textile factories.28

The burden of military conscription also fell heavily upon the poor. A lottery system in effect since 1798 governed selection for military service. The rich were able to avoid the draft by paying 1000 to 1200 francs for a substitute to take their place; by the second half of the nineteenth century, up to 28 per cent of Belgium's army was composed of substitute youths. For those too poor to pay for a
replacement, entering the military sometimes led to destitution for the family deprived of its working son. In the military, pay was so low that men were left virtually penniless upon termination of duty. Life in the army was unbearable for uneducated lower-class Flemings who could not speak French, for they subsequently became objects of physical and verbal abuse from officers.29

All of the problems and abuses described thus far pale beside the devastation of the economic crisis which decimated the Flemish population of Belgium beginning in 1845. The crisis was rooted in the ailing textile industry, which was the staple of the economy of the Flemish provinces.30 The principal fabric produced by the Flemings was linen, with the exception of cotton manufacture centered in Ghent.31 As the century wore on, the Flemish linen industry declined, the result of both the loss of foreign markets after independence in 1830 and, most importantly, of competition from English machine-produced fabric.32 Meanwhile, the coal and metal industries in the Walloon provinces of the south prospered and grew.33

Trouble in the Flemish linen industry began to be seriously felt around 1836.34 The textile market became flooded with less expensive English factory-produced products, drastically reducing the demand and lowering prices and wages of their Flemish competitors, who were still engaged for the most part in home industry, spinning and weaving in their cottages. In the face of these new developments which were leaving scores of Flemings jobless and destitute, there was surprisingly little that was done to mechanize Belgian linen production. In fact, the precise opposite occurred, as the commercial capitalists who
controlled the linen industry, in fear of being replaced by factory-

owning industrial capitalists, formed a vast National Association for
the Conservation and Progress of the Traditional Linen Industry in
1839.35

A remarkably intense resistance movement sprang up in which poli-
ticians, clergymen and merchants all proclaimed that the maintenance of
the traditional linen industry was necessary for the preservation of
morality, religion and the social order. These notions were dissem-
inated in scores of books, pamphlets and speeches which vaunted the
superiority of thread prepared "with the good saliva of our young
Flemish women" as opposed to the English imitation, drawn out of the
"jaws of iron."36 Those who suffered most in the midst of all this
were, of course, the spinners and weavers, whose traditionally
phlegmatic character, stubbornly resistant to change, was encouraged by
the reactionary establishment bent on preserving the status quo.

Concerned with the dwindling market and the growing unemployment
in Flanders, the government conducted an investigation in 1840, pub-
lished the following year as the Enquête sur l'industrie linière,
rapport de la Commission, octobre, 1841.37 The report revealed that
those spinners or weavers who were still employed "can no longer
afford adequate clothing, they have difficulty paying their rent; their
food consists of dry bread and potatoes; they are lodged in poor houses
and do not have any sheets to cover themselves and sleep on." At
Nederbrakel, some families slept on piles of leaves on the floor.38

Particularly moving is the chronic state of despondance and de-
pression to which many of the workers investigated were reduced. One
Interview was cut short because the spinner being questioned broke down in tears and could not go on. This was not at all an isolated incident. The burgomaster and magistrates of Waerschoot reported that alms distribution on Saturday mornings is an "aspect vraiment déchirant; si on refuse deux liards à un homme, il pleurera; on a vu des hommes tomber de faiblesse." A textile merchant responded that "Le sort des tisserands est très malheureux, extrêmement triste. J'en vois qui pleurent, qui désirent que cela finisse d'une manière ou de l'autre."\(^{39}\)

Those who were forced out of work were reduced to begging, which drastically increased in the late 1830s in both Flemish and Walloon provinces. Beggars banded together in groups with their demands for charity or employment. One observer at Thourout remarked that

La mendicité augmente toutes les semaines; il vient des pauvres par bande la nuit, qui demandent du pain et de la viande. Ces bandes sont déjà venues deux fois chez moi et j'ai donné de suite. Elles ne font pas de mal quand on donne de suite; je donne par la fenêtre. La mendicité nocturne se répand.\(^{40}\)

Callous indifference to the plight of the unfortunates on the part of public officials is revealed in the report as well. Many felt that the workers themselves were responsible for their own misery. Declares one town magistrate, "...l'ouvrage ne manque pas; ce sont des fainéants. On a essayé de mettre des entraves au mariage des pauvres; on a supprimé le pain et la moitié du loyer à ceux qui se mariaient, on n'a pas réussi."\(^{41}\)

Some proletarians saw little difference between working and begging, and one weaver even thought that unemployment was more desirable than the conditions he faced as a worker: "Nous manquons de tout, de vêtement comme de couchage. La classe mendigante est dans une position
moins triste que nous, parce qu'on la soutient; à nous, on ne donne rien.  "42

If the situation looked bleak in 1840, it was nothing compared to the havoc brought on by a yearly succession of natural calamities that hit Flanders from 1845 to 1849. This prolonged series of unmitigated disasters turned the regions already suffering from a fifteen-year old economic crisis into a vast arena of famine and plague. Similar food shortages and diseases were experienced in other European countries as well, to such an extent that this period has been referred to as the "hungry forties." The widespread suffering during these lean years is one of the factors which precipitated the wave of European revolutions in 1848. 43

In Belgium, disease destroyed the potato crop in 1845. The next year, a rye blight and poor harvests of all crops occurred. In 1847, Belgians were plagued with both a poor wheat harvest and a typhus epidemic. A cholera epidemic in 1849 concluded the disastrous period. 44 Added to these problems were the shock waves of a general European financial crisis which began in London in 1846 and was felt in Belgium within several years. 45

While the situation steadily declined with each passing year, already by 1845 a team of two doctors, J. Mareska and J. Heymans, published a report on the health and working conditions of textile workers in Ghent. Their findings reveal a grotesque degeneration of the workers' physical condition:

They are all pale, wan and sallow. Their lips, the insides of their mouths, their gums and the insides of their eyelids were discolored. Their voices were feeble, and their eyes dull and
expressionless. Their faces and extremities were puffed and fluid, or excessively thin. All their movements and muscular contractions were slow and painful and their physical inertia was associated with a very high degree of moral inertia. Thin and discolored muscles could be traced beneath their skin, through which the shape of all their bones could be seen. In a great number of cases, organic misery went beyond this extreme degree of anemia. The symptoms were of a special kind, known at the time under the general description of Flemish sickness or famine fever.46

A medical report that appeared the following year, sponsored by the government, did not mince words. It referred to the deteriorating lower classes as people less than human, "an emergent brute species, sub-human beings who live from hand to mouth and who are fast becoming only one step removed from beasts."47

As the years of crisis from 1845-1850 wore on, these famine-stricken, fever-ridden Flemings with no money and no work left their homes in large bands to go beg in the countryside or in larger cities, from whence they were periodically expelled.48 Bureaus of public assistance (bureaux de bienfaisance) existed to aid the destitute, but the growing legions of indigent citizens far surpassed their ability to help, so that they were finally able to offer assistance of only several francs per year. Private charity was also insufficient to fill the gap.49

Although spontaneous riots broke out sporadically in both town and country and, in several instances, calls for social revolt were heard,50 the most remarkable phenomenon was rather the passive and pious resignation of the victims which blocked the chances of an organized social movement from occurring. While they did express their unhappiness, the impoverished masses never collectively directed their complaints at any
one institution or individual, nor did they take steps to militantly improve their condition. As the historian Jacquemyns observed, "la population, profondément croyante et sobre, se montra le plus souvent résignée. Elle fut d'un calme qui peut étonner"; an old Walloon proverb reveals why: "Les ventres crevés n'ont pas des oreilles." If victims of hunger and poverty did decide to resort to violent tactics, it was on an individual basis. Robbery was rampant, but the objective of the thief was more often than not to be arrested and put in jail, where he would at least be guaranteed enough food to stave off death by starvation.

Accounts of those who could not find their way to such means of survival and died of starvation appeared daily in newspapers. In one Flemish household, four family members were found dead of starvation in January, 1847 and in another community, such incidents became so common that a guard was assigned to check on houses each day to make sure the inhabitants were still alive. In December, 1846, out of 165 starving individuals admitted to a hospital in Ghent and given food, twenty could not sustain the nourishment they were given and died of inanition regardless. Some individuals during the crisis were able to survive only by eating potato peels, tree roots, cat and dog meat, fish entrails and heads, and diseased animals dug up from the soil. When the final toll was taken, the number of inhabitants in East and West Flanders, diminished by famine, disease, or, in fewer cases, relocation, decreased by 31,209 from 1845 to 1848.
Part 2. Socially Conscious Flemish Literature, 1830-1848

The birth of the Belgian nation also saw the rise of the Flemish Movement, a nationalistic surge led by enthusiastic Flemings known as "Flamigants." At issue was the political, linguistic and cultural oppression to which the Flemings had been subjected during the French occupation under Napoleon and only briefly relieved of during Dutch rule from 1815-1830, when Dutch (of which Flemish is a dialect) became the official language of the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Belgian constitution of 1830, on the other hand, re-established French as the national tongue. 55

The first cultural manifestation of this movement occurred shortly after Belgian independence in the city of Ghent, where a group of writers whose fields ranged from philology and literary history (Jan Frans Willems), to poetry (Prudens van Duyze, Franz-Jozef Bliek, K. L. Ledeganck) to drama (Jacob Kats), 56 sought to re-awaken interest and pride in their Flemish heritage. By the 1840s, the literary center of Flanders had shifted to Antwerp and was led by three principal novelists, Henri Conscience (1812-1883), Pieter Frans van Kerckhoven (1818-1857) and Eugeen Zetternam (1826-1855). Many of the most significant works of this literary generation were written during the turbulent watershed years of 1847-48 and aired the tragic, exploitative situation in which contemporary lower-class Flemings found themselves in the tearful, sentimental manner typical of the romantic era.

Henri Conscience, the most celebrated author to emerge from the Flemish movement, wrote a great number of novels dealing with the joys and sorrows of the Flemish peasant and proletarian. The majority of
these are unabashedly sentimental escapist fare which descend from the rural idylls of George Sand. The author's own defense of his rose-colored presentation of rural life reveals his predispositions: "I depicted the Flemish peasant as he presented himself to me. I made him gentle, quiet, religious, patriarchal, attached to his morals as he is to his soil, and thus a bit hostile to change. . . ." Conscience's commitment to the lower classes of Flanders is also evident in his simple, direct prose style, designed to be comprehensible to his unlettered compatriots. (The inscription on his tomb reads "He taught his people to read.")

An early short story by Conscience, *Wat een moeder lijden kan* (What a Mother Can Suffer) published in 1841, served as the source of Eugène de Block's painting of the same title (Pl. 14), an important prototype for social realist painting of the coming decade. Conscience's story is one of the several works which depart from his more typically innocuous narratives in order to probe the grimmer aspects of life of the lower classes. As in other examples of this type, Conscience presents a lachrymose depiction of the plight of a poor family in the grips of crises who manage to weather the storm until a happy conclusion triggers tears of joy and relief. The plot involves two well-to-do ladies, Annah and Adela, who come upon a destitute family consisting of an unemployed father, a distraught mother, and two small children, one of whom is dying of cold and hunger. As the resigned father prepares to sell his mussels cart, his sole means of livelihood, in order to save his offspring, Annah and Adela intervene with money and food enough to rescue the family.
In Conscience's *Lambrecht Hensmans* (1847) the title protagonist, a house and furniture painter, is falsely accused by a wealthy lady of having stolen some money. When he is jailed, his wife dies of shock and the surviving family suffers hunger and humiliation. Soon Hensmans' son Willem is fired and is forced to break up with his fiancée. Finally the rich woman dies and her husband, realizing the trouble she has caused, restores as best he can the damage that has been done the family. That Conscience was well aware of the famine in Flanders which was at its peak during the time that his story of poverty went to press is revealed in a speech he gave at a "grand music fest for the benefit of the famine victims" in 1847. "Ah, for the sake of God," he pleaded, "consider that the farthing that you contribute may still arrive in time to save a dying mother!" 60

Pieter van Kerckhoven's first venture into contemporary social problems appeared in 1841, the same year as Conscience's *What a Mother Can Suffer*. Entitled *Drie kinderen* (*The Three Children*), it tells of three little sisters on the brink of death from starvation and cold whose father is on the verge of self-strangulation when a "compassionate soul," 61 hearing of the unfortunate family, comes to the rescue. Van Kerckhoven's device of using the sudden generosity of a wealthy individual as a means for a quick happy ending and his failure to give any consideration to the cause of his victims' distress—economic inequality—puts him in league with Conscience.

Van Kerckhoven's most important novel to treat Flanders' contemporary poor was completed in 1842 and entitled *Jaak of een Arm Huisgezin* (*Jack, or a Poor Family*). It is particularly interesting in
light of contemporary social realist art because the story is told from the viewpoint of a German painter, Walter, as well as a writer from Antwerp, Frans. In search of a subject matter, the artist encounters an impoverished family in a poor part of Antwerp consisting of a former peasant, his wife, their son Jaak and daughter Anna, with whom Walter falls in love. Jaak, unable to fine work, is forced to enlist in the army and leaves home. After he leaves, his mother and sister both die of consumption. The grief-stricken Walter is forced to return to Germany, where bankruptcy has ruined his own mother and sister. Jaak returns home just in time to save his father from being auctioned off at an open market to the lowest bidder, but again does not succeed in finding work. In desperation, he robs a rich man, is arrested and suffers through a ten-year sentence of hard-labor, during which time his father and Walter both die. Freed at last, Jaak, now an ex-convict, can find neither friends nor work and must join a foreign army, in which he is eventually killed. "Not a single tear was shed on his grave."—so concludes the novel. Twee Woningen (Two Dwellings) followed in 1844, contrasting the lives of inhabitants of rich and poor homes. The latter suffer on earth, but Van Kerckhoven assures his readers that they will be rewarded in the hereafter, thus underscoring another characteristic of the Flemish novelists which is carried into contemporaneous Belgian painting: intense Christian piety.

Eugene Zetternam, like Conscience and Van Kerckhoven, wrote several pieces of historical fiction taking place in the Middle Ages before turning to the contemporary Belgian proletariat in 1847. Schets uit het Werkmansleven (Sketches of the Life of the Workingman), written in that
year, narrates tales of worker solidarity in the face of the hard-hearted oppression of their employer. Right conquers might as the unemployed are eventually re-hired, the sick are cured, and the patroon becomes a friend to his workers. The same year saw Voor twee centen minder (For Two Cents Less), a grim little tale of an old carpenter, Hendrik Herman, who is fired and replaced by a scab worker who accepts two cents less in pay than his predecessor. The despondent Herman then commits suicide.

Perhaps the most interesting Flemish novel to treat the new industrial age and the convulsed society that was its by-product is Zetternam's Mijnheer Luchtervelde; Waarheden uit onze tijd (Mr. Luchtervelde: Truths of Our Time), which appeared in 1848 and treated life in the cotton factories of Ghent. The plot centers around Lodewijk de Craeyer, an artisan given to reading utopian socialist books and dreaming of a better society. When his boss criticizes his laziness and laments that he is not a machine, Lodewijk quits his job in a huff, thereby throwing his family into grave straits. His father, his fiancée Mietje, and his younger brother and sister are all forced to work in the textile factory of formidable Mr. Luchtervelde. Zetternam takes his readers into the factory with descriptions that reveal his fascination with the imposing machine technology, but he also comments upon the devastating effects of industrial progress:

One considers how little happiness has resulted from all that knowledge, all this wasted genius: that more poor people suffer from hunger, no one is better clothed and only the well-to-do are able to draw a cheap profit; that countless numbers of people are at the disposal of a few capitalists, who have the power to reduce their wages to a trickle.63
Clara, Luchtervelde's wife, forced by her parents into a loveless marriage, conducts an unconsummated affair with a man who eventually kills himself in order to save them both from the sin of adultery. Later, Luchtervelde, in a fit of drunkenness, rapes his own wife, afflicting her with a crippling venereal disease. Both Lodewijk's father and Luchtervelde die, leaving Clara to devote the rest of her life to charity. She helps Mietje open a grocery store and Lodewijk set up a carpentry business, in which he becomes, unlike Mr. Luchtervelde, the model employer. Unlike his colleagues, Zetternam does not shy away from dealing directly with the abuses of the industrial capitalist system within the novel. However, his reversion in the conclusion to the utopian vision of a preindustrialist society—not to mention the melodramatic plotline—reveals, as do many aspects of Zetternam's novels, that romantic ideals outweigh militant reformist zeal.

Two other minor works dealing directly with the Flemish weavers' crisis appeared in the watershed year 1848. A short story called *Zelfopoffering* (Self-Sacrifice) by Domien Sleecx (1818-1901) was included in his anthology *Volksverhalen* (Folk Tales [1848]). It recounts the plight of a family of weavers from rural Flanders (near Audenaarde), victims of the collapsed textile market and disasters of the late 1840s. The father dies, leaving the mother and daughter destitute and forced to seek refuge in Brussels, where the daughter eventually dies in the winter of 1847, a victim of selfprivation brought on in order to insure that her mother has enough to eat. In February, 1848, the month in which rioting broke out in Paris, the Flemish poet August Snieders (1825-1904) published a poem entitled *Vlaanderen's Doodskleed* (Flanders'
Shroud), which treated the misery of the textile workers and was inspired by Heinrich Heine's Die schlesischen Weber (The Silesian Weavers [1844]), a poem which had dealt with the weaving crisis in Germany. The final verses of Snieders' work reveal its intense tenor:

"I see the numbers of corpses there, stark naked in the snow! . . .
God! Let the snow weave a shroud over them! . . .
Pity, Lord! . . . Protect our lands of Flanders!"

("k zie't lykental daer moederneakt op 't zand!
God! laat den sneeuw daerop een dookskleed veven! . . .
Erbarming God! . . . Behoed ons Vlaendrenland!" 

The survey of mid-century socially conscious Flemish literature can be rounded out with another minor figure, Felix Alfonse Boone (1821-1870). His first novel, Mijn eerste blik in de wereld (My First Glimpse of the World [1847]), focused on the peasant farmer. A father and son, impoverished, unable to pay the rent on their farm or obtain a postponement from their hard-hearted landlord, ask the question:

"Why must the poor, ignorant farmer have a heart? Why doesn't he just have instincts like a pack-animal, since that's the way we're treated."

Despair gives way to hostility: "Should the poor people kill the rich man--since he lets them die of hunger?" All ends happily, however, when the farmers are unexpectedly given a plot of land and an annual salary. Boone's essential conservatism is confirmed in De Schone vrouw van het veldbal (The Beautiful Girl at the Country Dance [1848]), which encourages the worker to be content with his station in life and Een Arme jongen (A Poor Youth [1850]), whose protagonist's alcoholism, the result of ignorance, is cured through education.

In his study of Flemish fiction and the events of 1848, Bert Brouwers asserts that during the 1840s, most of the socially conscious
writers, usually from petit bourgeois backgrounds, came as close as they ever did in joining ideologic ranks with the proletariat against their bourgeois and aristocratic oppressors, but that, after the revolutions of 1848 failed and the bourgeoisie triumphed, the authors cast their lot with the middle-class victors and abandoned the lower classes. The subsequent works of Conscience, Van Kerckhoven and Zetternam, for example, either reverted back to the romantic escapism with which these writers had begun their careers (now sparked by disillusionment rather than pre-revolutionary utopianism); if the writers did tackle lower-class themes, their plotlines and focused upon social climbing of the ambitious or talented.

Philip De Pillecyn, in his analysis of the Flemish novelists treating social problems from the 1830s to 1880s, concurs that during the entire period, "We do not see the flag of revolution hoisted in Flemish prose. . . . Our writers were much more prone to reveal a generous heart than a rebellious spirit." Indeed, most authors, "fully in keeping with the mentality of the times, lamented . . . the ways things were," exhibiting a type of "social pessimism." The teary-eyed compassion with which the writers viewed the little man's fatalistic resignation to his miserable fate, coupled with the chroniclers' failure to deal with causes or effective solutions to the problems, turned the proletarian into a mere romantic vehicle, convenient to unlock the floodgates of the reader's emotion. Such an approach to poverty conforms closely to the depiction of Belgium's lower classes by De Groux and his immediate predecessors in the Brussels Salon of 1848.
Part 3. Images of 1848 in Belgian Painting

The food shortages, economic depression and political oppression experienced throughout Europe during the "hungry forties" sparked revolutions by the end of the decade in most countries on the continent. The seventeen-year-old nation of Belgium, which had perhaps experienced even more suffering since the Flemish crisis of 1845 than any of her European neighbors, emerged from the tumultuous year with only a few minor skirmishes of no consequence and was referred to as "le petit coin le plus tranquille du continent." Historian Georges Dumont called it "the miracle of 1848."74

The absence of insurrectionary activity has less to do with universal satisfaction with King Leopold I's regime than with the debilitated state in which the economic and agricultural crises had left the working class. The spirit of revolt was further squelched by the workers' dogged religiosity, encouraging passive prayers rather than active resistance, by the stern repressive measures of employers and government, and by the high illiteracy rate of the Belgian proletariat compared to the French workers, for example, who could read newspapers and left-wing literature.75 News of the February Revolution in Paris and Frankfurt Parliament in Germany inspired a few demonstrations, petitions and letters of support in Louvain and Ghent, organized by Belgian leftists, and the government succeeded in expelling a number of foreign radicals who had taken refuge in neutral Belgium during the 1840s, the most notable being Karl Marx, a Brussels resident since 1845.76 In an effort to mollify remaining critics, the Belgian parliament shrewdly passed a new election law on March 12, which increased
the electorate from 55,000 to 79,000 by lowering the tax qualification.

The last events of any consequence to threaten the Belgian monarchy occurred at the end of March, when trainloads of armed insurgents, mostly exiled Belgians in Paris, attempted to cross the Franco-Belgian border and lead rebellions. The first group of 800 to 900 men who had left from Valenciennes were easily dispersed by Belgian troops in Quiévrain on March 25. Following the affaire de Quiévrain, a larger team numbering 2,000 coming from Lille and heading toward Brussels were stopped on March 29 by 200 soldiers at the little hamlet of Risquons-Tout.

In contrast to the relative calm of Belgium in 1848, her neighboring countries, France and Germany, experienced considerable social and political upheaval, the effects of which figured prominently in the contemporary French and German painting. In the former country, images of the rural proletariat, bourgeoisie and peasantry were monumentalized, respectively, by Courbet, in The Stonebreakers and Burial at Ornans (both c. 1849-1850, Louvre, Paris) and by Millet in The Sower (c. 1849-1850; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Lesser-known but equally compelling images were painted by Meissonnier, whose fallen insurgents in The Barricade (1849, Louvre, Paris) contrast with Daumier's robust, assertive allegory of The Republic (1848, Louvre, Paris). In the German states, where revolutionary activities were more scattered, less effective and squelched more quickly, two images of confrontation and defeat stand out. Johann Peter Hasenclever's Workers Before the Town Council (Pl. 18; 1848-9, replica in Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf) depicts
Düsseldorf's perplexed assembly of city councilmen confronted by a delegation of workers and a raging mob outside an open window, and Adolf von Menzel's unfinished Public Funeral for the Victims of the March Revolution (1848, Kunsthalle, Hamburg) records the memorial ceremony for those killed during a riot in Berlin.\textsuperscript{78}

In the midst of political unrest throughout the rest of Europe, Belgium, having weathered the potential upheavals which might have occurred, was able to proceed with her triennial Exposition Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1848 uninterrupted. The Brussels Salon opened on schedule in August of that year, with entries consisting for the most part of the standard academic history pieces of the neo-classic and romantic schools, as well as landscapes, portraits and innocuous genre paintings. A handful of works, however, did deal with the social and political questions of the time. Most of those which did treat the issues in a conservative fashion, but an important entry of one artist, Joseph Stevens (1819-1892), marks the début of the social realist trend which would flourish in Belgian painting during the third quarter of the century and is the subject of this study.

The most conservative images of 1848 were two allegories which unblinkingly portrayed Belgium in tip-top political and economic health. One of these was Jean-Baptiste van Eycken's Abundance of the Year 1847 ([no. 982], Pl. 19; location unknown). Van Eycken (1809-1853) a painter of genre, historical and Biblical scenes, was an instructor of Charles de Groux, who débuted in the Salon of 1848 with two scenes from the life of Christ.\textsuperscript{79} Van Eycken's allegory, picturing a mother watching over two plump infants reclining on a bed of grain and fruit, completely
overlooks the failed wheat crops and typhus epidemic which ravaged Belgium in 1847. The critics and public were nonetheless taken by the painter's bucolic idealism, for it was reported by Adolphe Siret that "Everyone stops in front of this picture because they perceive a happy commotion, and see what art can do when it is true; few are the mothers who do not feel their eyes water with tender, furtive tears. . . ."80

J. van Severdonck's Allegory Representing Belgium in 1848 (location unknown) was more politically-minded, celebrating in the tradition of Ruben's Peace and War (National Gallery, London), Belgium's survival of the 1848 cataclysms. The goddess of Liberty holds the Belgian flag and is surrounded by a lion watching over the Belgian constitution of 1831 and an armed, muscular allegory of Strength, while war and its attendant horrors are consigned to the rear.81

One would expect contemporary Belgian problems to be mirrored most faithfully and consistently in genre painting, but, aside from the few exceptions which will be treated below, genre painters turned their backs upon the problems facing the Belgian people and either escaped to the world of the past by copying the seventeenth century little masters or focused upon the trivial. The critic of the Brussels journal La Renaissance commented upon this shortcoming in the year in which radical ideas were so prevalent elsewhere.

Il n'y a pas encore, parmi les genristes, cette révolution dans les idées que nous espérons rencontrer au salon de 1848. La routine est tellement invétérée dans les habitudes de quelques peintres, et dans les allures de l'école, que l'immortel pot de bierre, le chaudron de cuivre et la pipe, qu'ont illustrés Van Ostade, David Teniers et beaucoup d'autres, sont encore aujourd'hui les éléments qui constituent la plupart des tableaux de genre exposés. Il y a une série de tableaux bêtes à faire frémir la nature."82
The writer blames Ferdinand de Braekeleer for having given birth to this type of painting and inspiring legions of followers. The latter artist nevertheless exhibited two works in the 1848 Salon which bore some relationship to the crisis in Flanders. The Unfortunate Weaver (location unknown) apparently alludes to the devastated Flemish textile workers, but even conservative critic Siret criticized the artist for his innocuous treatment of the subject—a family of weavers, apparently—which constituted a "manque de vérité."

Aucun des membres de cette famille de malheureux n'a l'air souffrant. Leur attitude, il est vrai, est bien celle du découragement, mais rien ne décèle ce profond désespoir qu'on s'attend à trouver d'après le titre de l'œuvre. . . .

The Consoler of the Afflicted (location unknown) another entry of De Braekeleer, apparently dealt with paupers venerating a statue of the Virgin. The identification of the beggars with Belgium's Flemings and the painting's overriding Catholic sentiment—a hallmark of many social realist works to come—are indicated by the comments of J.-B.-J. Cels, Jr. in the Revue de la Flandre. The work, he says, depicts the "malheureuses et catholiques populations de la Flandres qui, dans leur misère et leur résignation, n'ont plus d'espoir qu'en Dieu par l'intercession de sa Mère!"

The Salon of 1848 included quite a number of scenes of beggars and dispensers of charity. The theme of alms-giving dates back to the Middle Ages. By the early nineteenth century, scenes of charity and the poor functioned as excuses to show Christian piety and romantic sentiment rather than as social protest. Such was the case with the majority of alms-giving subjects in the Salon, most of which were set
either in the past or in foreign countries, thus removing them from present-day reality. Titles of this type of scene provide effective examples of such mentality: Murillo Drawing a Young Beggar in the Studio of His Pupils (no. 10; J. Bataille [Antwerp]), The Beggar in Rome (no. 128; Clevenbergh [Louvain]), Beggars: Souvenir of Rome (no. 656; Léopold Moullignon), Little Beggars on the Isle of Capri (no. 717; Charles-Marcel Pignerolle [Paris]), Young Beggars: Souvenir of Rome (no. 766; Alexandre Robert [Rome and Trazignies]), and Travellers Giving Alms (no. 937; Charles Tschaggeny [Brussels]).

In contrast to these temporally or geographically-distanced examples is Pierre Paul Aloïs Hunin's Distribution of Alms in a Convent (Pl. 20; 1848, Musée communal, Anderlecht), which appears to take place in contemporary Belgium and thus acknowledges, at least implicitly, the economic crisis in Flanders. Nevertheless, the pious, well-scrubbed beggars picturesquely disposed throughout the composition, as well as the adequacy of the food supply, belie the consistent inadequacy and shortages of Belgium's charitable institutions in the 1840s, both religious and municipal, urban and rural.85

Rather than exposing the plight of the beggars, Hunin is concerned with eliciting veneration for the institution and female dispensers of religious charity. His main focus falls upon the central sister passing out bread to grateful recipients, thereby calling attention to the painting's artistic pedigree which ultimately leads back to scenes of the Virgin, like the one found on Jean Pucelle's David and Saul page of the Belleville Breviary (1323-1326, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris [Ms. lat. 10483, fol 24V]). In the lower right-hand corner, the
Virgin, posed like Hunin's nun, aids two beggars. Domenichino's St. Cecilia Clothing the Poor (1611-1614, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome) also contains compositional and thematic similarities. Closer to home, later in the seventeenth century, Van Herp's Distribution of Bread at the Entrance of a Cloister (Pl. 1) sets an even closer precedent for a realistically conceived religious charity scene. Hunin's painting looks very much like an updating of Van Herp's work, judging from the striking similarity of theme, composition and figures.

Belgium's traditional linguistic and cultural ties to France point to more recent antecedents in the art of her neighboring country, in which the Virgin and saints are replaced by monks or female aristocrats. An example of the former, Greuze's Distribution of the Rosaries (Pl. 21; c. 1780, private collection. U.S.A.), pictures a central female who is a recipient rather than distributor, but the motif of religious charity sugared with eighteenth century sentiment apparently did not go unheeded by Hunin. Although Victor Joly complained of Hunin's prosaic realism and decision to specialize in lachrymose subject matter, seeing in his work "la grimace du sentiment, la parodie de la douleur, quelque chose de tendu, de faux, d'ennuyeux et d'assommant" the painter's penchant for morality and sentiment and his specific affinities with Greuze were praised by the critic of the liberal journal La Renaissance.

To the latter, Hunin's realism is not at all "trival, prosaïque et bourgeois" but instead, "poétique, pleine de charme, de sentiment et d'expression. M. Hunin est le plus complet imitateur de Greuze que nous ayons jamais vu dans le choix de ses sujets et dans la manière de les rendre, en y apportant un sentiment particulier." Greuze himself
is praised for the "choix de ses sujets qui, presque tous, tendent vers
un but moral, qui, presque tous éveillent la sensibilité et inspirent
la vertu." As opposed to the trivial nature of many contemporary
Belgian genre subjects discussed earlier, Greuze's predilection for
didactic moralizing in modern domestic settings is a happy alternative.

Ce n'est pas une femme qui pêle une orange, ni un vieillard qui
taille une plume, mais un vieux père au milieu de sa famille
assemblée et l'instruisant par la sainte lecture; mais un père
paralytique trouvant encore de douces jouissances au milieu de
ses enfants empressés à le consoler.

After descriptions of the Malédiction paternelle and La Mère bien-
aimée, the reviewer gives a lengthier description of La Dame de charité
(Pl. 22; 1775, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon) which has particular rele-
vance in regard to alms-giving iconography, revealing as it does the
idea of veneration of the alms-giver.

Il a peint une Dame de charité, c'est-à-dire, une femme révérée,
conscrat sa vie aux soins des malheureux; il la représente
conduisant sa jeune fille dans ces tristes asiles des maux et de
la pauvreté, accoutumant son jeune coeur à go" le bonheur
suprême de consoler, de soulager les infortunés, et l'exercer-
de bonne heure à ces fonctions sacrées pour lesquelles les
hommes ne peuvent jamais avoir assez de vénération.

Once again the critic is moved to reiterate Greuze's contribution
to art, lamenting that his example was not followed more widely: "Ah! si
les beaux-arts ne s'écartaient jamais de leur véritable but, les artistes
ne chercheraient dans leurs travaux au'à rendre les hommes meilleurs." The
importance of Greuze for the upcoming social realists should not be
underestimated. His pious sentimentality and exempli virtutis con-
sistently recur in the paintings of 1848-1875, and one of his canvases
exercizes a direct influence upon the first important social realist
work of De Groux, as will be seen in Chapter II.
The line of descent leading to Hunin's 1848 painting continues into the artist's own century with both French and Belgian examples of aristocratic female alms givers from centuries past. Fleury Richard of France shows us *Mme. Elizabeth de France Distributing Milk* (Pl. 23; 1817, Museum of Versailles) in the eighteenth century. Richard's heroine, seen through church-like Gothic arches, has the outstretched arms of Hunin's nun, and gazes toward a beggar girl at her left with a pose and bonneted, profiled head resembling the analogously positioned girl in the Belgian painting.92

In Belgium, Henri Leys (1815-1869), a highly regarded painter of historical genre, depicts, in *Rich and Poor* (Pl. 24; 1837, M.R.B.A., Brussels), a seventeenth century high-born female descending a staircase, squired by a figure borrowed from Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, giving coins to an urchin girl, in profile here also, whose family huddles nearby in the foreground. The Crucifix, placed above the figures' heads at an oblique angle to the picture plane, reminds the viewer of the religious significance of the act of charity being performed.

Finally, Jozef Geirnaert's *Charity of the Duchess of Chartres* (Pl. 25; Collection Royale Belge, Brussels), was exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1845 (no. 301) only three years before Hunin's painting, accompanied in the catalogue by a lengthy account of the incident in which the eighteenth century angel of mercy was involved. The family she had stumbled upon consisted of an aged, paralyzed ex-soldier (providing a Greuzian motif in the rear) and a recent widow with four children, on her knees in the foreground, holding a baby in a position very similar to that of Hunin's kneeling mother and child, with his
grandmother's outstretched arm paralleling that of Geirnaert's widow. The requisite Crucifix and image of the Virgin hanging behind the para- lytic emphasize once again the religious virtue of the duchess' generosity.93

Hunin's work also bears striking compositional similarity to Carl Hübner's notorious Weavers of Silesia (Pl. 26; 1844, replica in Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf), well-known in its day, which belongs to the same school of Düsseldorf Tendenzbilder as Hasenclever's Workers Before the Town Council. Hübner's painting was praised by Engels for having inspired "more effective socialist agitation than a hundred pamphlets," and has been cited as a prototype of the socialist realism practiced in communist countries. It deals with the buyers' rejection of the hand-woven cloth of the German workers because of superior new machine-produced merchandise. The weavers' anger led to a strike in 1844.94 To my mind, Hunin's painting may be viewed as a patriotic, reactionary answer to Hübner's protest painting, suggesting that, unlike the Germans' callous indifference to the situation of their unemployed workers which sparked violent revolt, Belgium's conscientious solution to the problem by pious, humanitarian charity successfully staved off insurrection.95

In contrast to Hunin's generalized, idealized charity scene, which departed very little, in the final analysis, from beggar imagery which preceded it and skirted the real issues of the Flemish crisis, a Salon entry by Van de Kerkhove confronted the problem straightforwardly. The title, Misery of Flanders: Emigration of Flemish Beggars (Pl. 27; engraving after lost painting)96 points to a tragic dilemma which involved
thousands of Flemings from 1845-1848. The Flemish provinces had always contained a large share of beggars, but after 1845, unemployment and crop failures forced thousands of erstwhile textile workers from their small-town or rural cottages, leaving them to roam the countryside begging or to seek shelter in the large cities of Belgium or northern France toward which they gravitated—and were often expelled, for reasons of "public safety."97

The painter of Misery in Flanders, Van de Kerkhove (c. 1828-1878) is listed in the 1848 Salon catalogue with the first name Jean, but is referred to elsewhere as Leonard.98 Born in Vesenaz (near Ghent), he was a pupil of Antoine Wiertz, Belgium's leading social romanticist (Pl. 16,17) Van de Kerkhove's painting pictures seven mendicants in front of a cracking wall. In the center, an old woman, bending down, passes a bowl over to a bearded old man, his feet wrapped in rags, on the ground to her left. Behind him are two children in tatters: a girl with a basket attached to her back and a boy in tears, behind whom stands a young woman in a traditional Flemish hooded cloak. On the extreme right stands a mature, barefoot couple looking on, perhaps parents of the children and offspring of the aged couple on the ground.

Roadside beggars in contemporary garb had been depicted the previous year in The Beggar (Pl. 28; M.S.K., Kortrijk) by Philippe de Witte (1802-1876) of Kortrijk, but the angelic slumber and melancholic gaze of De Witte's two boys, sentimentally beautified in their picturesque tatters in the manner of Murillo, have little to do with the tears or frowns on the faces of all of Van de Kerkhove's figures, who do not solicit aid from the spectator as does De Witte's boy on the left with
his cup. Most importantly, neither De Witte's painting, nor Hunin's Distribution of Alms in a Convent, for that matter, are specifically tied by title to the Flemish crisis of 1845-8. Van de Kerkhove's deliberate subtitling of his work, Emigration of Flemish Beggars, calling attention to the thousands of uprooted, destitute Flemings at a very sensitive moment in European politics, justifies Thieme-Becker's characterization of his painting as Tendenzmalerei (peinture à thèse), an orientation apparently derived from Wiertz. The hysterical and metaphysical bent of Wiertz' socially conscious works have less in common with his pupils' painting, however, than do the more sober, prosaic and literal-minded Tendenzbilder of Düsseldorf in the 1830s and 1840s, which will be examined later.99

The fact that Van de Kerkhove had the audacity to paint a beggar scene stripped of artificial consolation, ingratiating generalization or foreign or historical trappings helps account for its chilly reception by Siret, who restricted his criticisms to the painter's technique rather than the content of the picture. He found the style to be cumbersome, the figures poorly executed and disproportionately small, and the colors unbalanced. "A moins de s'appeler Callot, une procession de souffreteaux de ce genre ne peut rien présenter d'original ni de sympathique," he complained.100

It is important to point out that, despite their differences, Misery of Flanders does share the pathetic, sentimental quality of both The Beggar and Distribution of Alms in a Convent, thus underlining an essential difference between the Belgian school of social realism and the works of its French counterparts, like Courbet or Daumier, who
deliberately avoid emotion-laden scenes in favor of greater objectivity. Furthermore, the similarity between Van de Kerkhove's compositional format and that of Lamentation scenes of the Flemish primitives, such as that of Petrus Christus in the M.R.B.A., Brussels, underscores once again, as in the case of Hunin, the reliance of the early Belgian realists upon Christian tradition, a trend which will continue into the 1850s and further.

The subject of humble unfortunates in distress is also seen in More Faithful than Happy (Pl. 29, M.R.B.A., Brussels), and The Beggars or Morning in Brussels (Pl. 32; M.R.B.A., Brussels), the two entries in the Salon of 1848 by Joseph Stevens (1819-1892). Stevens was one of three brothers, all of whom were also to play fundamental roles in Belgian realism. The contribution of Alfred, the painter and Arthur, the critic, who emerge in the 1850s and 1860s, will be treated in succeeding chapters. Joseph was a dog painter, largely self-taught. He never enrolled at the art academy of his native Brussels but is assumed to have studied, on an informal basis, with the undistinguished but successful animal painter Louis Robbe (1806-1887), who was to become a supporter of Charles de Groux.

Like genre, animal painting developed relatively early in Flemish painting, pioneered as an independent specialty by Roelandt Savery (c. 1576-1639). Further development in the seventeenth century was led by Rubens collaborators Frans Snyders (1579-1657) and Paul de Vos (c. 1596-1678), the latter who painted scenes of hunting dogs, and by Snyders' pupil Jan Fyt (1611-1661). A second team of seventeenth century Flemish artists also painted animals, like the previous three, as
adjuncts to still lifes, participants in hunt scenes or in the barnyard. These were Peeter Boel (1622-1674), Pieter Gysels (1621-1690) and Adriaen de Gryff (c. 1670-1715). The tradition continued in the eighteenth century with Balthasar Paul Ommeganck (1755-1826), "le Racine des moutons," patronized by Empress Josephine during Napoleon's reign. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the undisputed leader in Belgian animal painting was Eugene Verboekhoven (1799-1881), instructor of Robbe. Verboekhoven's large scale, minutely detailed, idealized and idyllic paintings of cows and sheep were immensely popular in the 1830s and 1840s.103

Biographers of Joseph Stevens suggest that he may have been inspired by French artist Decamps, who painted dogs in the 1830s and 1840s, examples of which Stevens' father may have owned,104 or Géricault, renowned for his horses, of whom the father owned several canvases.105 Stevens' earliest works are anecdotal, but do not contain the social implications of his 1848 Salon entries. He had already exhibited in the two previous Brussels Salons, making his début in 1842 with a drawing, Stallion Frightened by the Sight of a Dead Horse (no. 540). He entered a painting, The Hound and Her Companion (no. 650) in the Brussels Salon of 1845, accompanied by a poem in the catalogue narrating the story of a pregnant hound who shrewdly tricked her companion into providing a home for her large brood by remaining in his quarters until her puppies had grown enough to prevent him from turning them out.

Other dated paintings from Stevens' early years include Le Miserable (1844; formerly Collection Enrique Mistler, Antwerp), depicting a Scottish terrier suffering under the humiliation of a muzzle,106
and The Protector (1848; formerly Collection Mme Lenoir, Brussels), in which a large bulldog stands guard over a tiny cocker spaniel nuzzling against it. By 1847, he had received praise from Thoré-Bürger, who compared one of his dogs in the Paris Salon of that year to a "proud mendicant, painted by Velazquez or Goya."¹⁰⁷

Both of his entries in the Brussels Salon of 1848 are noticeably more serious in tone than his previous works, involving as they do themes of death and starvation. More Faithful Than Happy pictures a young organ grinder considerably less fortunate than his iconographic predecessors by Simoneau and Pinnoy. He lies in front of a crumbling wall (cf. Van de Kerkhove), sprawled out in the snow. The boy is either dead or dying from starvation and cold—his face is blue—having been unable to reach the cabin in the left background. Alongside him lay his hat, barrel organ and the body of his pet monkey with its own little cap cast aside also. The sole survivor is a poodle, who mourns his master and becomes the focal point of the scene and object of its title.

This sentimental, anecdotal approach to the canine species immediately brings to mind Stevens' counterpart in Victorian England, Edwin Landseer, from whom he has appeared to borrow two motifs. From Landseer's Alpine Mastiffs (Pl. 31; formerly collection J. Watts Russel), exhibited at the British Institution in 1820, comes the image of a helpless body in the snow hovered over by dogs. (A similar subject was painted in Belgium around 1827 by Charles Picqué in A Woman with Her Unconscious Child Rescued from the Snow by a St. Bernard Dog [unlocated.])¹⁰⁸ Landseer's first widespread success, The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner (Pl. 32; 1837, Victoria and Albert Museum, London),
contains the theme of the faithful mutt outliving and grieving over his deceased master, whose discarded hat lays in the foreground in both paintings.  

Presumably because of its sentimental, pathetic tone and its ties with the art of a well-respected British painter, great praise was heaped upon Stevens' painting by Siret and J.-B.-J. Cels, Jr. of the Revue de la Flandre. Considerable space was devoted to descriptions of it, in which the critics filled in events preceding the tragedy and be-moaned the fate of the unhappy trio. Another probable factor for the painting's success, and one which both critics mentioned, is the fact that the dead boy is not from Belgium but from picturesque Savoy, thus providing a comfortable geographic distancing.

Such was not the case with Stevens' other entry, The Beggars or Morning in Brussels (Pl. 32), the title of which emphatically places it in the capital city of Belgium. The painting was larger in size (139 x 190 cm.) than Stevens' other entry (85 x 127 cm.), most likely indicating the relative importance the artist attached to it, but its dimensions did not exceed those of other genre or animal paintings already seen in the nineteenth century. The "beggars" of the title refers not only to the starving dogs searching for food in the foreground, but to the two women in the background, one of whom combs through refuse while the other huddles against a wall. The morning light entering at a raking angle from the left casts a diagonal beam on the rear wall, partially illuminating the foreground dogs, but most of the composition is bathed in the grey shadows of dawn. In the central foreground, two dogs, one with a bandaged leg, fight over a
bone, as a shaggy poodle and another dog with a harness around its neck look on from the right. Standing on a step in profile to the left is an emaciated greyhound, and in the rear, close to the women, are three more shaggy, unkempt mongrels.

The emphatic mention of both "beggars" and "Brussels" in the title, the latter being an unusually localized setting for a begging scene, may well have something to do with a particular problem that had plagued the capital city the previous year. The number of Flemish emigrants flooding into Brussels from the surrounding countryside became so great during the peak of the economic crisis of the 1840s that in February, 1847, a royal decree was issued allotting 3500 francs to the Ministry of Justice to rid the city of its flock of beggars.112

The problem was taken up in fictionalized form in Domien Sleeckx's "Self-Sacrifice," first published in 1848 and cited in Part 2. The economic necessity which forced the destitute mother and daughter's emigration to Brussels from East Flanders is explained in the opening paragraphs. After explaining the crop failures and linen crisis, Sleeckx observes that,

It was thus no wonder that the suffering during the winter of 1846-1847 was so great that few people ever dared to describe it. The result was that an overlarge number of people from both [Flemish] provinces flocked elsewhere in the hope of finding either work or assistance that had been sought in vain at home, since all levels of society in Flanders, if not in need, were at least experiencing difficulty; and public assistance, however great, was insufficient to help so many thousands of needy people.

Many of these unfortunates set out toward Brabant, especially Brussels.113

Upon reaching the capital city, the two women find themselves victims of the royal decree expelling beggars, against which Sleeckx
sarcasically inveighs:

And now they were no longer permitted to step inside the gates of Brussels and appeal to the inhabitants' compassion for the suffering. The city officials who received hundreds of foreign bankrupts, foreign swindlers, French acrobats and French fortune-hunters daily with open arms, smiling as they let them roam the city streets and carry on their business, the city officials did to our poor Flemish brothers what the Turks did with the plague: they closed the doors in front of them; they had gendarmes and police agents arrest them so that they would not have to pass under the eyes of the aforementioned tradesmen and given them a bad impression of Belgium. 114

The specific parallel in the story to Stevens' painting comes with the next sentence, describing the furtive wanderings of the fugitive beggars trying to avoid the authorities: "Like shadows, the women roamed around the capital for several days with many hundreds of equally unfortunate creatures from Flanders." It seems entirely possible that the two women in the shadowed background might correspond to Sleeckx's characters adrift in Brussels. The young woman on the ground could be the twenty-year-old daughter ready to collapse from the self-starvation imposed to feed her mother, who would correspond to the kneeling figure looking through the garbage. 115 It would not be the first time that an episode from a socially conscious Flemish novel was illustrated by a Belgian painter. De Block's What a Mother Can Suffer would have offered a very successful precedent for Stevens.

How did the painting fare with the critics? Morning in Brussels received praise from both Cels and Siret. Cels' praise was more guarded. The objections he raised were based upon Stevens' choice of subject matter, which he found too vulgar, but which he finally accepted because of its execution ("spirituelle, fine, nerveuse") and sentimental presentation ("épisode ... pathétique ... qui fait rire et qui
75
touche"). Significantly, Cels spends most of his review talking about
the human beggars, whom he can condescendingly dismiss as harmless
objects of pity since they are too helpless to pose a communist or
republican threat.

In describing the dogs, Cels falls upon metaphors which connect
the animals to human beings: the scavenging canine is a "glaneur du
champ infect des villes," and Stevens is christened "La Bruyère de rue," and
"Gavarni en tableau." Siret carries these comparisons further,
calling Stevens the "Callot des chiens." 117 An entire section of his
review on the painting, in fact, draws parallels between the individual
dogs and the human types they resemble.

Siret becomes so involved with Stevens' dogs that he makes no men­
tion at all of the human beggars in the background. Because of his
obliviousness to the human figure, Siret, unlike Celes, leveled no
criticism at all toward the subject matter. The only reservations he
had were in regard to style. He praised Stevens' handling of paint, excused his greyish palette ("c'est peut-être nécessaire à l'originalité de son talent") and took the artist to task only for his unorthodox composition.119

It thus becomes apparent that suffering dogs were more acceptable objects of pity than the miserable human proletariat for mid-nineteenth century Belgian audiences. Explicit confirmation of this phenomenon is found in a review by Victor Joly of Stevens' entry in the Paris Salon of 1852, A Dog's Profession, showing a team of dogs harnessed to a salt truck.120 Stevens' painting elicits more sympathy, he feels, than Courbet's stonebreakers.

Nous comparâmes dans notre pensée les travailleurs flâneurs de Courbet--l'aimable critique vise les Casseurs de pierres--et ces pauvres créatures que l'homme soumet à un travail mortel sous le prétexte que le chien est son meilleur ami. Et le résultat de nos réflexions fut de nous dire que les traîneurs de sable de M. Stevens méritaient bien plus les sympathies des amis de l'humanité que les loupeurs de M. Courbet, qui, de mémoire de cantonnier, ne se sont jamais foulé le poignet dans leurs travaux de lazzaroni.121

By the placement of his human paupers behind a screen of starving dogs on Morning in Brussels, Stevens' large-scale, contemporary and locally-set problem painting was allowed to pass through the critics' gauntlet unscathed. His success is all the more remarkable considering his avoidance, unlike Hunin or Van de Kerkhove, of remnants of religious prototypes, and in view of his objective dispassion in presenting the beggars' distress, as opposed to the emotional overflow of the other two painters. The Beggars or Morning in Brussels thus set a
precedent for the realist canvases of his brother and of Charles de Groux, whose first contemporary subject appeared the very next year—still two years before Courbet's *Stonebreakers* and *Burial at Ornans* were exhibited in Paris.
NOTES


5 B. S. Chlepner, Cent ans d'histoire sociale en Belgique (Brussels, 1956), pp. 32-33.


7 Enquête sur la condition des classes ouvrières et sur le travail des enfants (Brussels, 1842-6).

8 Neuville, pp. 82-96.

9 Ibid., p. 100.

10 Ibid., p. 103.

11 Ibid., p. 109.

12 Ibid., p. 111.

13 Ibid., p. 112.

14 Ibid., pp. 113-114.


16 Neuville, p. 117.

17 Ibid., pp. 128, 130-131.
The buying power of the low wages received by workers was often eroded further by the truck-system, whereby the employer would pay part of the salaries with goods or require that certain items be purchased in stores that he owned—often items of which the workers did not have immediate need and/or for which they paid a higher price than they would have elsewhere. See Neuville, pp. 120-121.

The Flemish-speaking provinces are West Flanders, East Flanders, Antwerp, Limbourg and the northern part of Brabant (with the exception of Brussels, a bilingual city).

A mechanized process for the manufacture of linen was devised in England in 1810. See Jacquemyns, p. 68.
36 Ibid., pp. 401-402.

37 Enquête sur l'industrie linéaire, rapport de la Commission, octobre, 1841. 2 vols (Brussels, 1841).

38 Neuville, pp. 75, 80.

39 Ibid., pp. 78-79.

40 Ibid., pp. 76-77.

41 Ibid., p. 77.

42 Ibid., pp. 77-78.


44 Jacquemyns, pp. 405-407; Neuville, pp. 61-62, 64-65.

45 Chlepner, p. 34; Robertson, p. 18.

46 J. Mareska and J. Heymans, Enquête sur le travail et la condition physique des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton à Gand (Chent, 1845). Quoted and translated in De Meeûs, pp. 304-305. The report is also summarized in Dhondt, pp. 77-80.


48 Jacquemyns, pp. 314-316.

49 Ibid., p. 407.

50 Ibid., pp. 322-329.

51 Ibid., pp. 407-408.

52 Ibid., pp. 329-330.

53 Ibid., pp. 341-342.

54 Ibid., pp. 335-336, 408.

55 For a study in English on the Flemish Movement, see Shepherd B. Clough, A History of the Flemish Movement in Belgium (New York, 1930).

56 Kats (1804-1886), a leader in early socialist reform efforts in Belgium (see Ch. IV, Part 2), was the author of several tendensstukken (pièces à thèse) dealing with the suffering of his lower-class
compatriots. Klaes Lyden (1835) treated the woes of the Flemish little man. De Voorbereiding van de Kiezing in de Herberg (The Preparation for the Election in the Inn) of 1836 advocated universal franchise in order to permit workers to govern themselves without interference from the rich. He also composed a collection of Cathecisms on the Poverty of the Belgian People before 1848. See Brouwers, pp. 66-70; R. F. Lissens, De Vlaamse Letterkunde van 1780 tot Heden (Brussels, 1977), p. 57.

These include Blinde Rosa (1850), Rikke-Tikke-Tak (1851), De Arme Edelman (1851) and Het Geluk van rijk to zijn (1855). Paul Hamelius, Introduction à la littérature française et flamande de Belgique (Brussels, 1921), pp. 185, 187, calls this genre the "conte villageois" or "conte social," and claims that in such stories, Conscience steers a course midway between the idyll and the roman à thèse.

Conscience's first success was De Leeuw van Vlaanderen (1838), a work of historical fiction full of romantic pagaentry which narrated the Flemish resistance against the French in the Middle Ages. Other of his historical novels which fit into this medieval, nationalistic mould are Het Wonderjaar (1837) and Jacob van Artevelde (1849).

Georges Eekhoud, Henri Conscience (Brussels, [1881]), p. 82.


De Pillecyn, p. 115.

Quoted in Brouwers, p. 140.

In 1843, Conscience would also write a novel about the career of an artist called Hoe men Schilder wordt. Zetternam set out to give Conscience's theme a more realistic treatment in his Hoe men Schilder is in 1855. Certain elements in Jaak of een Arm Huisgezin are interesting in light of De Groux's career: the incorporation of a German painter who depicts scenes of poverty (cf. De Groux's relationship to Düsseldorf genre artists); the motif of the burned cottage of Jaak's family, the source of their impoverishment and the reason they had to move to Antwerp (cf. De Groux's The Lost Crop [1870]).

Zetternam, quoted in Brouwers, p. 218.

Domien Sleeckx, Volksverhalen (Ghent, 1868), pp. 81-95. The original edition was published in Brussels in 1848, according to De Pillecyn, pp. 17, 115, 159. See Part 3 of Chapter I for the relationship of this story to Joseph Stevens' The Beggars or Morning in Brussels.

Heine's poem had been published in the Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung (see Chapter IV). J. Kuypers, "Het Vroegsocialisme tot 1850," in Dhondt, p. 139.
Quoted in Ibid.

Quoted in Brouwers, p. 79.

Ibid., p. 80.

Conscience was a schoolteacher, Van Kerckhoven an office clerk, and Zetternam a housepainter, son of a town clerk.


De Pillecyn, pp. 186-90.

No movement of French-speaking writers comparable to the Flemish in consistent commitment to depicting lower class problems developed in Belgium until decades after the Flemish, when a Belgian variant of French naturalism was introduced by Paul Heusy (Un Coin de la vie de misère [1878]) and Camile Lemonnier (Un Mâle [1880]). This time lag appears surprising, considering the number of potential prototypes from France which probed the lower strata of society written before 1848. These include works of major writers like Victor Hugo (Le dernier jour d'un condamné [1829], Claude Gueux [1834]) and George Sand (Jacques [1834], Le Compagnon du Tour de France [1840], Le Meunier [1845]) and minor figures such as Eugène Sue (Les Mystères de Paris [1842-3], Le Juif errant [1844-5]), F. Maconnais (Les grisettes vengées [1838]), Clémence Robert (René l'ouvrier [1841]) and Virginie Ancelot (Gabrielle [1839]). The time-lag may be attributed in large part to the fact that which devastated Flanders during the 1840s was never as severe in the Walloon provinces, where the coal mining industry was rising as the Flemish linen market declined. The French-speaking writers thus had no immediate social cause among their own people upon which to focus attention. Whatever the case, only isolated examples of socially conscious fiction or poetry from the pre-1848 period by francophonic Belgian writers can be pinpointed today. These include Joseph Gaucet's Soeur et Frère (1840), a story with reformist intentions drenched in pathos. See David Owen Evans, Le roman social sous la monarchie de juillet (Paris, 1936); Gustave Charlîer, Le Roman réaliste en Belgique: Extraits et Notices (Brussels, 1944); and Gustave Charlîer, Joseph Hanse, et al., Histoire illustrée des Lettres françaises de Belgique (Brussels, 1958).

Van Kalken, p. 605.

Georges H. Dumont, Le Miracle de 1848 (Brussels, 1948).

De Meeûs, p. 305.

Pirene, vol. 7, pp. 133-135; Thomas Basyn, "L'Arrestation de Karl Marx à Bruxelles le 4 mars 1848," La Revue Générale (September 15, 1928), 257-274. Socialist activity in Belgium will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.
77. A recent consideration of French painting within the socio-political context of the 1848 uprising is found in T. J. Clark, Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1973).

78. Hasenclever's painting depicts protest in Düsseldorf that took place on October 9, 1848. It was set off by the arrest of radical poet Ferdinand Freiligrath on October 4 because of his subversive poem "Die Toten an die Lebenden." A local workers organization which he had founded, the Volksclub, rallied to his defense and assembled 5,000 demonstrators who marched under the red flag, protesting the arrest. The demands presented by the bearded proletarian were eventually met, for Freiligrath was finally released. In this painting, Hasenclever earns the distinction of being "the first German artist to paint positive proletarian figures and their progressive struggles [Kampfformen]," according to Wolfgang Hüt, Die Düsseldorfer Malerschule, 1819-1869 (Leipzig, 1964), p. 118. Indeed, one of the workers shakes his fist in anger while another gestures toward the raging mob below. This painting figured in the Antwerp Salon of 1852 (no. 242), listed in the catalogue as Députation des travailleurs auprès de l'Autorité communale. Episode de l'année 1848 en Allemagne.

79. La dernière chute du Christ (no. 215) and Le Christ au jardin des oliviers (no. 216), both unlocated.

80. Siret, p. 23.

81. Ibid., p. 30.

82. "Revue de l'Exposition générale des beaux-arts de Belgique en 1848; Chapitre VI. Les Genristes," La Renaissance, chronique des Beaux-Arts et de la littérature, 10 (1848), 92.

83. Siret, p. 47.


87. "Revue de 1848," Renaissance, 82. Further elaborating on the points of similarity later in the review, the critic states that "Il [Hunin] affectionne la même nature de sujets que Greuze; il compose ses tableaux de la même façon, prend quelques airs de tête, et surtout s'applique à reproduire un genre d'expression que l'on ne retrouve que dans les tableaux de Greuze." Ibid., 83.
The two Greuze paintings described are La lecture de la bible (Private collection, Paris); and Le Paralytique (Hermitage, Leningrad). The apparent derivation of the former from Teniers (Anita Brookner, Greuze [Greenwich, Connecticut, 1972], pp. 93-95) points to one reason for Greuze's veneration in Belgium. De Block's La lecture de la Bible (1869, M.R.B.A., Brussels) is closely based upon a Greuze prototype of the same title (Private collection, Paris).

"Revue de 1848," Renaissance, 83.

Also relevant iconographically is Louis Herson's Louis XVI distribuant les aumônes aux pauvres devant l'hiver de 1788, exhibited in the same Paris Salon of 1817.

Geirnaert's painting was reproduced as a lithograph in J. A. L., Album du Salon de 1845 (Brussels, [1845]), facing p. 20--reviewed on pp. 16-17.


Cf. Benjamin West's Penn's Treaty with the Indians (1772, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia), which illustrates the Quakers' success in dealing with the Indians by recourse to the peaceful, humanitarian ideals of Christianity—as opposed, by implication, to the exploitative, insensitive behavior of the British toward American colonists, which led to armed rebellion.

The engraving after the painting is cataloged in T. Hippert and J. Linnig, Le Peintre-graveur hollandais et belge (Brussels, 1879), p. 1055.


Thieme-Becker, vol. 20, p. 172; La Chronique des Arts et de la Curiosité (Supplement to the Gazette des Beaux-Arts) (1898), p. 278.

No specific connection between the Düsseldorff school and Van de Kerkhove's work can be made at present, except for the awareness in Belgium by 1848 of Düsseldorff painters. See Chapter II. Whatever the case, Jules Dujardin, L'Art Flamand, vol. 4 (Brussels, 1896-1900), p. 176, is incorrect in grouping Van de Kerkhove with the followers of De Groux. De Groux's first realist subject was exhibited in the Antwerp Salon of 1849. He débuted in the Salon of 1848 with two Biblical scenes (see n.79).
... triste sujet exécuté dans un style lourd et d'un dessin complètement manqué. Où donc l'auteur a-t-il trouvé ce coin de terre où les hommes sont à peu près d'un tiers plus courts que les hommes ordinaires? A moins de s'appeler Callot, une procession de souffreteux de ce genre ne peut rien présenter d'original ni de sympathique. Nous engagerons l'auteur de ce tableau à abandonner un genre ce qui n'est pas fait pour lui et à étudier l'harmonie des couleurs ainsi que les lois du dessin." Siret, p. 56.

nos. 890-889, respectively.


Paul Fierens, Joseph Stevens (Brussels, 1931), pp. 6-7.

Eekhoud, p. 33.

Fierens, Joseph Stevens, p. 6, plate 1.


wilenski, vol. 1, p. 476.

Engravings were made of this painting in 1838 and succeeding years, during which time it "became one of the best-loved prints of the century." Arts Council of Great Britain, Great Victorian Pictures: Their Paths to Fame (London, 1978), p. 47.

Josse-B.-J. Cell, Junior lavished this long-winded account on the painting: "Nous sommes à la campagne, le jour commence à percer tristement à travers les lourds et gris nuages du ciel, il a neigé toute la nuit; un pauvre Savoyard, que la faim rendait faible et plus frileux sans doute, n'a pu se traîner jusqu'à cette chétive cabane que vous voyez fumer là-bas, où on lui eût donné du pain et de l'hospitalité,—car la misère rend compatissant. Il s'est abrité de la bise glacée derrière un mur ruineux; il y a passé une terrible nuit! Tout ce qu'il a encore d'affections, d'espérances, de fortune au monde est là près de lui: son orgue, qu'au jour du départ, sa pauvre mère lui confia comme un trésor; son singe, son Jacquot que la misère avait pelé avant que la froide l'eût fait mourir! car il est mort Jacquot, mort pendant cette nuit fatale, pauvre Jacquot! puis son chien, son fidèle barbet, si intelligent et si courageux dans l'exercice de ses fonctions! Bucéphale tous crins qui portait si noblement Jacquot, et qui allait quêtant l'oboile du riche et des petits enfants réjouis, d'un air si suppliant, avec tant de persévérance, pour ses compagnons de voyage
et de misère!—Engourdi, roïdé par le froid, le petit Savoyard est là étendu sur la neige; il agonise; la mort déjà imprimé sur ses traits livides sa terrible empreinte; son regard, en s'éteignant, fait un suprême effort pour rencontrer encore une fois le regard de son dernier ami, et lui dire le dernier adieu! Et cet ami, ce pauvre babet, oh! comme il a la conscience de son affreuse position! comme il comprend tout ce qu'il y a de cruel dans une semblable séparation, tout ce qu'il y a de poignant dans son impuissance à aider, à sauver son pauvre maître! Terrifié par le malheur, il ne bouge point, il semble cloué au sol, et dans son silence vraiment éloquent, dans ce regard compatiissant et consterné attaché sur son maître expirant, quelle douleur profonde! Quel désespoir muet! c'est à arracher des larmes." "Promenade au Salon," Revue de la Flandre, 4 (1849), 306. See also Siret, 81.

111 Verboekhoven's animals were frequently life-size and genre paintings like Hunin's Distribution of Alms in a Convent (138.5 x 205) were as large or larger than Stevens' work. Life-size poachers and beggars had appeared in French art as early as 1841. Léon Rosenthal, Du Romantisme au réalisme (Paris, 1914), p. 390.

112 Jacquemyns, p. 315. Joseph's brother Alfred would also take up the theme of police harassment of beggars several times during his brief fling with social realism, in Mendicité tolérée (K.M.S.K., Antwerp), and Les Chasseurs de Vincennes (1855, Musée de Compiègne).

113 Domien Sleeckx, "Zelfopoffering," Volksverhalen (Ghent, 1868), p. 82.

114 Ibid., pp. 93-94.

115 Eekhoud, Peintres animaliers, p. 41, calls the women ragpickers. In the preliminary sketch (Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Royale, Brussels), the figure on her knees does appear to clutch a rag, but this does not preclude a search for food as well. On the other hand, contemporary critic Cels, Revue de la Flandre, p. 305, believes the women are looking for cinders. The argument in favor of a food hunt might be bolstered by the parallels the artist wishes to draw between the dogs and humans, as the word "beggars" in the title would indicate. Since the two dogs in the central foreground are fighting over a bone and all the dogs appear emaciated, it seems logical that the humans in the background are also preoccupied with procuring food.

116 Cels, 305.

117 Siret, 81. Cf. also Siret's association of Van de Kerkhove with Callot. La Renaissance carried a series of four articles on Callot, beginning in vol. 11 (1849), indicating an apparent revival of interest in the seventeenth century French printmaker.
Nous nous permettrons seulement de reprocher dans la composition dont nous venons de parler le manque d'harmonie. Les chiens sont placés à droite et à gauche du tableau et brisent violemment l'unité si désirable en toutes choses d'art." Siret, p. 81.

120 Reproduced in La Renaissance, vol. 13 (1851), facing p. 68.

121 Joly, p. 153.
Charles Corneille Auguste de Groux was born on August 4, 1825 in the small village of Comines, located in the province of West Flanders but extending beyond the border into France. He was the seventh of ten children of Jean-Baptiste Joseph de Groux, a ribbon manufacturer, and his wife, Marie-Constance Sophie Vandenwynckele, both natives of Comines themselves. The family moved to Brussels when Charles was eight years old.

Although De Groux is characterized by Leclercq as a moody, solitary youth, Adhémar Siret dismisses the notion that he suffered through "une jeunesse pénible et maladive. Loin de là, Charles Degroux était l'enfant le plus gai de la famille et il avait vingt ans quand il fut malade pour la première fois." In 1838, at the age of thirteen, De Groux enrolled, apparently to the consternation of his practical-minded bourgeois parents, in the Académie des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, where he remained until 1850.

The origins of the Brussels Academy date back to 1711, when a drawing school intended for tapestry-weavers, painters and sculptors was initiated in the Hôtel de Ville. Reorganization occurred in 1763, but it was not until Belgian independence in 1830 that a major revival.
took place, ushered in by David's star pupil Navez, who assumed direction of a program of study modelled after that of his former master's academy in France. Students were taught principles of modelling and required to draw after plaster casts, engravings after the old masters, and live models. The fundamental text was *Le Dessin au trait*, a systematic guidebook for art students stressing the importance of copies after engravings, by Mathieu van Brée (another David pupil, who directed Brussel's rival academy in Antwerp from 1827-39). Belgian artists were able to exhibit their works publicly in Salons held each year in either Brussels, Antwerp or Ghent. This system, devised by the Belgian government, was initiated on a regular basis with the Brussels Salon of 1833, followed by Antwerp in 1834 and Ghent in 1835. The same rotating pattern continued throughout the nineteenth century. Public exhibitions were also held, on a more irregular basis, in Liège and Malines.

A schism between Antwerp and Brussels artists developed at the time of Belgian independence in 1830, when artists from the former city, striving to break the hegemony of French neo-classicism upon Belgian painting, attempted a nationalistic transfer of allegiance from David—who had died in Brussels in 1825 after a ten-year Belgian exile—back to Rubens, in gigantic history paintings commemorating events in the history of the Low Countries, both past and present. Outstanding examples are Gustave Wappers' *Self-Sacrifice of the Leyden Burgomaster Van der Werff* (1829, Centraal Museum, Utrecht) and *Episode from the Belgian Revolution of 1830* (1835, M.R.B.A., Brussels), and Nicaise de Keyser's *Battle of the Golden Spurs* (1836, M.S.K., Kortrijk). Despite the strivings for Rubensian color and sweep, however, these paintings smack
strongly of the transposed Rubenism practiced by the romantic painters of France.\textsuperscript{8}

After approximately four years of study in the Brussels Academy, De Groux was permitted to work under the direct supervision of Navez himself, around 1843, according to Leclercq.\textsuperscript{9} In view of the number of other realists who were trained by Navez—Alfred Stevens, Constantin Meunier, Edmond Lambrichs, and Théodore Baron—it is perhaps instructive to survey briefly his career and art. Born in Charleroi in 1787, he began training at the Brussels Academy in 1807 and then in Paris with David from 1813-1816. His masterpiece of group portraiture, The Hemptinne Family (Pl. 33; M.R.B.A., Brussels) was painted in 1816, immediately after his return to Brussels. He soon departed for Rome, where he lived from 1817-1821. After a brief visit to Holland, Navez returned to settle permanently in Brussels, opening his atelier to pupils beginning in 1823.

Navez's œuvre consisted of portraits, Biblical subjects and genre scenes.\textsuperscript{10} Despite his teacher's belief in the primacy of history painting, Navez preferred to consider himself a portrait painter. Indeed, his portraits are his best work, but during his lifetime, he was disappointed that there seemed to be a greater demand for genre scenes. He complained of this in a letter from Rome to Auguste-Donat de Hemptinne, the father in his family portrait:

\begin{quote}
Je crains d'être obligé de me consacrer, comme les autres, au genre. Lorsque tu en trouves l'occasion, ne manque pas de dire que le portrait est ma spécialité; car j'y attends plus de ce genre-là que de tous les autres.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

Navez's production of genre paintings nevertheless remained constant,
from his first trip to Rome (1817-22) throughout the rest of his career. An examination of their title provides one source for De Groux's eventual iconographic repertoire. Although the younger artist would put his subjects in Belgian costumes and settings rather than Italian, recurring themes such as alms, pilgrimages, prayer or sickness can be traced back to Navez (Pl. 24). 12

In the studio, Navez insisted upon his beginning pupils' mastery of drawing in pencil, which was, he said, "l'instrument le plus expressif et celui qui exige le plus de conscience dans l'exécution, ne permet-tant pas d'esquiver les difficultés." Emphasis was also placed upon inspiration from literature. Moreover, Navez felt that the artist's goal was to extract beauty from nature with help from the examples of great art of the past. This classical academic approach has been summed up in the following way: "Imiter la nature et s'aider, pour l'interprétation des formes si variées qu'elle présente, de l'expérience des grands siècles qui nous ont laissé d'impérissables modèles." 14

Despite the heavy emphasis upon ideal beauty and art of the past, Navez was quick to emphasize that great art is always grounded first of all in reality ("l'idéal eût toujours pour base le réel."). 15 The extent to which he held to this principle is demonstrated in the fact that, while in Italy, he worked only from nature and abstained from making copies of paintings.

He also showed great enthusiasm for the realist tradition of Netherlandish art. He effusively praised Terborch's Signing of the Treaty of Munster (1648, National Gallery, London) in a letter to Léopold Robert, and, in an address delivered to the Institute of France
in 1829, he opined that contemporary painters would do better if they carried the fundamentals laid down by the Flemish primitives to their logical conclusions rather than pursuing the art of Rubens and Van Dyck.16 The latter statement reveals not only Navez's consciousness of his country's deep-rooted realism—a lesson not lost on De Groux—but reveals as well his classicist's antagonism with the Rubensian romanticists of Antwerp. As a final proof of Navez's relevance to the future generation of realists, his biographer Alvin reports how the artist was not immune to sketching streetside lowlife—although he would directly proceed to idealize his models on the opposite page of his sketchbook.17

Il dessinait dans ce cahier tout en causant. Chaque feuillet recevait une figure, un croquis saisi dans la rue, d'après quel- que pauvre femme, un mendiant, un homme du peuple à son travail; et, en regard de ce dessin aussi réaliste que pourrait l'exiger Courbet lui-même, son crayon délicat reproduisait la même figure qu'il traduisait en style noble, sans altérer en rien ses traits essentiels.18

Leclercq, who, as a pupil of Navez himself before turning to novels, had first-hand insight into the academic training process, narrates De Groux's difficulties as a beginning student. He had particular trouble in drawing after casts or living models, and would lose all sense of color and proportion, producing colossal heads that were two to three times larger than life. The consternation of his teacher is described by Leclercq:

Navez ne sait s'il devait se fâcher ou rire. "Mais, mon cher ami," disait-il à de Groux, "cette tête-là est aussi forte que celle du Jupiter Olympien; placez-la donc à côté du modèle: vous voyez, elle dépasse ses genoux de toute la hauteur du front. Ceci est une affaire mathématique. Prenez un mètre, si vos yeux ne vous guident pas; donnez à vos têtes vingt-cinq centimètres du hauteur, un peu plus, un peu moins: ainsi vous resterez dans les proportions humaines. Nous ne sommes plus au siècle des géants." Et Navez riait en regardant de Groux, qui était petit
et frêle; il semblait dire: "Comment diable ces énormités peuvent-elles sortir de ce bout d'homme-là?"19

On the other hand, De Groux is reported to have experienced consistent success in student competitions for his skill in composition. According to Leclercq, De Groux's taciturn and introverted behavior during his student days earned him the nickname "Job" among his peers.20 After criticism from Navez, he would sit silent and immobile for hours in the corner, too weak-willed to rebel against his instructor's wishes.

His placid, even indolent exterior, however, was apparently a mere cloak for an inner intensity: "... il y avait au fond de cet être délicat et pour ainsi dire passif quelque chose que ses intimes seuls ont pu découvrir, un mélange singulier d'héroïsme engourdi de faiblesses, une flamme pâle et presque froide qu'on sentait de nature à devenir très intense et très brûlante."21 He would even become violent upon occasion. After constant teasing and badgering from his livelier colleagues, "il se mettait dans des colères blanches. L'agneau montrait des dents comme un lion."22 Although he supposedly became more sociable after having achieved professional success, his earlier shyness still predominated to the extent that he could never be characterized as "worldly."23

De Groux's preferred subject matter during his student days is reported to have been medieval and Biblical subjects. Leclercq reminisces about his friend's susceptibility to French romanticism, or

... les bruits et les images qui nous venaient de Paris. ... Il croquait avec facilité et avec goût des groupes de chevaliers, de châtelaines et de pages, en chasse avec de beaux filles à robes traînantes, accoudées à quelque balcon, cherchant des yeux à l'horizon l'amant "fier" qu'un tuteur "cruel" leur défendait d'aimer.24
These early drawings have been lost, but something of their spirit may be deduced from surviving stained-glass window and mural designs, and book illustrations of legends and historical events of the Middle Ages (see Chapter III).

The Biblical scenes of De Groux, an inevitable consequence of training in Navez's studio, were distinguished by the young artist's predilection for "le fait dramatique, ou les costumes patriarchales, ou la grâce sauvage des personnages devenus classique."25 As a result of Navez's teaching, De Groux tended to conceive his Biblical subjects through the eyes of Renaissance masters: "il eut des visions raphaéllesques; le fantôme de Michel-Ange le hanta et le força d'enfanter des figures ayant quelque rapport avec les créations épiques de l'auteur du 'Jugement dernier.'"26

Several surviving paintings of scenes from the Bible dating from this early phase of De Groux's career reveals a style not yet crystallized. The church of Notre-Dame-du-Finistère in Brussels houses two Stations of the Cross by De Groux painted during his study with Navez, no. 8, Christ Meeting the Holy Women, and no. 12, The Crucifixion.27 An Old Testament scene, Lot Fleeing Sodom, is found in a private collection in Brussels.20 These paintings exhibit the awkward articulation of figures, spatial inaccuracies and discordant color one associates with a beginner, and a handling which is surprisingly painterly in view of the smoothly finished surfaces of Navez. The fluid brushwork anticipates that of De Groux's realist canvases of the early fifties.

Sometime between 184829 and his departure for Düsseldorf in 1851, De Groux was taught by Jean-Baptiste van Eycken (1809-1853), a painter
of history and religious scenes who had been a pupil of Navez himself from 1831-5. Van Eycken received artistic council from Paul Delaroche and Victor Schnetz in Paris in 1837, and from Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, in Rome, where he stayed from 1838-9. He began teaching at the Brussels Academy in 1839, the year in which he completed St. Louis of Gonzaga Teaching the Poor in Hospitals, demonstrating one of the traditional approaches to depicting poverty: consigning it to the past and offsetting it with a heroic foil. Other of Van Eycken's occasional genre subjects relevant to De Groux and his colleagues' future paintings include A Cobbler (Brussels Salon of 1833), Return from the Harvest (1839), The Orphans (1843), The Grape Harvest (1848), and The Gallant Poacher (Antwerp Salon of 1849).30

Van Eycken was showered with honors—membership in the Société des Beaux-Arts de France (1840) and the Royal Academy of Belgium (1848), gold medals from the province of Brabant (1840) and in the Paris Salon of 1840, and decoration in the Order of King Leopold (1847). His Abundance of the Year 1847 (Pl. 19) was presented to Queen Victoria of England, who promptly ordered a pendant for Prince Albert.31 One is tempted to speculate on whether De Groux's allegiances in the Brussels Salon of 1848 fell with his instructor's falsely idealized image of the state of the Belgian nation, or with the more truthful exposés of Van de Kerkhove and future colleague Joseph Stevens.

In the final analysis, Van Eycken's influence upon De Groux would seem to consist of little more than the inculcation, like Navez, of the standard principle of academic art during his student years. Neither of his teachers' smoothly finished surfaces and conservative
iconography have very much to do with De Groux's realist canvases after 1853. Van Eycken's last years were lived out in sadness and misery after the public became disenchanted with his weakening skill. The coup de grâce came in 1852, when critic Victor Joly pilloried his Jeremiah of that year in a sarcastic poem.

Savez-vous pourquoi Jérémie
A tant pleuré pendant sa vie?
C'est qu'en prophète il prêvoyait
Qu'un jour Van Eycken le peindrait.32

It is probable that De Groux may have felt some spiritual affinity with Van Eycken since both men's lives were characterized by chronic melancholy and ill-health. The despondency of Van Eycken's final years can be traced to the death of his wife around 1839, which plunged him into a deeply religious bent that might further have attracted his pupil, given the religious current present in virtually all of De Groux's canvases.33 One can also suggest some possible influences of Van Eycken upon some aspects of De Groux's brief foray into history painting in 1860,34 but the most obvious thread that bound the two artistically was their common attraction to the Nazarene art of Düsseldorf, which will be treated in Part 2 of this chapter.

After having completed his formal training and before setting out for Düsseldorf, De Groux spent a period of time working in a private studio which he rented for himself and lived out the bohemian existence described by Leclercq.

Il vécut longtemps d'une vie rude et assez irrégulière, de cette vie que tous les jeunes peintres devenus libres ont connue, et que Henri Murger a nommée la vie de bohème. Il eut ses intimes, dont quelques uns le trahirent; il eut ses jours de misère, parmi lesquels des jours resplendissants. Il vécut dans le découragement et l'espérance, comme tous les aspirants à la gloire.35
Public exhibition of De Groux's works began in the Brussels Salon of 1848, with a Last Fall of Christ (no. 215) and Christ in the Garden of Olives (no. 216), both lost, but neither one sufficiently distinguished to have elicited any comment from Cels, Siret, Joly or the critic of the Renaissance. The following year De Groux turned from the religious subject matter of his academic training period, and, perhaps inspired by the new realist currents seen in the works of Van de Kerkhove or Stevens in the Brussels Salon of 1848, exhibited his first genre painting in the Antwerp Salon of 1849, a Paupers' Bench (no. 160), now lost.

This early genre subject is usually overlooked by those anxious to point to The Drunkard (1853) as the starting point of social realism in Belgium. It is not clear what relationship the 1849 Paupers' Bench bears to the identically titled painting, signed and dated 1854, in the M.R.B.A., Brussels. An unlocated lithograph by Tony Voncken exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1854 (no. 1072) bearing the title "Le banc des pauvres, d'après M. Charles Degroux," could presumably be a copy of either of the two versions. Hymans reports that response to the 1849 painting was favorable—"la presse en fit l'éloge," but Cels, in the Revue de la Flandre, while praising De Groux's sensitive presentation, criticized the unpleasant color: "Le sentiment général et quelques bonnes expressions se font remarquer dans Le Banc des Pauvres (160) de M. Ch. De Groux, mais sa couleur tannée est fort déplaisante."

Disappointment came in 1850 when De Groux finished second in the Prix de Rome competition held in Antwerp, having entered a Davidian subject, The Horatii Departing for Combat. Later, he reportedly
painted over the canvas, deeming it mediocre. Thwarted from study in Rome, he turned his sights instead to nearby Düsseldorf and set out for the art center on the Rhine in April, 1851—four months before the opening of the Brussels Salon in which Courbet would exhibit his Stonebreakers.

Part 2. Sojourn in Düsseldorf, 1851-2:
Nazarene Art and Tendenzmalerei

Düsseldorf, a renowned art center by mid-century, was a logical alternative to Rome for De Groux to broaden his artistic background. The high regard in which Germany in general was held by Belgian artists and intellectuals, especially after 1848, is recounted by Hymans:

Les grands figures de Goethe, de Schiller, mises en relief par la poésie romantique, semblent avoir acquis une nouvelle autorité par les événements de 1848.
Un voyage en Allemagne appartenait à l'éducation de tout jeune homme débutant dans la carrière des sciences et des lettres.
La gravure, la lithographie avaient rendu familier à tous les sites pittoresques des bords du Rhin, comme naguère les romans de Walter Scott avaient mis en faveur les lacs et les montagnes d'Ecosse. Avec le Rhin de Victor Hugo, les bourgs en ruine, les légendes étaient choses familières à tout artiste. On n'était consacré artiste ou lettré qu'à la condition d'avoir gravé, le sac sur le dos, le bâton à la main, le Drakenfels ou le Lorlai. ... Les productions de l'école de Dusseldorf trouvaient en Belgique une faveur considérable. Les images de la maison Buddaens étaient dans toutes les mains.

Artists from Düsseldorf had already established a strong showing in Belgian Salons prior to De Groux's departure. Andreas Achenbach (1815-1910), one of Düsseldorf's leading landscapists, exhibited a landscape and seascape in the Brussels Salon of 1848. Visitors to the Antwerp Salon of 1849, where De Groux had shown his first Paupers' Bench, could count entries by twenty-five painters from Düsseldorf, two of whom, Karl Hübner and Louis Blanc, would be influential to the
Belgian painter. The number of Düsseldorf paintings exhibited in the Belgian Salons remained high during the next three decades. Moreover, two Düsseldorf artists, Peter Cornelius, director of the Düsseldorf Academy from 1819–24 and Jakob Becker von Worms, a genre painter, were made honorary members of the Royal Academy of Belgium in 1846 and 1847, respectively.41

The Königlich-Preußischen Kunstkademie in Düsseldorf, officially founded in 1819, had evolved gradually from a local drawing school in the late eighteenth century, connected with the impressive art collection of Duke Johann Wilhelm.42 The Academy flourished in the early nineteenth century under the directorship of Peter Cornelius and Wilhelm Schadow, two painters of the Nazarene movement or Lukas Bund ("Guild of St. Luke"). This was a group of German, Austrian and Swiss artists who fled their homelands and established an artistic community in Rome in 1810. Their credo was based on a rejection of traditional academic instruction in favor of a communal system of harmonious, collaborative endeavors reminiscent of medieval guilds and monasteries. Their style and iconography involved a reversion to that of Quattrocento and Renaissance masters, as well as German Gothic, with the intent to purify art by returning to its early sources. The group thus adhered to the general romantic percepts of nationalism—pursuit of a medieval Germanic heritage—and Christian idealism. The format of their artistic productions varied from tiny panel paintings to monumental murals.43

Peter Cornelius, who had joined the Lucas-Bund in Rome in 1811, served as director of the Düsseldorf Academy from 1819–24. He conceived a reformed training system, inspired by the ideal of Nazarene
brotherhood, which would have substituted open exchange between master and pupil for the traditional authoritarian approach. It was left to his successor, Wilhelm Schadow, who assumed directorship in 1826, to bring these plans to fruition.

Schadow had left the academy of his native Berlin in 1813 to join the Nazarenes in Rome, where he converted to Catholicism the next year. His move to Düsseldorf the following decade attracted the artists—his close followers—who became responsible for establishing Düsseldorf's international reputation by the time of De Groux's arrival: Julius Hübner, Theodor Hildebrandt, Carl Sohn, C. F. Lessing, Adolf Schrödter and Eduard Bendemann, among others. Academic reform under Schadow went into effect in 1831 and involved a four-step process. A beginning class taught children to draw from plaster casts, followed by the introduction of live models and painting in the second phase. Advanced students then proceeded to create their own compositions and collaborate with their teacher, after which a select few were entitled to enter the prestigious Meisterklasse, where Schadow himself would supervise the painters in their specially-provided low-rent studios. The latter steps fulfilled Cornelius' vision of student-teacher brotherhood.

The spirit of community and exchange extended outside the academy as well. Extracurricular clubs where artists could engage—or indulge—in activities of a social or cultural nature were initiated with Schadow's arrival. The director's clique included not only artists, but writers and musicians as well, whose interaction inspired evenings of poetry, music, sketching, skits and lebende Bilder, human tableaux...
of literary scenes intended to spark discussion.46

Many artists in Düsseldorf, however, were discontent with the academic orthodoxy of Schadow's immediate circle, which favored history and religious painting, and disliked its strong Prussian character as well. Rhinelanders in particular resented Prussian rule over their homeland, and Schadow's appointment as director of the Düsseldorf Academy was not without political implications. Consequently, alternative groups sprang up beginning in the late 1830s with names like the Picnicker, the Crignac, and the Verein Düsseldorfer Künstler für gegenseitige Unterstützung und Hilfe.47

The most active organization outside the academic clique at the time of De Groux's arrival was the Malkasten. The name of this organization, the German word for "palette," was intended to symbolize the unity of the artists involved, as harmonious as the colors on a painter's palette. It was founded in 1848 under the impetus of Emanuel Leutze (1816-1868), a German-born, American-bred history painter best known for his painting of Washington Crossing the Delaware (1851, Metropolitan Museum, New York), who had come to study painting in the Düsseldorf Academy.48 He boldly broke with the Academy in 1842 in a dispute that involved his insistence upon the artist's right to inject contemporary political messages into history painting, as opposed to Schadow's ideal of Gedankenmalerei, which would embody timeless, universal concepts. Leutze's decision to set up an independent studio and teach students outside the auspices of the Academy soon inspired other painters to do likewise. Motivations stemmed from antagonisms which included politics (independents' leftism vs. academic conservatism), nationality
(Rhinelanders vs. Prussians), religion (Protestant vs. Catholic), and age (young vs. old). The effect of the rift was such that by 1851, the "Düsseldorf Academy" was distinguishable from the "Düsseldorf School," the latter sometimes including but not being limited to the former.\textsuperscript{48}

The real significance of the Malkasten resided in its role as a locus for the independents and in its commitment to democratic principles. The latter characteristic refers not only to the organization's support for freedom from academic straitjackets but also to the politically left-wing orientation of many of its members. The year 1848 was, understandably, a high point in the political consciousness of Düsseldorf's artists. Their attention was focused upon the disturbances occurring in other parts of Germany, involving the left-wing struggle for the twin goals of a united Germany and liberalized government, propounded at the Frankfurt Parliament.\textsuperscript{49} Eleven Düsseldorf artists joined a local militia formed after riots and shootings had broken out in Berlin on March 24, but no violence occurred in Düsseldorf.\textsuperscript{50} The political alignment of independent Malkasten members ran the gamut of left-wing factions, including democrats (K. F. Lessing), socialists (Andreas and Oswald Achenbach) and communists (J. P. Hasenclever, R. Seel and K. Hübner).\textsuperscript{51}

Whatever political zeal the artists might have demonstrated was squelched, however, with the right-wing reaction which set in after the failure of the Frankfurt Parliament and shootings in Berlin. While the buoyant idealism of Germany's would-be reformers was changing to disillusionment and Realpolitik, the Malkasten pragmatically took steps, in 1849, to invite Schadow to join. That such a rapprochement between the
academy and independents was possible is a tribute to the close-knit nature of the Düsseldorf art community and the respect and affection which Schadow inspired, even among his dissenters. But the membership of Schadow and other academicians, such as C. F. Sohn and T. Hildebrandt, clearly worked to the advantage of the Malkasten, since their sanction raised the respectability and status of the organization. Academic participation also pleased Prussian authorities who saw it as a deterrent to political subversion within the independent organization. The year preceding De Groux's arrival, however, a controversy surrounding the admittance of a notoriously radical poet (Ferdinand Freiligrath) to the Malkasten eventually forced Schadow to leave the group.52

Whether or not De Groux was a member of the Malkasten is unknown,53 but he would have to have been at least aware of its existence—and of the dichotomy between the academic and independent painters, accentuated by the still-fresh Schadow-Freiligrath incident. The dualistic nature of De Groux's paintings in the early 1850s reveal a receptiveness to both camps. The influence of Schadow's Academy is revealed in De Groux's lone Biblical scene of 1851, while his early realist works of 1853-4 betray the effect of Düsseldorf's independent genre painters. The resolution of opposites in his mature style beginning in 1857 can be viewed, in one respect, as a synthesis of the two tendencies.

An indication of Düsseldorf's high standing in Belgium is seen in an anonymous article called "L'Ecole de Dusseldorf" which appeared in the Brussels art journal La Renaissance in 1850. This was the year preceding De Groux's departure, and he may very well have read it. The opening paragraphs stress Düsseldorf's geographic proximity to
Brussels and its strength in monumental (i.e., mural) painting.

After a brief history of the academy, the author presents Schadow as an exemplary director who attracted a loyal flock of followers—Lessing, Hildebrandt and Sohn are mentioned—to Düsseldorf as instructors. The writer then praises Schadow's free approach to teaching.

Schadow laisse se développer librement autour de lui toutes les idées, toutes les tendances. ... Il rappelle notre immortel Van Brée, immortel non point par ses tableaux, mais par l'influence immense que son enseignement exerça sur notre école....

Rien n'égale le charme que cet homme remarquable a su répandre sur cette œuvre qu'on peut réellement appeler sienne: l'école de Dusseldorf. Tout y respire le caractère aimable, conciliant du directeur. L'harmonie la plus touchante règne entre les élèves et les professeurs, et les artistes nombreux qui s'y trouvent à la tête d'ateliers renommés.

After a digression complaining of Belgian painters' propensity for arcane subjects drawn from obscure literary passages as opposed to the more direct approach of German artists, the writer concludes with lengthy praise of Karl Friedrich Lessing (1808-1880), singled out for his versatility and resistance to the excesses of romanticism.

Lessing est universel dans son art dont il embrasse les diverses branches avec une égale supériorité. Histoire, genre, portrait, paysages, lui ont valu des palmes décernées par l'Allemagne entière. Nous nous arrêterons longuement à cet homme-là, parce qu'il nous semble être le peintre par excellence vers lequel l'école belge peut tourner les yeux comme vers un modèle à suivre sous tous les rapports. On a accusé l'école de Dusseldorf, pendant un certain temps, et non sans raison, de se complaire aux aberrations de la fièvre romantique que nous avons vue dans sa contagion embrasser l'Europe entière, aussi bien dans la littérature que dans les arts.

C'est incontestablement Lessing qui, non par paroles, mais par le moyen bien plus efficace de l'exemple, a montré le travers de cette tendance. Encore une fois, Lessing est un génie qui
mérite de servir de guide à notre école. La description de ses œuvres constitue à elle seule une école dont nos peintres écoutèrent, nous en sommes certains, les leçons avec ferveur.  

Lessing, although originally a disciple of Schadow, eventually rejected the former master's precepts and left the Academy at about the same time as Leutze, to pave the way for Düsseldorf art of realistic and socially conscious orientation. The initial work to lean in this direction was his controversial Hussite Preaching (Pl. 36; 1836, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf), which sparked considerable controversy immediately upon its completion due to its obliquely implied criticism of the domination of the Rhineland by Catholic Prussia. A lack of documentation leaves open the question of whether De Groux worked under the guidance of Lessing, but certain of his later drawings show an affinity to those of the German artist, and the possible political implications of De Groux's own evangelical scene, Francis Junius Preaching Reform in Antwerp (Pl. 91; 1860, M.R.B.A., Brussels) have probable connections with Hussite Preaching (see Chapter 3).

Actually, almost nothing concrete is known about De Groux's activities in Düsseldorf. One established fact, however, is that he was never enrolled at the Düsseldorf Academy. The Verzeichnisse der Schüler der Königlichen Kunstakademie zu Düsseldorf (or Schülerliste) contains names of five Belgians who had studied at the Academy before 1851 and more who came afterward, but De Groux's name is absent from the list. The Belgian painter took up residence in Düsseldorf just about the time when enrollment by foreigners in the academy reached its peak in 1851, having already grown from twenty-one in 1827 to forty-three in 1836. Americans and Scandinavians led the foreign
students in terms of artistic quality, but Düsseldorf also drew aspiring artists from Russia, Poland, Switzerland, Holland, Great Britain, Austria and Hungary. Leclercq states that De Groux was accompanied to Düsseldorf by his wife, who, according to Delacre, helped support her husband by sewing corsets. Her name was Joanna Geyssens, but the date of her marriage to Charles has not been ascertained.

The sole surviving artistic creation of De Groux's Düsseldorf sojourn is the recently rediscovered *Ruth and Naomi* (1851, collection Sartiliot, Mons) signed "Dusseldorf 1851." This identifies it as De Groux's entry in the Brussels Salon of 1851 (no. 284). It illustrates Ruth begging her mother-in-law Naomi to let her come along to Bethlehem instead of staying behind in her native Moab, speaking the words "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee ... thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," (Ruth 1:16). The painting, set in a lunette frame, is remarkable in relation to those preceding or immediately following it in its smooth, hard-edged academic finish and monumentalization of the two figures, who fill up most of the picture space. In a twilight setting with background barely visible, the women are shown in half-length, close to the picture plane, thereby flattening picture space and simplifying composition in true Nazarene style.

Previous German examples of tenderly entwined pairs of females available as prototypes for De Groux include *Two Maidens* by Eduard Bendemann (Pl. 37; 1833, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf), *The Two Leonores* by Carl Ferdinand Sohn (location unknown), both by Düsseldorf artists and both lunette-shaped canvases, and *Germania and Italia* by Friedrich
Overbeck, a Nazarene (1811-28, Neue Pinakothek, Munich). The pose of
the figures in the latter works, with faces touching, is particularly
close to De Groux, and even closer in pose are the two right-hand em-
bracing female figures in Cornelius' *Wise and Foolish Virgins* (1813-16,
Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf). The re-discovery of *Ruth and Naomi* is of
considerable significance, since it demonstrates De Groux's receptiveness
to the academic tenets of both the Belgian neo-classic and German
Nazarene school, and reveals mastery of a monumentalizing, smoothly-
finished, flattening style in rendering academic subject matter years
before he applied this style to genre scenes of social realist content.

In all probability, De Groux's interest in Düsseldorf was stimu-
lated by his teacher Van Eycken's visit to Germany in 1848 to study the
wasserglass mural techniques of Cornelius, now in Munich, and Wilhelm
von Kaulbach, Cornelius' pupil. Van Eycken attempted to apply the
technique and launch a renaissance of mural painting in Belgium with his
decoration of a room in the Brussels home of Dr. Nollet with medical
history scenes 1848-1851. By 1852, he had finished a Biblical mural for
the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Chapelle in Brussels, which exhibits a
flattened, primitivizing style precisely in tune with retrogressive
Nazarene art, and which differs noticeably from his fourteen earlier and
traditionally-executed Stations of the Cross in the same church.

Given the enthusiasm of De Groux's teacher for monumental paintings
of historical subjects and the young painter's demonstrated compliance
to academic tradition in *Ruth and Naomi*, one may well ask why he did not,
in fact, enroll in the Academy. It seems that, despite the tribute paid
to Nazarene idealism in *Ruth and Naomi*, the art of his years immediately
following his departure from Germany exhibits the realist tendencies of Schadow's independent opponents. These artists' left-wing political sympathies, as opposed to academic conservatism, would certainly have appealed to De Groux's sympathy for the poor and downtrodden demonstrated consistently in his art, and their commitment to independent artistic expression would also have been important for a painter who was to draw attention to himself once back in Belgium for his artistic unorthodoxy.

Writers on De Groux have consistently misinterpreted or failed to investigate the influence of Düsseldorf art upon his later style and iconography. Leclercq states that his Düsseldorf sojourn was instrumental only in instilling a classical, archaizing technique which he would someday exploit in his mural and stained-glass window cartoons. Charles Bertrand, in his analysis of the members of the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts, and Hymans, in his admirable survey of the art of nineteenth century Belgium, both point to Düsseldorf's effect upon De Groux's realist "conversion," but specify no painters, paintings or schools.

The strain of Düsseldorf painting which had the greatest impact upon De Groux was undoubtedly the Tendenzbild (in French, the tableau à tendance or tableau à thèse), developed by the independent genre painters. Like a roman à thèse or piece à thèse, the Tendenzbild presents a specific, contemporary social and/or political problem in a tendentious way. Immel, in her study of nineteenth century German genre painting, notes the wide range of approaches used by the Tendenzmaler to communicate their messages. The spectator is confronted with paintings which can be "accusatory, tragic, satiric, social,
religious, pathetic or heroicizing.\textsuperscript{72} 

Tendenzmalerei may be viewed as an antithesis to Gedankenmalerei, the type of academic production favored by Schadow which presents a universal theme in an idealized style.\textsuperscript{73} Although the impact of Tendenzmalerei upon De Groux's painting was delayed until the year after he left Germany, the brief look at the school's principal artists and their paintings which follows will serve to establish a framework against which De Groux's realist canvases may be viewed. It should be noted from the outset that, while De Groux's images share the German artists' pathetic tone as well as certain stylistic and compositional similarities, he never shares their insistence upon the exposure of specific abuses with the intention of encouraging reform.

The independent spirit of the Tendenzmaler, who insistently defied academic idealization in subject matter and style, is pointedly revealed in a work by Johann Peter Hasenclever, whose Workers Before the Town Council, previously examined (Pl. 18), depicted a tense confrontation between Düsseldorf's proletariat and bourgeoisie in 1848. However innocuous the activity taking place in The Painter's Studio (Pl. 38; 1836, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf) may seem by comparison, the latter work was nevertheless meant to be read as an allegory of the independent genre artists' rejection of academic art in favor of realism. The five artists among whom Hasenclever pictured himself (third from the right) in his studio collaborated with him in painting the canvas. These men, all genre artists themselves, can be identified, from left to right, as Otto Grashof, Carl Engel, Anton Greven, (Hasenclever), Joseph Wilms and Wilhelm Heine. Wilms' tatters, unkempt hair and fixed pose satirize
romantic robber scenes, while the apparatus of romantic knights and riders—helmet and sword—lie discarded on the floor in the foreground. The artists have turned around the huge canvas beloved of academic history painters in the rear, and pushed a cast of the Borghese warrior into the corner at left, with Engel and Greven mocking the pose with their outstretched arms. All of this points to the independents' preference for the living model—an idea reiterated by the dummy's arm Hasenclever has cast over his shoulder. The open book in the lower left foreground says "Siberia," touting the artists' status as rejects, and the bottle held by Greven, the coffee brought in by the maid—even the sketch of Greves' Drinker on the easel at left—all point up the informal, bohemian conviviality of the young rebels who disliked the arch formality of Schadow's clique.74

The bulk of Hasenclever's paintings consist of caricatured, mildly critical scenes of the German bourgeoisie and cannot be classified as Tendenzbilder.75 A sampling of the works of his colleagues, however, reveals the wide range of problems besetting Germany's lower classes to which the Tendenzbild addressed itself. W. J. Heine, for example, one of the artists pictured in the Painter's Studio, painted an important and very early Tendenzbild in 1837, following a series of earlier paintings which, like those of Lessing and Hildebrandt, presented lawbreakers as romantic outcasts (Smuggler [1834], Poacher on the Look-out [1834], The Tramp [1836], all lost). Chapel in the Penitentiary (Pl. 39; 1837, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf), on the other hand, depicted imprisoned worshipers under the surveillance of Prussian guards; the former bear no resemblance to hardened criminals and are, in all
likelihood, political prisoner--subversive students, demagogic reformers and rebellious workers.\textsuperscript{76} Besides its political implications, the painting is also noteworthy for the nascent realism evident in Heine's rejection of artificial academic poses and of a composition based on a lebendem Bild in favor of greater truth to observed life--and light.\textsuperscript{77}

The most noteworthy Tendenzmaler of the Vormärz (pre-1848) period in terms of the quantity of protest paintings and following he inspired was Karl Wilhelm Hübner (1814-1879). After an initial series of innocuous scenes of the lives of the German folk, The Silesian Weavers (Pl. 26; replica in Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf) appeared in 1844, exposing the plight of German weavers whose hand-woven wares are rejected by callous merchants, triggering reactions ranging from amazement and faint-heartedness to resignation to insurrectionary rage. Artistically the painting works less convincingly than Heine's more realistically understated prison scene. Hübner's figures are disposed in the contrived fashion of the lebenden Bilder, and expressions and gestures are artificially exaggerated to the point of caricature, recalling David Wilkie's prototypical Distraining for Rent.\textsuperscript{78} Construction and articulation of the figures are weak, moreover, and overlocalized colors, according to Hütt, produce a jarring effect.\textsuperscript{79}

Nevertheless, the timely subject--Heinrich Heine's poem, "Die schlesischen Wever," had already been published--coupled with Hübner's dramatic presentation attracted great attention as the painting moved from exhibitions in Düsseldorf to Cologne, Berlin, Halberstadt and other German cities. In Cologne, where it was exhibited as The Struggle of our Time for the Abolition of Blatant Class Differences, the
Kölnische Zeitung praised its "socialistic, and thus timely" quality.\textsuperscript{80} Friedrich Engels, in an article published in England in 1844, described the painting at length and called it "more effective socialist agitation than a hundred pamphlets."\textsuperscript{81} To the socialist mind, the most praiseworthy feature of Hübner's image is its direct presentation of the true source of proletarian distress: the painter "showed not merely the opposition between the power of the state and the people, as Heine had done: Hübner took social misery back to its causes, to the exploitation of man by man. He attacked capitalism."\textsuperscript{82}

The following year Hübner again turned to the hard lot of the weaver in an alms scene, Charity in the Cottage of the Poor, wherein a kind-hearted village girl brings bread to a hungry family of textile workers. The Rhenish little man championed by Hübner was prey not only to exploitation by capitalists, but was also the frequent victim of feudal privileges of the aristocracy. Hübner's Gaming Laws (Das Jagdrecht),\textsuperscript{83} also from 1845 shows a young man of the people whisking his wounded father to safety in their cottage. The old man had been shot in the neck by order of the mounted nobleman in the rear because one of his stray pigs that had been destroying the peasants' cornfield had been killed.\textsuperscript{84} Laws surviving from the Middle Ages which permitted such injustices were one of the objects of 1848 protests, and a poem by the leftist writer Müller von Königswinter decrying such legal aberrations apparently inspired Hübner's painting.\textsuperscript{85} Noteworthy is the powerful strength of the son, not unlike the angry young man exiting on right of the Weavers of Silesia, both images conveying the defiant strength of the enraged proletariat.
The following year, in *Departure of the Emigrants* (Pl. 40; 1846, National Gallery, Oslo), Hübner offered a solution to feudal oppression: emigration. In the foreground, a family ready to depart lingers at a gravesite before joining the long procession of fellow emigrants winding its way through the rear of the picture. In the far distance at the left, the viewer is reminded of the cause of the mass exodus. An aristocrat and his wife ride by on their horses, which kick up a storm of dust into the face of a departing subject standing by the road. This painting too matches a poem by Müller written in 1842. The motifs of painful separation from the homeland, graveside tears, and the notions of peasant piety and close-knit family bonds will all emerge in paintings of De Groux's realist phase. After the political disappointment of 1848, Hübner forsook the Tendenzbild for genre scenes of a less political and controversial nature, returning to the innocent themes of his early career.

Another specific abuse against which several painters protested, along with the liberal press, was the "meal and meat tax," a particularly onerous burden for the poorly fed proletariat. A lost work painted in 1847 by Peter Schwingen, *The Untaxed Bread* (Das unversteurte Brot) shows a beggar boy with a loaf of bread being brutally seized by guards, as hunters, loaded down with fresh game, are cordially permitted to pass by. A painting dealing with the same issue by a less gifted artist, Wilhelm Kleinenbroich, survives in Cologne's Historisches Museum, entitled *Meal and Meat Tax* (Pl. 41). As guards harass peasants in the foreground carrying paltry portions of corn, a rich couple—the banker Oppenheim of Cologne and his wife, by local tradition—ride by
in the background with impunity, accompanied by their huntsman and his kill.\textsuperscript{87} The wooden articulation and melodramatic gesturing of Kleinenbroich's figures detract from the effectiveness of his painting—the foreground female with her back turned assumes a pose from David's \textit{Death of Socrates}—but the strong contrast he establishes between the privileged rich and exploited poor will continue on well toward the end of the century in Belgium. Other \textit{Tendenzbilder} by the latter two artists include Schwingen's \textit{Distraining for Rent}, one of the first versions of this subject in Düsseldorf, and Kleinenbroich's \textit{The Proletarian} (1846).\textsuperscript{88}

Alongside the socially critical \textit{Tendenzmaler}, Düsseldorf fostered other strains of genre painting which also depicted contemporary members of the lower classes in a manner which was more realistic than the proscribed academic idealism but which shied away from controversial issues of class conflict to stress the ennobling or endearing aspects of their subjects' lives. The frequent exhibition of such scenes in Belgian Salons readily accounts for their influence upon the works of De Groux and his colleagues. The "peasant genre" (\textit{Bauerngenre}) of Jakob Becker von Worms (1810-1872), for example, appears to have had some effect on De Groux's \textit{Lost Crop} of 1870 (see Ch. IV) and themes of events in the lives of Rhenish and Norman fisher folk and coast dwellers painted by "ethnographic genre" artists like Adolph Schrödter (1805-1875), Rudolf Jordan (1810-1887) and Henry Ritter (1816-1853) attracted De Groux's follower Henri Bource (Ch. V).\textsuperscript{89}

Yet a final category of genre painting which did not stray as far as the previously discussed works from the romantic idealism of the
academy was "literary-historical genre." This Zwischenstufe as Hütt calls it, was nonrealist in both its reversion to the past and its idealistic, stylizing tendencies, so different from naturalistic observation of detail and open-air light effects of the Volksmaler. Preferred subjects of the historical genre painters were daughters of noblemen or goldsmiths, fairy tale characters, or church-goers. An example of the latter theme by Louis Blanc (1810-1885), Woman Going to Church (Pl. 42; Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover) shows a three-quarter-length medieval maiden reverently striding past medieval ruins in the background. The archaizing qualities of an image such as this, with its stiff, flat, Gothicizing quality, as well as the aura of nostalgia and piety, will emerge in the mature works of De Groux five years after his departure from Düsseldorf.

Part 3. Return to Brussels, 1852-4

The Brussels Salon of 1851 opened on August 15. One concludes that De Groux, who had left Brussels in April of that year, must have set to work very quickly in Düsseldorf, for his Salon entry, Ruth and Naomi, is signed "Düsseldorf 1851," giving him four months to have completed it. The main attraction of the Salon, however, was Gustave Courbet's The Stonebreakers ([no. 238], 1849, destroyed), exhibited in Belgium in the wake of the controversy it had just stirred up in the Paris Salon of 1850-1. The Brussels Salon also included Courbet's The Cellist ([no. 239], 1847, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm). The preface of the catalogue by Minister of the Interior Charles Rogier, explained that Belgium was attempting to broaden the scope of the triennial exhibition that year by
encouraging more foreign entries in order to complement the International Exposition in London which had opened in May and whose art section was restricted to industrial design.  

Courbet accompanied his paintings to Belgium and spent some time there in the company of Belgian painters sympathetic to his art. Courbet's Belgian biographer Camille Lemonnier reports that in 1851 "Courbet avait passé trois mois en Belgique, il s'y était lié avec quelque chercheurs, et un peu de sa large indépendance s'était mêlé à leur art. ..." Hymans chronicles how Courbet, ever the outspoken bon vivant, ensconced himself in Belgian taverns and indulged in lively conversation, pipe smoking and faro (a Belgian ale), but gained little sympathy when he spoke harshly of Rubens. He also found time to paint a Goyesque Spanish Dancer, Señora Guerrero (1851, M.R.B.A., Brussels) and to decorate a temporary palais de fête on the Boulevard du Régent.  

Courbet had made his first visit to the Low Countries in the autumn of 1847, when he journeyed to Holland upon the invitation of the Dutch art dealer J. van Wisselingh. From 1851 to 1869, the French painter made many trips to Belgium, and was a frequent exhibitor in Belgian Salons (see Appendix B). It has been stated that, in Belgium, Courbet was "understood and admired more than anywhere else," and that the country came to be a second home for him. He even considered at one time selling the Burial at Ornans to Belgium, and, at the end of his life, would write to Joseph Stevens, "Il y a vingt-six ans que j'y vais et que j'y reçois des ovations de toutes sortes. C'est le pays de la peinture et des luttes."
Although Courbet's painting inspired harsh criticism in Brussels, as it had in Paris, it nevertheless found supporters in certain quarters. This may be accounted for in part by the safe geographical distance from which Belgians could view Courbet's politically-charged image of the French proletariat, but also because of the preparation with which the paintings of Joseph Stevens and Van de Kerkhove had furnished visitors of the Brussels Salon of 1848. The critic of the Brussels newspaper l'Observateur offered high praise, and, surprisingly, considering Courbet's alleged atheism, interpreted the paintings in a religious light. The Stonebreakers was called:

une oeuvre faite pour rapprocher de Dieu des humbles et ceux qui souffrent. Une église qui achèterait ce tableau pour en orner une de ses chapelles ferait mieux que d'acheter une de ces images mal peintes comme on en voit tant, qui nous représentent des vièrgesvêtuès d'une draperie rouge et d'une robe bleue.

On the other hand, Joly, whose preference for Joseph Stevens' dogs over Courbet's workers was cited earlier, leveled strong criticism at The Stonebreakers. He accused Courbet of polluting art with politics, thus removing it from its Christian, philosophic and literary roots in favor of mechanically reproducing ugly reality as if using a camera.

Selon nous les "Casseurs de pierres" de M. Courbet sont plutôt un tableau politique qu'une œuvre d'art. Il rapetisse la mission de l'art en le faisant le complice des hurleurs de carrefours. L'art est éternel et divin comme l'âme humaine dont il émane, et c'est, selon nous, le faire tomber de ses sublimes hauteurs que de le faire intervenir dans des luttes politiques où il ne peut servir comme auxiliaire qu'à la condition d'abdiquer ses plus belles et ses plus nobles prérogatives. ... L'art, tel qu'il est compris aujourd'hui, est le produit complexe du christianisme, de la philosophie et de la littérature. ... Vouloir ravaler l'art au point d'en faire la daguerreotype de la nature dans ce qu'elle a de plus sordide et de plus terne, c'est vieux, et quelques romantiques l'ont tenté. Le beau c'est le laid,— a dit un jour un rapin, furieux de voir admirer Paul Véronèse et le Titien, et comme M. Courbet, il a entrepris la glorification du sabot, de la chaussettetrouée, de la chemise visqueuse, de chairs
tannées par le soleil, des souliers éculés et roussis, des pantalons à meurtrières et à machicoulis, et autres ornementst que le naturalisme préfère à la poésie de Raphael, à la spendeur de Véronèse.  

J.-G.-A. Luthereau made the typical association of Courbet's workers with the revolutionaries of 1848 and deplored the unpleasant details.

Voilà l'art tel que nous l'a fait la révolution de 1848! ... L'encanaillement est complet; il n'a repoussé aucun genre de vérité. Il a copié le trou fait au pantalon, le rapiéçage de la vente, l'indiscrétion sale de la chemise, la vétusté de sabots, la naturalité de la pierre.  

Adolphe van Soust lampooned Courbet's painting with a satiric poem.

Monsier Courbet a fait vraiment
Une œuvre des plus singulières.
Dans son tableau tout bêtement,
Un pauvre diable fend des pierres;
Un autre ... (je ne sais comment
Rendre la chose honnête et claire,
Le fait emporte un chafiment,
Mais enfin ce n'est mon affaire)
Un autre donc fort poliment
Au public montre son ... derrière.  

Courbet was also pilloried, this time in a spirit of amiable jest rather than outright hostility, a pamphlet called Le Diable au Salon by "Japhet," one of a series of "comic salons" which parodied exhibited painters and paintings, written and illustrated by Félicien Rops (1833-1898). This artist, best known for his diabolically erotic Symbolist etchings and lithographs later in the century, was initially allied with the anti-academic realist camp which formed in the 1850s. A cartoon similar to those which appeared in the Paris press caricatured the stonebreakers as wooden mannekins who send spectators into shock (Pl. 43). The accompanying text opens with a poem satirizing the artist:

Ces bons-hommes qui sont courbés
Sous les haillons de leur misère
Sont dus à Gustave Courbet
Le peintre soc-humanitaire
On avait prétendu d'abord,
Mais pour moi, je n'en veux rien croire,
Qu'il a juré de l'aire tort
Aux joujoux de la Fôret Noire.

Several prose paragraphs following contain the standard jokes comparing Courbet to a marionette maker, a carnival huckster and a mason of the paintbrush. Almost every passage refers in some way to his populist tendencies, demonstrating an awareness of the painting's leftist political implications.

L'auteur fait, nous dit-on, de la propagande socialiste avec ses œuvres; il s'en va dans les foires, fait dresser une baraque et il invite le public à venir visiter ses tableaux pour la somme et la bagatelle d'un sou. Il y a au-dessus de la porte d'entrée, une paillasse qui crie, une baguette à la main:
— Entrez, messieurs, mesdames, entrez, ici on voit les tableaux du
CITOYEN COURBET, OURVIER PEINTRE!
Cette phrase manque rarement son effet. Le maçon enthousiaste lâche sa pièce de cinq centimes afin de contempler les œuvres d'un frère qui manie la truelle du génie, comme lui manie la truelle à mortier.¹⁰⁶

As if to underscore the controversy provoked by Courbet's monumentalized, objective presentation of the French proletariat rendered with rough scumbling and earthen hues, the painting was hung in the Brussels Salon next to an emphatically academic, romantic machine by a well-established Belgian painter, Louis Gallait (1810-1889).¹⁰⁷ The painting in question was The Brussels Guild Paying Their Last Tribute to Counts Egmont and Hoorn ([no. 532], Pl. 44; M.B.A., Tournai), popularly known as "Les têtes coupées," since it reveals the decapitated remains of two well-known Flemish patriots whose execution by the Spaniards provoked the Netherlandish rebellion against the Hapsburgs in the sixteenth century. Gallait's painting answered all the requirements for
traditionally acceptable history painting that Courbet's did not.

Gallait's subject was a perfect vehicle to show how historical pagentry, infused with patriotism, piety and a strong dose of graphic gore—Gallait had studied corpses and dismembered limbs in morgues in preparation—were still the lifeblood of academic romanticism. Affinities with Géricault's Raft of the Medusa and Delaroche's history scenes in Paris are obvious. (While studying under Ary Scheffer in Paris, Gallait established his acquaintance with Delaroche.) Surfaces of Les têtes coupées gleam and sparkle, colors are brilliant, almost garish. Poses and composition are suavely manipulated and the finish is finely licked.

It is not too difficult to see how a myth sprang up very early which ascribed the birth of realism in Belgian painting to the appearance of Courbet's painting in Brussels. In observing the startling contrast between Les têtes coupées and The Stonebreakers, it was easy to overlook the milder realist imagery that had already appeared in Belgium in 1848. The rigorous objectivity, frank materiality and monumentality of Courbet's image of the proletariat did, however, distinguish his painting from the pathetic paupers of Van de Kerkhove and Stevens, and the glamorized beggars of Hunin. Indeed, Courbet would never really find a true counterpart in Belgian art, which would make limited stylistic concessions to Courbet, but would remain spiritually rooted elsewhere. In any case, the myth of Courbet's effect in Belgium was widely propounded by the early twentieth century, with statements such as that of Georges Macou in 1905. "En 1851, Courbet avait exposé à Bruxelles son tableau Les casseurs de pierres, et le succès que rencontrà cette œuvre donna bientôt naissance à une école nouvelle,
Novelist Camille Lemonnier, in his 1906 history of Belgian painting, presented a florid analysis of the Courbet/Gallait confrontation, considerably embellishing the political implications of The Stonebreakers.

It was not until 1853—two years after the exhibition of The Stonebreakers in Brussels and a year after his return from Düsseldorf—that De Groux exhibited his first extant social realist canvas, The Drunkard (Pl. 45; M.R.B.A., Brussels). In a dimly lit interior with bare wooden floor and walls, a mother with long black hair lies dead on a simple bed. A baby in a torn red garment clutches at her neck and another, seated on the floor at the foot of the bed, its head buried in its hands, weeps. At the left, framed by the door, the father enters, staggering from the effects of the contents of the bottle held in his left hand. He is steadied and pulled by two children, a girl on the left, clutching her father's shirt, and a boy on the right, grabbing his father's arm and pulling him toward the death bed. A ragged color print of the Crucifixion is tacked on the wall over the bed.

The Drunkard was not shown in a Salon, but in the art exhibit of a private cultural circle in Ixelles, a district of Brussels, called La
It was one of many "sociétés particulières" which flourished in Brussels at the time. It is described in a contemporary chronicle as a group presided over by the burgomaster of Ixelles which organized concerts, plays, outings and art exhibits: "Grands [sic] bals avec orchestre, petits bals de famille avec piano, sociétés de choeurs, représentations dramatiques, concerts, fêtes champêtres, estaminets, expositions d'oeuvres d'art." Participation in this group may have been for De Groux a means of continuing the camaraderie of the artists' clubs in Düsseldorf with which he would have been familiar, whether or not he was a member.

Many biographers of De Groux interpret the painting as a direct response to Courbet's *Stonebreakers*, despite the fact that De Groux had left Brussels months before the opening of the 1851 Salon. Leclercq, however, does not make such a connection, stating simply that "vers 1853 ... tout à coup le talent de de Groux se révéla." Delacre offers a more elaborate explanation, stating that, upon stepping off the train that brought him back from Düsseldorf to Brussels, he noticed a drunkard being dragged away by his wife, prompting De Groux to ask himself why he had gone all the way to Germany to look for subjects to paint when he was able to find his "tableau rêvé" with the first step back in his native city.

Whatever the immediate source of inspiration, The Drunkard exhibits numerous connections with earlier paintings in Düsseldorf, France and Belgium. Drinkers had been staple, in fact, in the iconography of Flemish and Dutch genre painting from its inception, and tavern and *kermesse* scenes with inebriated figures flourished in the
seventeenth century under the hands of Adriaen Brouwer and David Teniers. Frequent nineteenth century pastiches of the seventeenth century little masters (Pl. 6)\textsuperscript{115} attest to the continued popularity of such themes in De Groux's own day. A year before his painting was completed, a lithograph after a Van Ostade Drinkers appeared in the Brussels art journal, *La Renaissance illustrée*.\textsuperscript{116}

Despite its roots in native iconographic tradition, the differences between De Groux's *Drunkard* and seventeenth century drinkers are more important than their similarities. Hardly a scene intended for the amusement of bourgeois spectators, De Groux's painting is a grim domestic tragedy in which alcoholism, poverty, disease and suffering are inextricably bound together. Although officials and industrialists at the time were eager to attribute alcoholism of the poor to moral laxity and working class degeneracy (see Ch. I), a more charitable view was taken by the Belgian reformer Edouard Crucpétiaux (1804-1864)\textsuperscript{117} in *De l'intempérance et de l'ivrognerie dans la classe ouvrière*, published in 1843. This study finds the heavy drinking habits of the proletariat to be an understandable means of momentary escape from the "deadly cycle" of back-breaking labor for which it hardly receives adequate compensation to meet its needs: "S'ils veulent vivre il faut qu'ils s'épuisent, et l'épuisement conduit à la maladie et à la mort."\textsuperscript{118}

Although the author decries the immorality of drinking and its consequences, he concedes that, in many cases, the problem is beyond an individual's control, since it has become hereditary—passed on from the mother to the infant she is nursing. Moreover, the growing number of distilleries and drinking establishments and the lowering of the price
gin are cited as factors which could—and should—be controlled by the government to help alleviate the problem.119

While it is clear that De Groux's sympathy lies with the victims of his domestic crisis, above all, the innocent children, the ideology revealed in his painting is that of Christian morality rather than Ducpétiaux's socioeconomic approach. The Crucifixion print by the mother's bed suggests her reward in heaven after suffering on earth, but it also puts drinking in its Christian context, reminding viewers that it is a vice, the result of human weakness. With The Drunkard, we see the first example of De Groux's recurring theme of the suffering poor and their relationship to God.

Given the conscious incorporation of the art of Greuze into the moralizing paintings of Hunin—especially relevant here is Distribution of Alms in a Convent (1848 (Pl. 20)—it is not surprising that The Drunkard incorporates elements of several Greuze paintings which treat vice. De Groux's very theme of the dissolute husband swaggering in, to the consternation of two of his children, is seen in Greuze's Return of the Drunkard (Pl. 46; c. 1780, Portland Art Museum, Oregon). Both paintings have the identical type of wood-beam construction framing the figures on the left, and the daughters both pull at their father's shirt. The mother in Greuze's painting is not dead, however, but confronts her husband with a stern gaze. The pathetic death-bed motif with dying parent and a family villain entering upon the grieving family was used in Greuze's Punished Son (1778, Louvre, Paris). The intentions of both artists are virtually identical in that they both paint vice in an unattractive light and thus reenforce Christian values of
sobriety and family loyalty. Diderot's summation of the function of art, which he felt was embodied to perfection in Greuze, could be applied to De Groux as well: "To make virtue attractive, vice odious, ridicule forceful: that is the aim of every honest man who takes up the pen, the brush or the chisel." ¹²⁰

In comparison to Greuze's paintings, however, De Groux sets his figures in a much more squalid setting and clothes them more shabbily, so that the viewer's attention is also drawn to the effects of grinding poverty. Here a distinction must be drawn from Courbet's depiction of proletarians in The Stonebreakers, which was artistically innovative in precisely the ways in which De Groux's Drunkard is not. The large scale of Courbet's canvas and figures, which alone was not sufficient cause for critical hostility, became unacceptable to proponents of traditional values in painting when coupled with the artist's deliberate avoidance of narrative anecdote, sentimental pathos and hints of religious consolation. The Drunkard, on the other hand, trespassed none of these bounds. Small in scale (68 x 80), it reenforced rather than rebelled against the genre tradition.

If not with Courbet, there seems to be a connection in De Groux's early realism with the art of another French painter who specialized in scenes of proletarian misery in a way more traditional and akin to De Groux's—and Greuze's—approach. This was Octave Tassaert (1800-1874), a "romantic realist" whose lower-class imagery had begun in the mid-1840s in a monochromatic "manière grise" which, combined with his painterly brushwork, makes him a very likely source of inspiration for the loosely brushed impasto and overall brown tonality of The
Drunkard. Tassaert was quite familiar to Paris Salon-goers and critics, who dubbed him the "specialist in misery," "Prud'hon of the slums," and "Correggio of the attic," thus revealing his stylistic roots. His sad narratives also owe a debt to Greuze. Of his cycle of paintings depicting destitute families, attic suicides, sick children and shivering orphans, the one which comes closest to The Drunkard is Poor Mother or Young Girl Dying (Pl. 42; c. 1853, formerly collection Alexandre Dumas fils), one of many depictions of suicide by Tassaert, which reveals a problem which was rampant among the poor of Paris in the 1840s. Tassaert's daughter, like De Groux's mother, expires before the image of the Crucifixion hanging on the wall, as she is mourned by a loved one beside her bed.

The similarity of De Groux's impassioned, melodramatic treatment of problems of the poor in The Drunkard with Tassaert's approach to the same type of subjects justifies the classification of the Belgian painting with the category of romantic realist paintings to which several works of Wiertz also belong. Certain paintings from the early career of another French artist, Jules Breton (1827-1906) which also fall under the rubric of romantic realism should be cited as parallels, if not possible sources of inspiration. Although he was born in France, Breton pursued studies in Belgium at the academies of Ghent with Félix de Vigne (1843-6) and Antwerp with Gustaf Wappers (1846) before proceeding to Paris to study with Drolling. A painting called Hunger (destroyed), exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1850-1, was also sent to the Brussels Salon of 1851. Although lost, its emotion-laden romantic tenor may be deduced from the surviving Misery and Despair
(Pl. 48; 1848, Musée, Arras) of the same period, picturing a husband heading for the 1848 barricades against the frantic protestation of his bare-breasted wife seated on the floor, clutching her infant. As in The Drunkard, a crucifix hanging on the rear wall looms over the foreground action. (Breton's romantic realist phase was brief, however, for in 1853, he turned to the subject matter on which his fame would rest, the French peasant.)

The work of a third French artist who was a contemporary of De Groux, the Parisian lithographer Gavarni, also provides a possible iconographic source for The Drunkard. Gin (Pl. 49), a lithograph from the series Les Anglais chez eux of 1853, reflects the artists's social consciousness-raising trip to London in 1849-51; it pictures the effects of hard liquor on two derelicts swaggering in the streets. Gavarni's influence upon De Groux's own lithographs for the Uylenspiegel in 1857 (see Chapter III) is unmistakable, so an attraction to the Parisian artist's work at an earlier date does not seem unlikely.

The Drunkard also reveals the impact of De Groux's Düsseldorf experience. Hütt believes that De Groux borrowed a motif from The Card Sharps (Pl. 50; 1851, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf) by Ludwig Knaus, an artist younger than the first generation of Düsseldorf Tendenzmaler. Knaus' genre works, which fall after the decisive 1848 turning-point, are devoid of the political involvement of his older compatriots.

A moral sermon rather than a political indictment, Knaus' painting depicts a young barefoot girl, her hand on the back of her father, who is engrossed in a card game with two old men receiving signals from their accomplice, stationed behind the unwary victim. Knaus' work
transplants the card playing theme beloved of the seventeenth century Flemish genre painters, especially Teniers and Brouwer (cf. Brouwer's *Four Aces*, K.M.S.K., Antwerp) to a nineteenth century Rhineland setting, preserving the little masters' densely thatched, monochromatic brown pigment that matches De Groux's style. Other compositional similarities are seen in the standing pitcher on the left and the familiar architectural framing device in the rear.

The Card Sharps was painted during De Groux's first year in Düsseldorf, making his awareness of the painting very likely, but there is a difference, one among many, between the well-kempt, picturesquely costumed figures of Knaus and the tatters of De Groux's. Eastman Johnson, an American genre painter who studied in Düsseldorf, painted a Card Players (collection Camp, Watch Hill, Rhode Island) with Knaus' motif of the little girl summoning her wayward father which contains figures with harsher features wearing more ragged clothes, but the 1853 dating makes contact unlikely. The closest Düsseldorf antecedent to The Drinker, however, was painted by the Polish-born Tendenzmaler Elizabeth Jerichau-Baumann and survives only in a description. The painting, entitled *Proletarian Family*, was reviewed in 1851 by the Düsseldorfer Zeitung, which reported that it showed an impoverished mother lying in a miserable straw cot drawing a sickly child toward her breast as an elder child lays next to her.

The latter description brings to mind another painting of a distressed mother from De Groux's own country, Eugène de Block's What a Mother Can Suffer (Pl. 14). The similarity between this work and The Drunkard, besides the identical themes of contemporary Belgian
proletarians helpless in the face of death and deprivation, and the sim-
ilar obscuring, enveloping shadows, includes an identically posed weep-
ing youngster with curly hair, seated on the floor with back against the
bed. De Block's painting illustrated a specific passage from a Flemish
novel, and although no specific literary correspondence can be made in
the case of De Groux, it is interesting to note that a play by P. F.
van Kerckhoven entitled The Drunkard opened in Antwerp on October 6,
1853. The plot focuses on a lower-class family ruined by the alco-
holic father who early in the play drives his wife to a premature death.
While his son Frans tries to rescue the family by working for a baron,
the baron's son prepares to seduce Frans' wife, but events converge to
bring a happy ending by the final curtain. Although there is no scene
in the play that specifically corresponds to De Groux's painting, the
artist's arrangement of figures and setting reminds one very much of a
stage, and the Düsseldorf practice of basing compositions on lebenden
Bilder may have lingered in De Groux's mind at the time of the creation
of The Drunkard.

Drinking among the lower classes was also treated in a number of
socially conscious Flemish novels published before 1853 which might
have influenced De Groux's conception. Four years before his play, in
1848, Van Kerckhoven wrote a short story called De Valsche Schaamte
(The False Shame) which presented the problem of alcoholism among
the poor in a sympathetic light. The protagonist, a furniture maker
with a wife and aging mother to support, loses his job as a result of
his drinking and is forced to rob a man for money. He soon drinks
himself to death—literally—whereupon the man he robbed, recognizing that the artisan's alcoholism had become a problem beyond his control, decides to support the family survivors. One doubts that De Groux would have had as much sympathy for his own drunkard, showing, as he did, the victimized wife and children, but his sentimentally pathetic presentation and basic sensitivity to the potential ravages of alcohol abuse on the poor are well in keeping with Van Kerckhoven's viewpoint. Passages in several of Zetternam's novels also deal with drinking as an understandable but regrettable balm for workers' misery. In Voor twee Center minder (1847), the author asks what other means the poor worker has besides drink to escape his "brutal degradation," and Mr. Luchter-velde (1848) contains a passage explaining that Sundays in the tavern were the only time during which the textile worker could forget his woes. August Snieders, in De arme Schoolmeester (The Poor Schoolteacher [1851]) refers to drinking as the cause of many disasters.130

An illustration from Conscience's Lambrecht Hensmans (1847) drawn by J. Mathysen (Fig. 51)131 may also have influenced De Groux's composition. The episode selected shows Hensmans' son Willem coming home after his father's false arrest to find his mother dead from shock. The illustration and the painting both contain the by-now familiar elements of the still-life elements at the left, the door at rear with entering male figure, and the family clustered around the obliquely-positioned deathbed, and the Crucifix on the wall above.

In 1854, De Groux painted another decisive realist subject which was not exhibited in a Salon, The Paupers' Bench (Pl. 52; M.R.B.A., Brussels). This signed and dated painting is the second version of
De Groux pictures his outcasts clustered around the round white columns at the rear of a church filled with bourgeois worshipers who occupy the better seats farther in the background. The better clothing and self-assured expressions of the wealthier church-goers visible behind the paupers create an obvious contrast with them, the first of many such rich-and-poor juxtapositions which will recur in De Groux's oeuvre. On the far left, a sickly-looking bearded man leans against the column. In front of him, an exhausted younger man sits on the prie-dieu, his head in his hand and eyes closed, with a sack of belongings at his feet. Next to him a woman in a red dress clutching a rosary buries her head on the prayer stall as a blond, tousle-haired infant in a light blue striped garment looks on. Next to the woman, a bald-headed, unshaven man looks heavenward. On the far right stands a hooded blind man supported by a young boy. Several figures in shadow are seated between the right and left groups.

The view of a church interior seen from the rear with fragmented columns in the foreground is a compositional format used with great frequency by De Groux's realist predecessors in seventeenth century Holland who specialized in painting church architecture. Gerard Houckgeest and Emanuel de Witte, in particular, each painted a series of church interiors in Delft around 1650 which used the arched frame, giving a greater illusion of depth, with obliquely receding colonnades starting from a close vantage point. The M.R.B.A. in Brussels owns a De Witte painting after Houckgeest of the Oude Kerk in Delft with the square tiled floor pattern and stained-glass windows glimpsed
between the foreground columns seen in De Groux's work. One of the closest comparisons can be made with De Witte's *Oude Kerk in Delft* (Pl. 53; 1651), in the Wallace Collection, London, with the arched frame, receding columns in front framing a stained-glass window in the rear, with shadows casting dark/light patterns over the round, white columns.

The Dutch painters were most interested, of course, in reproducing architectural structures, and their figures function merely as subordinate staffage elements. De Groux's concerns are just the reverse, for it is the humans that occupy most of his attention and picture space. A seventeenth century pastiche by De Groux's contemporary in Antwerp, Henri Leys, *The Pauper's Bureau* (Pl. 54; 1839, collection Philippe, Maaseik) comes closer in spirit to the *Paupers' Bench*, showing needy citizens in an imposing architectural interior with the same type of checkered floor pattern below and religious paintings hanging above. Leys painted an Adoration scene, paralleling the destitute mother and child standing below, while in De Groux's painting, the Crucifixion and the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows hanging on the columns provide analogies to the suffering and promised salvation of the humans beneath them.

A previous image of the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows positioned on a column above a female worshipper kneeling on a prie-dieu, her back turned, was available to De Groux in Belgium as a book illustration by an anonymous artist. It appeared in the Flemish edition of Conscience's novel, *Hoe Men Schilder Wordt* (Becoming a Painter), published in 1847 and illustrated a passage wherein the grandmother of the
aspiring young painter Frans "went to the Church of St. Andrew [Antwerp] every day to say a prayer before the statue of the Virgin, consoler of the afflicted." Her prayers solicited success for her grandson, since financing his training had put the family in debt.

It is hard to imagine De Groux's social realist paintings outside the context of the novels of Conscience and his colleagues, in light of the recurring themes of the suffering poor and their indomitable piety which permeate paintings and storylines. From De Block's What a Mother Can Suffer to Stevens' Morning in Brussels to paintings which reach to the end of De Groux's career, such affinities are patent.

As in the case of The Drunkard, reminiscences of Düsseldorf are also in evidence. Heine's groundbreaking Tendenzbild, Chapel in the Penitentiary (Pl. 39, 1837), like the Paupers' Bench focuses on outcasts in the rear of the worship chamber, with male figures leaning against a large round foreground column (cf. also the square floor tiles) and women in prayer with their faces hidden and backs turned. The comparison with Heine makes clear, however, the difference between Tendenzmalerei, with emphasis placed on the political repression of militant workers and political activists, and the social realism of De Groux, which subtly portrays class distinction but does not point to specific causes of the distress of his paupers other than misfortune. Heine implies that solution to the problems of the inhabitants of his austere Protestant prison chapel (cf. the abundant decoration of De Groux's Catholic church) lies in resistance to political authority, whereas De Groux's figures passively submit to the consolation of religion and the promise of a better life in the hereafter.
More in keeping with De Groux's pathetic drama in the rear of the church is Tassaert's Young Girl Fainting in a Church or The Abandoned One (Pl. 56; 1852, Musée Fabre, Montpellier), in which the swooning fille du peuple is observed with curiosity by a young boy in a workers' smock on the right, and with disdain by a bourgeois mother carrying her child on the left. The foreground columns, pauper boy at the right, the distressed beauty, as well as the rich-and-poor contrast, are present in both Tassaert's and De Groux's paintings.

Finally, De Groux's blindman-and-child motif was a popular one in Belgian painting during the years preceding the Paupers' Bench. Hunin had used it in Distribution of Alms (Pl. 20), showing a blind man on the right with his arm around a little girl in much the same configuration as De Groux's two figures. Geirnaert exhibited a Blind Man and His Guide in the Brussels Salon of 1851 (no. 547), and in 1852, the most popular image of a slightless beggar was shown in the Antwerp Salon of 1852 (no. 184), painted by Jozef Dyckmans and called The Blind Man (Pl. 57; K.M.S.K., Antwerp). The subject is seated at the entrance of a church rather than standing inside, and, like Hunin, he is accompanied by a little girl.

Although the Paupers' Bench was not exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1854, De Groux did enter four other paintings, the largest number he had yet entered in a single salon, and, for the first time, he received extensive comment—favorable—by critics. The paintings, all genre scenes, were The Idlers ([no. 195], Pl. 58; watercolor version in Musée d'Ixelles),136 The Unfortunate Family ([no. 196] location unknown), Ash Wednesday ([no. 197], location unknown),137 and
The Tavern Brawl ([no. 198], Pl. 59; M.R.B.A., Brussels).138

A short biographical note in Charles Deleutre's compterendu of the Salon calls De Groux one of the most promising artists and youngest realists practicing in Belgium. He touts De Groux's striking début in genre painting, to which the painter had turned his hand after starting out with Biblical scenes.139 In his discussion of the paintings themselves, Deleutre once again recounts how De Groux's talent in genre had been suppressed by his academic training. Discouraged, he supported himself by making stained-glass windows, but had finally found his calling in 1853, the year in which he painted The Drunkard.

Elève de M. Navez, M. Degroux avait été malgré lui jeté hors de sa voie par la tradition de David. Il a peint quelque temps, à contre cœur, mécontent de lui-même, et il allait par renoncer presque à la peinture. Pour vivre, il peignait sur verre, il faisait des vitraux d'église. Seul parfois, dans son atelier il jetait sur la toile les idées qui bouillonnaient dans son crâne; mais il cachait soigneusement à tous les regards ces ébauches vivants qu'on lui avait appris à regarder comme des hérésies. Il y a un an à peine que M. Degroux s'est révélé à lui-même, et déjà ses tableaux sont parmi les plus remarqués du salon par les vrais connoissoirs.140

The two paintings exhibited in 1854 which survive in public collections in Brussels are The Idlers and The Tavern Brawl. The first shows a group of shabbily dressed men and boys standing or sitting in the center of the picture, playing a game of corks. One of the boys looks at a mother and her three children, walking off toward the right. she turns her head and looks back in distress and disapproval of the dissipation she sees. The moral of the painting is clear: a sign on the wall at the left says "Workers sought" ("On demande les ouvriers"). The Tavern Brawl involves a multitude of crowded figures both in the foreground, where they form a dense cluster extending horizontally
across the entire picture, and in the background, where onlookers crowd a staircase behind a square arch, and more enter through a door at the right. Behind an overturned table from which a jug, a mug and cards have fallen to the floor—probably indicating that the fight was the result of a card game—two men scuffle as onlookers struggle to remove a knife from the hand of one of them. Another, to the left, about to join the fray, is restrained by his companions. An old blindman accompanied by a little girl move out of harm's way at the extreme left.

Both paintings conform in style to The Drunkard and The Paupers' Bench insofar as they both exhibit the broken brushwork, faceted color and modelling, and frequent black outlining of the contour of forms. The figures in the two Salon entries take on a more horizontal arrangement, stretching across the painting in parallel relation to the picture plane. Their regular arrangement is reenforced by the vertical architectural features behind them. By contrast, The Drunkard's composition runs on a diagonal, its orientation established by the obliquely receding column of The Paupers' Bench, on which the hanging paintings set up diagonal movement toward the bottom of the picture. The monochromatic brown of The Drunkard differs from the other three paintings' more varied hues, primarily in the clothing of the figures—and the stained glass in the Paupers' Bench. The lighting in all four is diffuse, creating complex light and dark patterns over the figures which is complemented by their nervous irregularly drawn contours.

The unfinished, irregular quality of De Groux's Salon entries provoked criticism by Berru and De Cauwer in an otherwise favorable review of his works, which began by stating that "M. Degroux est un
artiste d'un talent incontestable et qui a déjà conquis une certaine popularité; il sent vivement et profondément, ses compositions sont vraies et morales.\textsuperscript{141} What these critics objected to was his "extraordinary" style, which strayed too far from the "licked, [or] at least finished and correct" appearance of legitimate painting. They assumed—correctly, it turns out—that these technical aberrations were just a phase the artist was going through.

La peinture n'est pas un travail de caprice ou de convention, dont les conditions peuvent changer au gré de la fantaisie de l'artiste; pour être admiré, il faut qu'elle soit belle, vraie et, sinon léchée, du moins finie et correcte. Celle de M. Degroux est loin de posséder l'une ou l'autre de ces qualités: elle n'est qu'extravagante. Certes, il serait déplorable qu'un artiste du mérite de M. Degroux s'obstinent à rester dans la voie fâcheuse où nous le voyons engagé, et, pour notre part, nous le lui répéterons chaque fois que nous en trouverons l'occasion. Les artistes qui ont inventé le système de peinture excentrique qu'il vient de ressusciter si malheureusement, ont succombé sous l'arrêt du bon sens et du bon goût: puisse-t-il, pendant qu'il en est temps encore de préparer un meilleur avenir.\textsuperscript{142}

Deleutre, on the other hand, apparently more open to stylistic innovation, saw fit to praise the colorism of The Idlers and perhaps for want of a better comparison, linked it to Delacroix: "... l'on trouve des parties pleines de couleur et de style, que je ne saurais comparer qu'à la peinture d'Eugène Delacroix."\textsuperscript{143} The critics went on to point out shortcomings in the execution of the figures in the painting ("il y a là des détails lâches, des incorrections flagrantes, des hommes qui ont des têtes de bois, des bras, des jambes, impossibles ..."), but excused these defects because of an underlying mastery which he detected, and did not hesitate to anticipate the future success of the painter ("On sent le maître partout et l'on reconnaît dans les pas­sages les plus cavalièrement traités une science volontaire et
dédaigneuse, qui nous promet pour l'avenir d'excellents morceaux de peinture"). Less charitable when it came to The Tavern Brawl, Deleutre faulted it, ironically, for its unrealistic quality, interpreting it as a fantastic vision that emerged from the imagination of the painter rather than the result of realist observation.

Je prends son plus mauvais tableau, la Rixe de cabaret. L'œuvre du peintre est désordonné, violente, étrange, fantastique comme un rêve qu'on a. M. Degroux a rendu ce rêve avec toute son activité dévorante. Rien ne l'a arrêté, et quand l'exécution est venu le détournier, il l'a laissé en chemin avec insouciance. L'effet obtenu, la sensation satisfaite, il s'est arrêté. On dirait qu'il a pris avec la main une vision toute vive, en son cerveau et qu'il l'a lancée d'un seul coup sur la toile.

From the limited comments in both comptes-rendus of The Unfortunate Family and Ash Wednesday, it is impossible to deduce what these paintings looked like or portrayed. It is tempting, but perhaps somewhat imprudent, to link the first with the painting of the same title by Tassaert from 1852, and the second with De Groux's later version of the subject (Museum Wuyts-Van Campen en Baron Caroly, Lier) exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1866 and the Ghent Salon of 1868. Deleutre found the emotional expression of The Unfortunate Family a bit overdrawn ("... l'expression ... est presque trop vive, trop douleureuse dans certaines figures, elle est d'une réalité déchirante"), and Berru and De Cauwer complained of technical deficiencies, conceding nevertheless that the monotonous background color suited the depressing subject. Already De Groux's penchant for expressive sadness was recognized. High praise in both reviews was showered upon Ash Wednesday.

Deleutre concludes his discussion of De Groux with a lengthy passage praising De Groux's commitment to depict contemporary reality,
as opposed to the majority of Belgian genre painters whose iconography and style regress to fifteenth century Germany (Leys) or seventeenth century Flanders and Holland (De Braekeleer). The critic thus aligns himself with the tenets of Courbet which stressed the artist's restriction or subject matter to people, places and events of the artist's own time. Even De Groux's predilection for the rags of the lower classes is looked upon with favor; the critic finds them just as interesting and fetching as the costumes worn by Veronese's sixteenth century aristocrats.

M. Degroux a un mérite dont il faut lui savoir le plus grand gré: il peint des hommes et des sentiments de notre temps. Quel intérêt auront pour nos neveux les tableaux de la plupart de nos peintres actuels qui ne font que des pastiches d'après les Allemands du XVé siècle, ou d'après les Flamands et les Hollandais du XVIIé? Qu'apprendront-ils de nous à la postérité? Quelle originalité peuvent-ils avoir, puisque leurs oeuvres ne sont jamais la traduction vivante de leurs impressions, mais le patient résultat de leurs études, de leurs recherches, de leurs imitations?

... M. Degroux a du style et le sentiment de la tournure; aussi, sous son pinceau, les costumes modernes, représentés sans prétention, sans draperies affectués, naïvement et avec vérité, ont un caractère pittoresque que bien peu de peintres savent exprimer.

... Dans ses tableaux où l'oeil est quelquefois blessé par la trivialité de certains types, on est charmé de rencontrer des personnages en haillons qui ont autant de style, d élégance et de caractère que des patriciens du XVIé siècle, dans un tableau de Véronèse, et cela tout en étant très-vrais, bien de notre temps, bien de la classe à laquelle ils appartiennent.

The key to the acceptance of De Groux's early depictions of the contemporary Belgian proletariat may be found among the opening remarks of Berru and De Cauwer's review: "... ses compositions sont vraies et morales. Dans la reproduction d'une scène de misère bien comprise, on trouve un enseignement." De Groux shows the poor, not in a removed, morally ambiguous fashion like Courbet, but within the
framework of traditional Christian morality. The works of De Groux's early Realist period do not, like the Tendenzmalerei of Düsseldorf, indict the upper classes and government for exploiting the poor.

If there is a finger to be pointed, it is at the proletarians themselves, for engaging in the vices—drinking, gambling, fighting—which cause or exacerbate their misery. Solution to their problems lies not in resistance to the powers-that-be, but rather in worship and prayer. The Church offered the hope of salvation and relief of present distress in a future reward. For De Groux, Catholicism was anything but Marx's pacifying opiate, and the unyielding faith of his distressed paupers would seem to conform to contemporary accounts of the unquestioning and consistent submission of Belgium's poor to Church dogma and ritual. Thus, De Groux's early scenes of poverty offered little or no provocation to the government, church or social order, and even functioned to reenforce the status-quo by means of their moralizing, didactic character. In this way—as well as in their appeal to spectator sentiment—De Groux's early realist paintings fall into place beside Hunin and, ultimately, Greuze, so that, ideologically, at least, they perpetuate rather than depart from established artistic tradition.
NOTES

1 Since he was born in the French section of Comines (district of Comines-Sud), France claimed him as a citizen eligible for conscription in the French military. He was eventually classified as a deserter for his refusal to serve, until he applied for the Chambre des Lettres de Naturalization for Belgian citizenship, which was granted him on April 28, 1851. See Eugène Barnavol, "Charles Degroux," La Société Nouvelle, 26 (October-December, 1907), 157; Emile Leclercq, "Charles de Groux," L'art et les artistes, 2d ed. (Brussels, c. 1876), p. 194; Abbé Louis J. Messiaen, Histoire de Comines, vol. 3 (Comines, n.d.), p. 504, typed transcript in M.R.B.A., Brussels, Archives de l'art contemporain; Jean Snollaerts, unpublished biographical outline of Charles de Groux.

2 Acte de Naissance de Charles de Groux, Ville de Comines, no. 126. Two of De Groux's brothers would also grow up to pursue successful careers in their own rights, Louis (1824–93), a lawyer, and Liévin (1822–95), a merchant who founded a family textile business.


4 Leclercq, p. 196; Barnavol, p. 157.


6 Directors of the Antwerp Academy during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century were Guillaume Herryns (director from 1804–1827), Van Bree (1827–1839), Gustaf Wappers (1840–1853), J. A. Verschaeren (1853–1855) and Nicaise de Keyser (1855–1879). See also Louis Alvin, Les Académies et les autres Ecoles de Dessin de la Belgique en 1864 (Brussels, 1865). See K.M.S.K., Antwerp, Gustaf Wappers en zijn School (Antwerp, 1976).

7 Public exhibitions in the major Belgian cities actually began much earlier, but were not coordinated with each other, nor were they held with regularity, being frequently interrupted by political upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Such exhibitions began in Liège in 1779, Antwerp in 1789, Ghent in 1792, Brussels in 1811 and Malines in 1812. See "Sur les expositions publiques d'objets d'art qui ont eu lieu en Belgique, et sur leur origines," Journal des Beaux-Arts et de la littérature, no. 15 (August 15, 1860), pp. 113–114.

8 See K.M.S.K., Antwerp, Gustaf Wappers.

9 Leclercq, p. 196.
Remarkably, in light of David's iconographic predilections, Navez' oeuvre contains only three completed history paintings of non-Biblical subjects and six mythologic scenes. Navez' most well-known genre piece is the Spinners of Fondi (Neue Pinakothek, Munich), picturing a Neapolitan shepherd dealing cards to read the fortune of the baby of one of the four young women of Fondi behind him, was shown in the Brussels Salon of 1845. The painting is only one of a series of "Roman" genre scenes picturing Italian peasants, pilgrims and brigands, a result of Navez's training in Rome from 1817-1822 and friendship with the two important Franco-Swiss practitioners of this genre, Léopold Robert and Jean-Victor Schnetz, also pupils of David studying at the French Academy in Rome. Schnetz exhibited a Pilgrim with Wounded Foot in the Brussels Salon of 1833 (no. 305), and, in the Brussels Salon of 1839, Paul Mercuri, from Paris, entered a copy of Robert's The Harvester (Les moissonneurs [no. 386]). See Louis Alvin, Notice sur François-Joseph Navez (Brussels, 1871), pp. 18-19, 27-31; Alvin also includes a catalogue of Navez's oeuvre, pp. 84-96; see also Thérèse Burollet, "François-Joseph Navez et ses élèves," L'information d'Histoire de l'Art, 16 (May-June, 1971), 118-120. For concise treatments of these two close friends of Navez, see Grand Palais, Paris, De David à Delacroix: La peinture française de 1774 à 1830 (Paris, 1974), pp. 588-590, 603-604.


Some examples of typical Navez titles during the years preceding and including De Groux's student years: L'aumône à l'ermité (1820 and 1835), Un pèlerinage (1824), Un pèlerinage dans la campagne de Rome (1836), L'aumône de la veuve (1840), Un vieillard aveugle jouant de la guitare devant un groupe d'enfants (1842) and Une jeune mère prie pour son enfant malade (1844). See the catalogue in Alvin, pp. 85-95; Leclercq, p. 220, n. 1, cites genre paintings by pupils in Navez's studio which depict scenes from novels—Paul et Virgine and The Vicar of Wakefield—as well as "paysannes modernes."

Ibid., p. 60.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., pp. 27, 50.

Ibid., p. 60.

Ibid., p. 71.

Leclercq, p. 198.

Ibid., p. 201.
Another of the Stations was painted by Leclercq. The existence of these paintings was discovered by Mr. Sartiliot in the records of the Académie des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles.

Cited in Jean Snollaerts' manuscript as having won a "prix du Concours," presumably a student competition conducted by the Academy.

The 1848 Brussels Salon catalogue still lists him as a pupil of Navez.


Leclercq, pp. 202-203. The year of De Groux's move to his own studio may have been 1849, since his address listed in the Antwerp Salon catalogue of that year, "rue du grand Lombard, n. 24, à Bruxelles," is different from that in the catalogue of the 1848 Brussels Salon, which still lists him as a pupil of Navez living at the "rue de Berlin 24, faubourg de Namur, à Bruxelles."

Hymans, 1921, p. 171.

38 Manuscript of Jean Snollaerts.


40 Hymans, 1921, p. 197.


43 For a survey of the Nazarene in English, see Keith Andrews, The Nazarenes: A Brotherhood of Communal Painters in Rome (Oxford, 1964); a more recent and exhaustive treatment is found in Städelisches Kunstinstitut und Städtisches Galerie Frankfurt am Main, Die Nazarener (Frankfurt am Main, n.d. [c. 1977]).


45 Ibid.

46 A contemporary account of this circle by one of its members is found in Friedrich von Uechtritz, Blicke in das Düsseldorfer Kunst und Kunstlerleben, 2 vol (Düsseldorf, 1839-40). Sections of this book appear in English translation appear in "Düsseldorf and the Artists," The Literary World, no. 275 (May 1, 1852), 333-334 and no. 277 (May 22, 1852).

47 Hütt, pp. 121-122.


50 On the political situation in Düsseldorf in 1848, see Hütt, pp. 107-110.

Hütt, pp. 120-127.

Three-fourths of the Malkasten archives were destroyed in World War II and surviving records show no trace of De Groux's membership.

"L'Ecole de Dusseldorf," La Renaissance, 12 (1850), 143.

Ibid., 144.

Hütt, p. 55.

Ibid., p. 175.


This suggestion was made by Dr. Wendt von Kalnein, director of the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf. A good sample of De Groux's drawings is reproduced in Maurice Delacre, "Le dessin dans l'oeuvre de Charles de Groux," Gand Artistique, 3 (March, 1924), 58-64.

Lessing's flaxen-haired child in the lower left corner of Hussite Preaching also shows up in certain of De Groux's mature works, such as La Prière du matin (c. 1857-70, M.B.A., Tournai), and Les Apprêts du festin (c. 1857-70, location unknown).

Julius Helbig (from Liège, enrolled 1840-3), E. G. Lavino (born 1813 in Brussels, enrolled 1830-1), Carl Mischel (born 1827 in Liège, enrolled 1847-8), Nestor Schäffers (born 1826 in Liège, enrolled 1846-8), Alexander Thomas (born in 1810-11 in Malmédy, enrolled 1829-30 [died in Brussels 1898]).

Emile Seeldragers (enrolled 1870-6), Henri Suykens (1871-9), Oskar Angenot (1880-2), Paul Colleye (1880-2), Constant de Bruyne (8118-2). The Schülerliste runs from approximately 1829-30 to 1894-5. For the information given in this and the previous note I thank Mr. Klaus Seitz, who transcribed the Schülerliste for the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf.

Hütt, p. 19.

Ibid. Two recent exhibition catalogues are devoted to the American and Scandanavian schools, respectively, Kunsthalle Bielefeld,
The Hudson and the Rhine (Essen, 1976); Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf und der Norden (Düsseldorf, 1976).

Information obtained from Mr. Seitz' analysis of the Schulerliste.

De la cre, pp. 58-59.

Born in 1824. Acte de Naissance, Ville de Bruxelles, no. 2130.

The latter comparison was suggested by Mr. Sartiliot; Henri Hymans, Belgische Kunst der neunzehnten Jahrhunderts (Leipzig, 1906), p. 84, sees the combined influence of Navez and Schadow.


"Il rapporta d'Allemagne des éléments classiques qui, plus tard, lui vinrent à point pour l'exécution de ses cartons de style plus ou moins gothique." Leclercq, p. 203.


Tendenzmalerei, unlike social realism, need not be limited to the depiction of contemporary society, but may be historical as well, in which case the artist alludes to a contemporary issue by reference to an analogous historical event. Lessing's Hussitenpredigt and Leutze's Washington Crossing the Delaware are interpreted as historical Tendenzmalerei in Groseclose, 1973, pp. 29-34, 54-57, 98-11.

The origins of Tendenzmalerei can be traced to romantic paintings of thieves by artists like Lessing, who began depicting robbers in the 1820s and in 1832 completed The Melancholy Robber in the Mountains with His Sleeping Child. Theodor Hildebrandt's The Robber (1832, Nationalgalerie, Berlin) and other paintings of thieves from the same period, deriving from the picturesque Italian brigands of Léopold
Robert, were read in Germany as protests of the poor against the un-
just politico-economic system which forced people to steal in order to
survive. Plays and novels preceding the paintings which glorified
robbers as folk heroes had been written by dramatists Friedrich von
Schiller (Die Räuber) and Heinrich von Kleist (Michael Kohlhaas) and
novelist Moritz Hartmann (Der Krieg um den Wald); in real life, a
latter-day German Robin Hood named Schinderhannes, who robbed from
the rich and often gave to the poor, was arrested in 1803. See Hütt,
pp. 30, 99-100; Immel, pp. 244-247; see also Karl Koetschau (ed), et al.,
Rheinische Malerei in der Biedermeierzeit (Düsseldorf, 1926), p. 94.

Hasenclever depicted his middle-class contemporaries engaged
in activities both light (The Wine Tasters [1835, Kunstmuseum Düssel-
dorf]) and serious (The Reading Cabinet [1843, Nationalgalerie,
Berlin]), inspired in part by his study of Wilkie's Reading of the Will
during a sojourn in Munich from 1842-6. Hasenclever also painted a
Blind Fiddler, obviously drawn from Wilkie's prototype. Scenes like
the Reading Cabinet document the bourgeoisie's interest in political
issues during the Vormärz. Such reading rooms were among the few
places where political ideas could be discussed and read about, but
Hasenclever seems to be rather critical of the uncommitted complacency
of these armchair liberals, who would wink at the repression which set
in after 1848. See Hütt, pp. 63-5, 100; Gagel, p. 126.

Hütt observes that the painting appeared the same year as
political repression of student clubs and demagogic reformists, the
most notable incident involving the suicide of the imprisoned republi-
can Pastor Weidig. His death inspired widespread protest in the press,
of which Heine's painting, according to Hütt, may be seen as an ad-
junct. Besides the allegedly subversive youths and reformers pointed
out by Hütt, one's eye is also drawn to the resolute gaze of the man in
the weaver's smock at left, reminding one of weavers' uprisings in the
Rhineland which occurred from 1826 to 1830. The silent confrontation
between the imprisoned proletarian and rifle-bearing arm of the state
is viewed as portentous, as is Heine's positive representation of the
worker. With the exception of Hasenclever's Workers Before the Town
Council, depictions of the proletariat in the thirties and forties
showed him as a pathetic object of the spectator's pity.


Irene Markowitz and Rolf Andree, Die Düsseldorfer Malerschule,
Bildhede des Kunstmuseums Düsseldorf, rev. ed. (Düsseldorf, 1977),
p. 72. Interest in Wilkie's painting was keen among Düsseldorf artists,
and his Reading of the Will, exhibited in Munich in 1825 and acquired
by the Pinakothen, was particularly well-studied. See Hütt, p. 100.
"Das Streben unserer Epoche nach Aufhebung des schroffen Standesunterschiedes," Hüt, p. 103.


Hüt, p. 103.

Reproduced in Friedrich Schaarschmidt, Zur Geschichte der Düsseldorfer Kunst (Düsseldorf, 1902), p. 175 and, under the Title The Poachers, in Groseclose, 1975, Fig. 51.

Rothe, p. 148.

Hüt, p. 105.

Ibid.

Gagal, p. 127; Hüt, pp. 105-106.

Hüt, pp. 105-106.

On the Düsseldorf painters of ethnographic and peasant genre, see Hüt, pp. 57-70; Immel, pp. 247-273; Schaarschmidt, pp. 155-169.

Hüt, pp. 57-58; Koetschau, pp. 76-88.

"Ainsi, notre exposition, au lieu d'être conçue comme celles qui l'ont précédé, au point de vue plus exclusif de l'art belge, ouvrirait un vaste champ où se rencontreraient les artistes de toutes les écoles et qui permettrait de constater le degré de perfection auquel les différentes branches de l'art sont parvenus en Europe. Aucun pays, du reste, ne semble plus propre que la Belgique à une solennité de cette nature, tant par sa position géographique, que par la situation prospère et calme que ses institutions lui ont assurée.

D'un autre côté, Sire, les deux expositions de Londres et de Bruxelles de complétereraient l'une par l'autre, car, s'il est vrai que la première consacre une section à la sculpture, aux modèles et à l'art plastique, il est a considérer qu'elle envisage cette partie des arts spécialement au point de vue industriel et qu'elle exclut formellement toute les autres. La seconde, au contraire, admettrait les productions de toutes les branches artistiques indistinctement, à la seule exception des copies." Charles Rogier, "Rapport au roi," Exposition Nationale des Beaux-Arts, 1851 (Brussels, 1851), pp. 5-b.


94 Jack Lindsay, Gustave Courbet, His Life and Art (New York, 1973), p. 33.

95 In Brussels, Courbet would often stay with a photographer friend Radoux, whose residence he would occasionally give as a forwarding address at times when he mysteriously disappeared to points unknown. His most memorable trips after 1851 were in 1855 and 1861. In 1855, he triumphantly toured Brussels, Malines, Antwerp, Ghent, Termonde, Louvain, Liège and Dinant, reporting, "I'm welcomed like a prince, which isn't surprising as I'm surrounded by counts, barons, princes, etc. Some of the time we're entertained at dinners, other times we ride in carriages or on horseback through the streets of Ghent. . . . Lindsay, pp. 143, 159.

In 1861, at an international art convention in Antwerp, he delivered a speech, printed in the Précurseur d'Anvers (August 22, 1861) which contained the often-quoted passage stating that the Burial at Ornans meant the "death of romanticism." George Riat, Gustave Courbet: Les maîtres de l'art moderne (Paris, 1906), p. 191.


98 Charlier, Le Roman réaliste, p. 6.

99 For a political interpretation of The Stonebreakers, see Clark, Image of the People.

100 Quoted in Hymans, pp. 194-95.

101 Joly, pp. 105-108.


103 Adolphe van Soust, Revue du Salon de peinture de 1851 (Brussels, 1853), cited in Charlier, pp. 7-8.


106 Cf. the first two paragraphs: "... Ces derniers [puppets without strings] ont encore un avantage, ils n'ont pas les mains sales et ils ne sentent pas mauvais des extrémités.

Malgré cette légère infirmité sociale et peu humaine, il y ade gens qui les trouvent encore trop aristos parce qu'ils ont des sabots; il voudraient les voir marcher pieds nus, ce serait plus démocratique.


110 A watercolor version of this painting (s., 23 x 43) is housed in the Musée d'Ixelles.

111 Leclercq, p. 203.


113 Leclercq, p. 203.

114 Delacre, p. 59.

115 Other such paintings of drinkers listed in nineteenth century Belgian Salon catalogues include J. Vanacken (of Antwerp), Un buveur (Brussels Salon of 1836, no. 466), and F.J.T. de Backer (of Antwerp), Le verre de bière (Brussels Salon of 1839, no. 114).

116 V.1. 14 (1852), facing p. 124.

117 On Ducpétiaux, a pioneer in penal and public welfare reform in Belgium, see Edmond Rubbens, Edouard Ducpétiaux (1804-1864), 2 vol. (Louvain, 1922-1934); a short biography by Roger Aubert also appears


119 Ibid., pp. 4, 46, 9.


121 Lemonnier, 1906, pp. 74-5 made the following comments on the relationship of Tassaert to De Groux: "Tassaert s'était bien fait le Béranger des mansardes où les grissettes se tuent par le charbon, entre deux rêves, avec un sourire aux lèvres; mais une légèreté toute française le dissuadait d'excéder certaines limites; il savait demeurer aimable, dans un art qui ne dépassait pas l'émotion du mouchoir. De Groux, lui, osa être tragique jusqu'au bout."


In 1855, a copy of Tassaert's *An Unfortunate Family* (earlier version, c. 1850, Musée, Poitiers), the best-known of his poverty scenes, picturing a daughter expiring in the lap of her mother, was exhibited in the Antwerp Salon (no. 665). The catalogue carried a long explanatory passage from Lamennais' *Paroles d'un croyant*, which the painting illustrated, and alerted spectators that the original title, *The Suicide*, was incorrect—presumably to avoid censure of the Catholic Church. For bibliography and notes on *Une famille malheureuse*, see Grand Palais, Paris, *Le Musée du Luxembourg en 1874* (Paris, 1974), p. 170.


124 Hütt, pp. 143, 160, n. 223. It is not entirely clear whether Hütt is referring to *The Drunkard* in the M.R.B.A or to the *Cabaret Scene* (1868, a private collection, Brussels), to which it is closer in comparison.

125 Markowitz, p. 73.

126 Kunsthalle Bielefeld, *The Hudson*, pl. 58.
Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann (1819-1881), one of the few women painters of the Düsseldorf school, moved to the Rhenish city in 1838 from her native Warsaw via Berlin and began painting pictures of the nationalist struggles of the people of her homeland. These Polish scenes include a mother and her children fleeing through a cornfield, a family amidst the ruins of their burned house, and three soldiers leaving their homeland. Paintings like Proletarian Family and Poor Child (1850, location unknown) demonstrate her continued commitment to depicting lower-class distress even after 1848, unlike many of her colleagues.

127\textit{Düsseldorfer Zeitung}, no. 196 (1851), cited in Hüt, p. 106.

128\textit{F. van Kerckhoven, De Dronkaerd} (Antwerp, 1854); Brouwers, pp. 182-183.

129\textit{F. van Kerckhoven, Volksverhalen} (Antwerp, 1849).

130For specific references to these passages, see De Pillecyn, pp. 111-113.


132Since no records of the earlier 1849 canvas after 1854 have been found, the possibility that De Groux painted the second version over the first on the original canvas also presents itself.

133See Ilse Manke, \textit{Emanuel de Witte, 1617-1692} (Amsterdam, 1963); examples include Houckgeest's \textit{Nieuwe Kerk in Delft} (1651, Mauritshuis, The Hague), \textit{Oude Kerk in Delft} (1654, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) and \textit{De Witte's Oude Kerk in Delft} (collection Horne, Montreal). My thanks to Dr. Walter Liedtke for his suggestions in this matter.


135Heine's three women in prayer may also have influenced Henri Leys' \textit{De dertigdenmis voor Berthal de Haze} (1854, M.R.B.A., Brussels), the artist's first venture into the type of medieval and Renaissance genre scenes imitative of Late Gothic art in style to which he turned after a trip through Germany in 1852. See Dale G. Cleaver, \textit{Henri Leys, Nineteenth Century Belgian Painter} (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1955), pp. 101-148.

136The Ixelles watercolor is titled \textit{Les joueurs aux bouchons}, and, according to museum files, was a copy of a painting in the collection Dekens, destroyed in a fire, which was probably the oil exhibited in the Salon.

137Not to be confused with a later version of the same subject exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1866 (no. 197), now in the Museum Wuyts-Van Campen en Baron Caroly, Lier.
The photograph of a second unlocated and probably later version of the same subject (formerly collection Van Tielt, Brussels) is found in the Archives Photographiques of the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique, Brussels.


Camille Berru and De Cauwer, L'Exposition des Beaux-Arts de 1854 (Brussels, 1854), p. 75.

"Dans La Famille malheureuse, le mère est certainement le personnage le moins réussi; la physionomie en est terne et manque d'expression. L'arrière-plan a trop de monotonie, néanmoins la couleur est d'une tristesse bien en harmonie avec le sujet." Berru and De Cauwer, p. 75.

"Dans le Mercredi des Cendres, on ne peut s'empêcher d'admirer cette singulière entente des effets, le fond est d'une harmonie parfaite; les figures ont un excellent style; les têtes, les expressions, les poses ont une vérité et une profondeur saisissantes." Deleutre, p. 10; "Le mercredi des cendres, du même artiste, reproduit les mêmes écarts de peinture que nous venons déjà de signaler. Ici cependant, ces défauts sont compensés autant que possible par de solides et brillantes qualités: la composition est parfaitement ordonné, et le tableau éclairé d'une manière toute nouvelle, très originale et du plus ingénieux effet. Un homme et une dame, en costumes modernes, forment, au milieu de la composition, un petit groupe ravissant. Le prêtre est trop éloigné de l'enfant dont il touche le front. Cette toile, peinte d'une manière moins choquante, serait une excellente production." Berru and De Cauwer, p. 75.
149 Deleutre, p. 10.

150 Berru and De Cauwer, p. 75.

151 See, e.g., Neuville, vol. 1, p. 117.
CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DE GROUX'S MATURE REALISM, 1855-1861


In 1855, De Groux exhibited three works in the Salon which was part of the Exposition Universelle held in Paris that year. These paintings exhibit essentially the same style as his entries in the Brussels Salon of the previous year, and all were genre subjects. One, The Sick Child (private collection), is social realist in theme. After the encouraging reviews he had received in Brussels in 1854, De Groux must have been delighted to find that the response of the Parisian critics in 1855 was even more enthusiastic.

Besides the undoubted satisfaction which De Groux must have experienced in discovering that he had now gained international recognition, the Exposition Universelle would have provided him with artistic stimulation for future efforts as well, if we assume that he accompanied his paintings to Paris. Two works which may be regarded as influential to the high realist style to which De Groux would turn in 1857 were painted by fellow Belgian artists who had already begun to shuttle frequently between Brussels and Paris. These were Alfred Stevens' What is Called Vagrancy or The Soldiers of Vincennes ([no. 407], Pl. 62, Musée National, Compiègne) and his brother Joseph's An Episode at the Dog Market in Paris ([no. 413], Pl. 65; M.R.B.A.,
Brussels). The large-scale, low-keyed or earthy palette and planar format of these works—as well as their lower-class subject matter—stems largely from the example of Courbet, who was represented in the Salon with major social realist canvases The Stonebreakers, The Young Ladies of the Village (1851, City Art Gallery, Leeds) and Women Sifting Grain (1853-4, Musée de Nantes). The Salon committee members refused to accept The Burial at Ornans and The Studio of the Painter (1855, Louvre, Paris) however, since, in Courbet's words, "They say it is vital to put a stop to my tendencies which are disastrous to French art."

Consequently, Courbet erected his own structure to house a one-man show which would include the rejected works, located near the site of the official Salon. Visitors to the Pavillon du Réalisme were able to see more examples of Courbet's social realism: the second two parts of his "Ornans trilogy," The Burial at Ornans and The Peasants from Flagey Returning from the Fair (first version, 1850, disappeared; second version, 1855, M.B.A., Besançon) as well as the enigmatic Studio of the Painter (1855, Louvre, Paris), the left side of which was peopled with social outcasts and lower-class types. A pamphlet distributed to the spectators of the special exhibit contained one of the first efforts at elucidating realism in the programmatic sense, as Courbet (possibly with the aid of Champfleury) explained his ideas to the public.

The title of realist has been imposed on me as that of romantic was imposed on the men of 1830. . . .

I have studied, without recourse to any system and pre-conceived position, the art of the ancients and the art of the moderns. I have not wanted to imitate one any more than to copy the other; nor has my thought been any more aimed at reaching the trifling goal of art for art's sake. No, I have wanted quite simply to draw from the total knowledge of tradition the reasoned and independent sentiment of my own
individuality.

To know so as to have the power: that was my thought. To be in a position to translate the manners, the ideas, the aspect of my epoch, according to my own estimation, to be not only a painter but a man as well; in a word, to create living art—that has been my aim.2

De Groux and his colleagues who might have visited the Pavillon were thus provided not only with a realist manifesto which would help clarify the theoretical underpinnings of their own paintings, but also, in combination with Courbet's Salon entries, with a convenient display of Courbet's major social realist statements up to that point, which was as comprehensive in scope as the retrospectives of the romantic works of Delacroix and Ingres hanging inside the walls of the Salon.

The paintings exhibited in the Belgian section of the Salon by De Groux were The Last Farewell ([no. 284], Pl. 60; sketch in M.R.B.A., Brussels) and The Promenade or Regrets ([no. 286], Fig. 61, M.R.B.A., Brussels) and The Sick Child ([no. 285], private collection). The first painting depicts the funeral of De Groux's teacher, Van Eycken, which had taken place on a snowy day on November 17, 1853.3 The canvas in the M.R.B.A., Brussels bearing the title The Burial is probably a sketch or unfinished copy for the Salon painting because of its summary execution and the fact that there are some discrepancies between the extant work and descriptions of it in Salon reviews; Leclercq, moreover, states that De Groux painted over or destroyed the original canvas.4 In any case, the painting that has come down to us pictures a group of men who cluster around an open grave obliquely positioned in the foreground, as one among them reads the final rites. Behind, on the left, a Gothic church rises up, and a distant snow-covered cityscape recedes on the right. The loosely-brushed execution and thin
black outlining of figures and objects (the shovel and crosses) in the foreground are fully in keeping with De Groux's early realist style, although the brushwork, as noted earlier, is more broadly handled here than in previous examples discussed.

Iconographic comparisons with The Burial at Ornans was inevitable, and to A. J. du Pays, writing in the Paris Illustration, De Groux's painting emerged superior. Already De Groux was called "une sorte de Courbet flamand" but he remained in the good graces of the Paris critic due to his prudent restraint upon vulgarity. Du Pays began his discussion by singling out De Groux as unique among his peers vis-à-vis his sentiment and technique. He is called a

jeune artiste dont le sentiment et la facture sont quelque chose de tout a fait a part dans la peinture belge moderne. On pourrait dire que M. Degroux, que c'est une sorte de Courbet flamand, si au nom de peintre français ne s'attachait pas une idée d'amour systematique du laid et de l'ignoble. Une composition particulière, un enterrement, semble établir un lien de plus entre les deux artistes. La scène du Dernier adieu est rendue avec vérité ... Les figures sont vulgaires, telle que les présente trop souvent la réalité, fort peu soucieuse d'esthétique; mais elles n'ont pas la prétention de leur vulgarité, et elles n'affichent pas la laideur.5

Edmond About made similar comments regarding De Groux's ability to be a realist--not in itself an objectionable category--without capitulating to Courbet's propensity for ugliness. The critic prefaced his remarks by crowning De Groux "le plus distingué des peintres travaillant à Bruxelles," but showed his true colors as a condescending francophile by adding, "J'aurais supposé, en voyant ses tableaux, qu'il avait un atelier à Paris."6 The following comments were made in regard to The Last Farewell.
Il [De Groux] appartient à l'école réaliste. Je n'ai pas dit qu'il fût élève de M. Courbet. Il peint la réalité sans travailler à l'enlaidir. Les bons habitants de Paris se souviennent encore, dans leurs cauchemars, d'un certain enterrement à Ornans. C'était, si j'ai bonne mémoire, une sorte de cérémonie grotesquement funèbre; quelque chose comme une danse macabre exécutée par des paysans francs-comtois. Le Dernier adieu, de M. Degroux, est une étude plus sérieuse de la réalité. ... Les visages sont vulgaires comme des portraits, non comme des caricatures. Ils expriment très-simples mais la tristesse, le froid, le devoir pénible.7

Théophile Gautier draws a less elaborate distinction between De Groux and Courbet, stating only that, "Sans être réaliste à la façon de M. Courbet, M. Degroux a fait aussi son Enterrement à Ornans dans Le Dernier adieu.8 Although De Groux does appear to have taken a cue from Courbet by positioning his grave in the foreground at the same angle seen in The Burial at Ornans, and also placing the figures of a man and boy in partial profile to the left as Courbet had done, it is easy to grasp why critics accepted the Belgian burial and rejected the French. The Last Farewell fulfills the expectations of a contemporary audience for a funeral picture which Courbet had frustrated. It is small in scale (the Brussels version measures 30 x 41 cm.), so that its depiction of the burial of an anonymous corpse, not inflated to the size of history painting like Courbet's, raised no complaints about appropriateness of scale or confusion of genres. The mourners are appropriately grief-stricken in facial expression and gesture, all turned reverently toward the grave, as opposed to Courbet's distracted poses and wandering eyes and De Groux's church rising up in the background, in addition to the foreground grave crosses, lend an air of religious reverence to the event, very different in spirit from the caricatural clergymen and bored choirboys of Courbet. Since De Groux
is less concerned in *The Last Farewell* with the mourners and their social condition than with commemorating the loss of a close companion. This work does not bear the stamp of social realism seen in the *Burial at Ornans*. It is representative, however, of the different way in which De Groux and Courbet will treat similar iconographic themes.

The *Promenade* is one of several scenes of priests painted by De Groux which have nothing to do with the anticlerical bent of his Belgian predecessor Geirnaert or his French contemporary Courbet. The painting in question is a wryly sentimental anecdote showing an elderly priest with a cane taking a stroll beside a youthful novice who supports him by the arm. The young priest gazes wistfully at a young man and woman amorously walking off in the distance. Although the background vegetation is freely brushed, De Groux's main figures here begin to take on characteristics which herald his mature style. Surfaces are more smoothly treated, with brushstrokes concealed. The figures are more elongated and thinner than those seen in previous paintings. Their vertical angularity is accentuated by the long stiff cassocks they wear, the folds of which fall in columnar configurations as straight as the walking stick of the elderly priest.

Gautier commends De Groux for not crossing the line between good humor and bad taste. "Cela est peint spirituellement, et l'intention comique, qui, plus marquée, pourrait devenir de mauvais goût, s'arrête juste à temps." Du Pays and About, on the other hand, found the strolling lovers too risqué. The former critic nevertheless praises De Groux's provocative approach to the age-old conflict between the spirit and the flesh:
Comment se terminera la lutte que de mondaines pensées viennent ici engager avec un ascétisme encore mal établi? Telle est la curiosité que l'artiste éveille dans l'esprit du spectateur avec les moyens les plus simples et avec une réserve parfaite, à laquelle fait seulement défaut le vulgaire du couple amoureux. He nonetheless takes issue with what he considers to be De Groux's inadequacies in drawing and brushwork, problems he feels will correct themselves with time.

These first two paintings are atypical of most works seen by De Groux thus far in that they do not deal with social problems, but their somber mood is totally consistent with works both preceding and following 1855. De Groux's last painting in the Exposition Universelle, The Sick Child, contains both qualities, social consciousness and melancholy. The depressing subject is described in detail by Edmond About.

L'Enfant malade est une toile d'un aspect saisissant, d'une tristesse profonde. Le rouet, la couchette de bois peint, le papier à dix sous le rouleau, tout crie misère dans cette petite chambre. Pas de draps dans le lit; les draps sont vendus ou engagés. L'enfant est couché avec son pantalon; sa petite tête pâle est enveloppée dans un méchant madras. Il mange son brouet avec un appétit languissant et dégoûté. La mère, assise au pied du lit, semble se demander en quel endroit de la terre on pourrait trouver cinq francs. La lumière même est miserable autour de ce grabat. Le soleil luit pour tout le monde, mais les pauvres des villes n'en ont pas tout leur souil.

Gautier felt that De Groux had overstepped the bounds of artistic restraint in The Sick Child, so that "la tristesse est vraiment trop noire, trop étouffante." Du Pays thought that the subject itself, although symptomatic of the times, was inappropriate for art in the final analysis and no more legitimate than the shepherds of Watteau had been a century ago:

C'est une remarque à faire l'honneur de notre époque que cette pitié sympathique du poète et du peintre accordée à l'affliction et aux douleurs de la pauvreté; il n'y a peut-être point là, pas
plus que dans les bergères et les bergers en vestes de satin de Watteau, une fin bien légitime pour l'art, parce qu'il s'y réserve au contact des choses infimes qu'il veut représenter, et qu'il en prend le côté valétudinaire et honteux, au lieu de chercher à le poétiser, mais cela est bon comme symptôme des préoccupations humaines, sociales de notre époque.17

Although notices on De Groux were generally favorable, he received no medal of distinction from the Salon jury. Such was not the case with Alfred Stevens, who, along with his brother Joseph, received second class medals for The Soldiers of Vincennes and An Episode at the Dog Market in Paris, respectively. The Stevens brothers were two among twenty-three Belgian artists awarded at the Salon,18 an indication of the high regard in which the Belgian school was held. Critic Maxime Ducamp, in fact, warned his French compatriots to stand guard, lest they be surpassed by the Belgians: "Que les peintres français veillent. L'Exposition universelle prouve que leur supériorité, si longtemps incontesté, est loin d'être maintenant incontestable: l'école belge est déjà une réalité, tâchons qu'elle reste notre soeur, et qu'elle ne puisse jamais devenir notre souveraine."19 It is somewhat ironic that two paintings by the Stevens brothers, each heavily inspired by Courbet, whose key paintings the jury refused to exhibit, received official recognition. It is easy, nevertheless, to spot the modifications that the Belgians introduced to Courbet's style and iconography which rendered their canvases acceptable to the critics and jurists who had rejected the French realist.

Since Alfred Stevens' The Soldiers of Vincennes is one of the first of the few fully social realist works of an artist whose previous paintings were primarily romantic in subject, a brief review of
Stevens' career preceding 1855 provides necessary background for an understanding of the work. This artist, like De Groux, had studied with Navez in Brussels from 1840-44. During the final year he set out for Paris and there studied under academic painter Camille Roqueplan (1800-55), a Gros pupil who specialized in history scenes as well as historical genre executed in rococo revival style. From this painter's private studio, Stevens won a competition permitting him to enter the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, where his work was allegedly corrected by Ingres from time to time. Back in Brussels at the time of his grandmother's death in 1849, Stevens made his début with four historical genre paintings in the Brussels Salon of 1851, where he won a first class medal. His penchant at this phase for romantic costume pieces can be seen in a lithograph after his entry The Love of Gold ([no. 1196], Pl. 63; location unknown) in which a gnarled miser (similar to that in an 1844 Couture painting of the same title) fingers a pile of coins behind the protection of a bolted door and watchdog. The Huguenot Soldier ([no. 1194], Hamburger Kunsthalle) illustrates a passage from Mérimée's Chroniques de Charles IX, and another example of romantic escapism, Longing for the Homeland ([no. 1195], location unknown) pictured a homesick soldier in Renaissance costume. Stevens' one potential try at a contemporary subject, inspired by an incident witnessed in Montmartre, was transformed into a historical scene at the suggestion of Constant Troyon and given the cumbersome title, Bourgeois and Peasants, at Daybreak, Finding the Body of a Seigneur, Assassinated by the Guisards ([no. 1193] location unknown).
The incorporation of social realist elements in Stevens' work was seen for the first time in the Paris Salon of 1853 in *Morning of Ash Wednesday* (Musée de Marseilles), a street scene in which three costumed revellers stagger past a group of slum children. An old woman in rags sweeps the street on the far right. Courbet's darkened palette seems to have taken root in Stevens' painting by this point, not only in this work but his other two Salon entries as well, *Discouragement* or *The Sick Musician* (M.R.B.A., Brussels), the latter reminiscent of Courbet's *Cellist* exhibited in the 1851 Brussels Salon,25 and the *Assassinated Seigneur*, which had originally been exhibited in the latter Salon. L. Clément de Ris objected to the murky atmosphere of all three works: "Cette localité noirâtre que je signale chez M. Alfred Stevens offre pour premier inconvenient de n'indiquer ni l'heure ni le lieu où se passe chacune des trois scènes. Le même teinte les enveloppe toutes trois."26

In the 1855 Paris Exposition *The Soldiers of Vincennes* was the only work of the six exhibited by Stevens which dealt with a contemporary social theme. His other entries either continued his earlier romantic escapism or fell back upon traditional anecdotal genre. *Souvenir of the Homeland* ([no. 412], location unknown) pictured a nostalgic Moorish soldier, *Reading* ([no. 409], location unknown) and *Meditation* ([no. 410], location unknown) were set in the Middle Ages and *The Nap* ([no. 411], formerly collection Orban, Brussels), depicted an old woman asleep beside her cat. In *The First Day of Devotion* ([no. 408], location unknown) a young beauty enters a decrepit pawnshop to exchange her jewelery, presumably to aid her sweetheart. The interior may be
characteristic of a social realist setting, described by About as "froid, sombre--paunt comme il convient," but the beautiful, young focus of attention heralds the type of subject matter which would come to occupy Stevens for the remainder of his career--lovely, fashionably dressed contemporary women, usually placed in well-furnished, decorative settings. Such a subject had already appeared the year previously in Reverie (private collection, Brussels) as well as in two paintings from 1855 not shown in the Paris Salon, Chez soi (location unknown) and The Artist in His Studio (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore). Stevens' choice of this kind of subject has often been ascribed to the influence of the Belgian painter Florent Willems (1823-1905) with whom Stevens shared his studio in the 1850s. Willems had settled in Paris in 1844 and specialized in small-scale scenes of elegant ladies set in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries painted in a little-master style that earned him the appellation "the modern Terborch." A preview of Stevens' future iconographic turn is seen in The Soldiers of Vincennes in the form of the well-dressed upper-class woman in the foreground reaching back to give a purse of money to a beggar woman. The unfortunate victim, along with her two children, a baby in her arms and a little boy crying at her side, is being led away by three officers for vagrancy, one of whom orders the rich woman to depart. On the far right, a carpenter carrying a saw reaches into his pocket to offer assistance as well. The entire scene is set against a high wall in the rear, parallel to the picture plane, bearing a poster which says "bal," providing an ironic counterpoint to the action in front. All of the figures, with the exception of the little boy and
the upper-class woman, are of approximately equal height and stand in the same plane parallel to the rear wall, prompting About to wonder how they were able to move. Stevens' positioning of his hapless beggar in front of a wall may recall Van de Kerkhove's Misery of Flanders, but the planar arrangement of the large figures against a vertical grey backdrop, as well as a certain flattening of the volume—an effect increased by outlining—and stiffening of their poses all point to The Burial at Ornans. It must be noted, however, that while Stevens' painting was larger than a typical genre painting (132 x 162 cm.), it did not reach the gigantic dimensions of Courbet's work. Furthermore, although it depicted a contemporary slice of lower-class life, the painting's reliance upon a clearly readable narrative anecdote and its pathos—two traditions which Courbet had deliberately avoided—immediately rendered Stevens' work more acceptable to the public and enabled it to win a medal.

Most critics complained of Stevens' muted color and flat handling, the most emphatic being J. de la Rochenoire, who lamented what he considered Stevens' capitulation to a formula in painting:

Pourquoi M. Alfred Stevens, qui est comme M. Willems un peintre de talent, se laisse-t-il entrainer au système? ... Pourquoi cette couleur uniformément noire et monotone, cette tendance au massif et ce ragoût massif?

Du Pays found Stevens inferior to Willems and Leys because of his refusal to paint the picturesque costumes of the past; he also objected to the artist's sombre palette.

M. Alfred Stevens est un peintre coloriste qui cherche les aspects nets et vigoureux, mais qui abuse un peu des tons noirs. A la différence de MM. Leys et Willems, qui empruntent au passé
l'ampleur pittoresque de ses costumes, il aborde la réalité vulgaire de notre époque, et mérite d'occuper un des premiers rangs dans la phalange des peintres qui se consacrent à décrire le présent.32

While they were often critical of Stevens' style, few of the other reviewers lodged complaints about the subject matter. The destitute mother was a helpless, humble victim and functioned as an object of pity rather than a vaguely discomfiting threat, unlike Courbet's Stonebreakers or Millet's Sower. Valleyres, in L'Illustration, sympathized with her plight.

Elle n'a pas volé, comme on l'a dit; non, elle a vagabondé, elle a mendié, elle n'a pu justifier aucun moyen d'existence, elle a pleuré tout haut, en pleurant elle a tendu la main: on la mène en prison. Dans trois jours, dans vingt-quatre heures on la relâchera; et cela recommencera jusqu'à ce que la mère soit morte, ou qu'elle vole, ou que cette dame qui lui tend une bourse, ou que ce brave ouvrier qui passe près d'elle ... ne lui prêtent un secours énergique.33

Despite Valleyres' concern over the pauper's helplessness, he consoles himself by fantasizing about the benevolent charity which the wealthy woman may bestow upon the poor family in the future. His effusive praise of and faith in individual charity underscores the close relationship of Stevens' work to the female alms-giving scenes already seen in earlier examples of Belgian painting by Leys (Rich and Poor, 1837), Geirnaert (The Charity of the Duchess of Chartres, 1845), and Hunin (Distribution of Alms in a Convent, 1848). Moreover, the critic's teary-eyed, hoped-for charity as a solution to the problem reads like the dénouement of a socially conscious Flemish novel, such as Conscience's What a Mother Can Suffer. Such a passage reveals the literary framework in which contemporary spectators viewed such paintings.
J'espère que la jolie dame n'oubliera pas la veuve ni le petit enfant; elle ne croira pas avoir tout fait en laissant tomber quelques louis d'or avec une larme dans cette main décharnée. J'espère que demain, lorsqu'on aura relâché l'infortunée, elle l'ira voir dans son taudis; elle y portera du pain, des vêtements, plus que cela, l'action persévérante d'une charité sympathique et de bon sens. Mais si par hasard les soucis, les affaires, le train dans ce monde, effaçaient les souvenirs de la matinée, je compte sur l'ouvrier, sur cet homme travailleur, sobre, prompte à la besogne, qui s'est tenu à l'écart et qui pleurait. Celui-là viendra trouver la veuve, il prendra son aîné en apprentissage; tout doucement il encouragera la mère à l'activité, à l'ordre; grâce à lui, elle remontera la pente. — Si je ne pensais pas cela, si la charité individuelle, positive, d'homme à homme, n'était pas là pour me réconforter, ce tableau me navrerait jusqu'à la révolte. 34

Stevens' inclusion of the charitable lady and the pose he gives her, so admired by Valleyres, was nonetheless criticized by About, who wondered what she was doing out at seven in the morning.35 De la Rochenoir objected to her exposed petticoat—a flourish Stevens apparently borrowed from Willems:

Pourquoi, comme nous le reprochions à M. Willems, la jeune dame relève-t-elle si prétentieusement sa robe? ... C'est donc un parti pris, et bien inutilement, car le pied et le bas du jupon ne sont pas heureux.36

The latter critic raised a more basic disagreement with Stevens' straightforward presentation of a situation which, he felt, should have received a more heart-rending treatment on par with the pathos of a melodrama like those presented at the Amibigu-Comique, a Paris theatre where "L'on pleure toujours, par parenthèse, et la réalité est trop vive." He proposed such an alternate scene which would picture a mother collapsed on the street suckling a baby, bursting into tears at the sight of her older child picking up a bird from the snow to warm it, at which point the gentlewoman would appear and save the day. Stevens' approach, he felt, contained an insufficient dose of
such "poetry," which, to modern eyes, involves lachrymose sentiment.

... quoique M. Stevens l'aït peint avec énergie et d'un ton approprié au sujet, il n'y a point répandu assez de poésie. Tout se voit, rien ne se devine, c'est de la réalité.

This latter comment is telling, for, although the twentieth century viewer may be quick to dismiss the painting as mawkish narrative, to a conservative critic like De la Rochenoir, its stark realism, unembellished by nineteenth century standards, constituted grounds for criticism.

Interestingly, the painting, although created with no such intention in mind, caused a minor political stir. Upon seeing the painting in the Salon, Napoleon III is reported to have ordered the painting removed because of the unfavorable light in which it portrayed the French soldiers. When he was informed that the scene depicted an everyday occurrence, the emperor let the painting stand, but ordered that the beggars henceforth be carted away in wagons. Stevens later reported that his Paris studio became invaded by left-wing radicals claiming him as their own and thanking him for helping further the Rights of Man by challenging the regime's abusive treatment of the poor, even though such aims had never crossed his mind while working on the painting. Despite the assumptions of such political factions, neither Stevens nor his fellow social realists of Belgium created their works to advocate political reform; they were merely conforming to the long-standing tradition in both painting and literature of soliciting spectator pity for, or at least sympathy with, their unfortunate subjects without imposing a militant view.
Alfred Stevens' brief phase of social realist iconography is rounded out by two more known works, a female Beggar of 1855, now lost, and the undated Begging Permitted (Pl. 64; c. 1854-55, K.M.S.K., Antwerp). The latter work retains the flat planar and monumental quality of The Soldiers of Vincennes, but is not quite as large (128 x 100 cm.). Again Stevens shows a destitute mother now standing in the doorway of an elegant shop as her daughter, seated at her feet, clutches her dress and sleeps. On the basis of the title, one concludes that the two paupers need not fear police harassment, unlike their counterparts in The Soldiers of Vincennes. Stevens introduces no story in Begging Permitted but restricts himself to a study in contrasts, both in content and form. The two paupers, as if to call attention to their miserable state, are positioned next to a fashionable silvershop with its elegant wares, accessible only to wealthy customers, and displayed against rich red drapery in the window at the left. In the upper right, a sign reading "modes" ("fashions") adds a note of verbal irony in view of the rags worn by the figures. The sign serves the same function here as did the "bal" poster in The Soldiers of Vincennes.

As in the latter painting, Stevens seems incapable of depicting poverty without some touch of elegance, whether in the form of a fashionably dressed lady or, in Begging Permitted, the gracefully designed exterior of a boutique. Such a setting allows Stevens ample opportunity to play an attractive set of patterns against each other, with the vertically-oriented rectangles of the gold moulding strips contrasting with round shapes of a silver platter, doorbell or curtain ring, and finally, a recurring checkered pattern seen on the mother's
basket and carried down to the paving stones. Stevens' predilection for two-dimensional patterning, eventually allying him with Orientalism and Whistler, is already incorporated into his typical feminine subjects by 1855 (see the Baltimore The Artist in His Studio), and becomes one of his stylistic trademarks. It is doubtful, considering his consistent devotion to portraying lovely women in plush surroundings after 1855, that Begging Permitted or any other social realist subject would have been painted after that date.

Joseph Stevens, who had broken ground for social realist iconography in the Salon of 1848 with Morning in Brussels, won a second class medal, like Alfred, in the 1855 Salon for the one painting out of the five he exhibited which was closest in spirit to his earlier effort. In An Episode at the Dog Market in Paris, he moved his locale from Belgium to France, enlarged his scale to a near-lifesize 240 x 290 cm., making the dimensions of his canvas larger than Alfred's Soldiers of Vincennes and almost twice as large as his own Morning in Brussels. Stylistically, Joseph departs from the looser brushwork of the latter painting and like his brother, smooths and flattens his space and surfaces; he masses his forms more monumentally and reduces his color scheme to predominant greys, blacks and whites. The flat space and overall grey tonality is set up by a plaster wall parallel to the picture plane which blocks off background space by rising almost to the edge of the frame (cf. Alfred's Soldiers of Vincennes). Two posters hanging on the far left bear the word "vente" or a fragment thereof. The wall's grey color and rough texture are continued in the paving stones on the bottom.
Like *Morning in Brussels*, the main interest is focused on the seventeen dogs of various ages, sizes and species which are in an unfortunate situation: they are waiting to be sold. Some struggle against the ropes or chains with which they are tied to the rear wall; in the foreground, two little pups crawl out of a basket on the left; meanwhile, at the right, a despondant mother dog laments the eventual loss of her three offspring clustered around her. As in *Morning in Brussels*, two lower-class human figures are unobtrusively set amidst the canines. A stout old woman seated in the corner at the left picks fleas from a puppy in her lap, and behind her, a Savoyard with his back turned leans against the other side of the wooden fence, holding a cocker spaniel in one arm.

Critics compared Stevens to the pre-eminent French dog painters Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803-1860) and his pupil Louis-Godefroy Jadin (1805-1882), but, as in the case of his paintings of 1848, the example of Landseer again seems just as probable. An untitled woodcut after a lost painting by the British painter (Pl. 66) shows a massive old woman hovering among three despondent dogs as a family (including a young boy) looks on from over a barrier in the rear. The reader may recall how critics in 1848 who sensed Stevens' humanitarian sympathy for downtrodden members of the canine species associated him with mordant observers of the human species from the past (Callot, La Bruyère) and present (Gavarni). By 1855, it was possible for Du Pays to re-christen Stevens "le Courbet des chiens," an apt association both iconographically and stylistically. Consistent with the situation in 1848, critics lavished praise upon Stevens' painting, finding it easier
to sympathize with forlorn animals than the more threatening human figures of Courbet or Millet. Gautier, in his review of Stevens' *A Dog's Profession* ([no. 414], Musée de Rouen), showing a team of panting dogs harnessed to a salt truck taking a rest, wrote a mock warning about the potentially incendiary effect of such a painting upon a mob of canine spectators: "Si les chiens avaient leurs entrées à l'Exposition et voyaient ce tableau navrant, il leur inspirerait sans doute des idées de révolte et les ferait se ruer avec fureur sur les mollets de l'homme, ce tyran de la création."^{41}

A few other paintings by Joseph Stevens dating from roughly 1851 to 1855 contain elements of social realist iconography because of the inclusion of unfortunate human figures alongside suffering animals. Most of these involve salt carts, which were pulled through the steep streets of Brussels in the nineteenth century by teams of dogs. This theme appears first in the Brussels Salon of 1851 in a lost canvas, *A Dog's Profession* (no. 1198).^{42} The viewer is made to sympathize with the two panting dogs struggling to pull the heavily loaded cart through the countryside on a cloudy day but his attention also falls upon the boy behind the cart who strains to push it over the hill. The same motif, now set in the city streets, is seen in the undated *Salt Vendor* (Pl. 67; Collection Royale Belge), wherein a third dog with a bandaged foot limps alongside his travelling companions and the boy salt vendor again thrusts the entire weight of his body against the cart, the position of his bowed head hiding his face. Another lost painting (Pl. 68) shows a salt cart parked in a back alley to which a burro is harnessed. Two dogs, one also attached to the cart, take a rest from
their exhausting task and are tended by a little girl seated on a doorstep with hands folded in her lap and a thoughtful and melancholic expression on her face. Her presence recalls the women in the rear of Morning in Brussels, but her situation is not as desperate.

After shuttling between Paris and Brussels from about 1851 to 1862, Stevens settled in the French capital in 1869. In his later paintings, the unhappy poverty of his "première manière bruxelloise" is largely eliminated in favor of more pleasant subject matter, exemplified in the Dog at the Mirror (1861, M.R.B.A., Brussels), showing the pet of an aristocrat whose gloves and cane lie on the floor, a far cry from the stray "working-class" mutts of his earlier period, who were invariably seen laboring at the thankless tasks or scavanging for food.43 Joseph's new focus upon well-kempt dogs of leisure parallels his brother Alfred's shift from beggar women to high-fashion beauties after 1855.


The title of De Groux's single entry in the Ghent Salon of 1856, a lost Blind Man's Buff (no. 137), gives no indication of social realist subject matter. By the time of the Brussels Salon of 1857, however, he had fully elaborated his new "high realist" style in his three entries, The Pilgrimage of St. Guido of Anderlecht ([no. 238], Pl. 75; M.R.B.A., Brussels), A Winter Scene, subsequently known as The Coffee Mill ([no. 239], Pl. 77; K.M.S.K., Antwerp) and The Pilgrimage of Dieghem ([no. 249], Pl. 76; M.R.B.A., Brussels). In these paintings, the artist has transformed the small-scale works of genre format from
his early period into monumental examples of social realist art which approach the size of history painting. Critical attention given to the three works constitutes a climax to the commentaries already made in the Brussels Salon of 1854 and Paris Salon of 1855. Significantly, De Groux's new stylistic departures provoked hostility from some critics even though the more traditional works of previous years had not.

Before turning to these three major paintings, however, it is perhaps instructive to examine several lithographs by De Groux which were printed before the opening of the Brussels Salon and provide examples of his social realist subject matter in a medium other than painting. These graphic works were printed in the weekly periodical L'Uylenspiegel, Journal des Ebats artistiques et littéraires, the first issue of which appeared on February 3, 1856. It was primarily a cultural revue, satirical in spirit, founded and staffed by the younger generation of Belgian writers and artists; it adhered to no particular political or esthetic doctrine other than an openminded interest in new currents of thought and artistic expression. Its avoidance of social or political issues and devotion to all branches of the arts is made clear in the premier issue.

Uylenspiegel ne sera jamais l'organe d'un parti ni d'un homme; il ne s'occupera ni de questions religieuses ni de questions politiques; les questions sociales, si dignes d'être étudiées ailleurs, ne seront pas même effleurés dans ses colonnes.—Les personnalités blessantes et les allusions grossières n'y trouveront pas d'accueil.

Outre des charges, des caricatures, des dessins et de fantaisie et d'actualité, Uylenspiegel publiera des articles et de variétés, des peintures de moeurs, quelques poésie, des biographies artistiques, des études diverses, des nouvelles à la main, des anecdotes peu connues et tirées de nos annales. Une
The driving force behind the journal was the writer Charles de Coster (1827-1879), best known for *La Légende d'Ulenspiegel* (1867), narrating, in epic style, the legendary adventures of the folk hero who had aided the Flemings and Walloons drive the Spanish Hapsburgs from the Low Countries. De Groux was one of several artists who etched illustrations for De Coster's masterpiece, having already provided several plates for De Coster's *Légendes Flamandes* (1857), another collection of traditional folk tales. De Coster had gathered Brussels' cultural avant-garde together almost ten years earlier in the *Société des Joyeux*, whose members—"employés, étudiants, avocats, artistes et flâneurs"—eventually included Emile Leclercq and Félicien Rops. The group met on Thursday evenings originally to read aloud and judge each others' literary efforts, but drinking, singing and witty repartee soon replaced the more serious functions.

Most of De Groux's illustrations for the *Uylenspiegel*, numbering approximately ten and running from January to July, 1857, are humorous anecdotes with captions, usually treating the lighter side of urban life in a style somewhat akin to Gavarni. De Groux's drawing for May 31, 1857, for example, falling under the "Les Métiers Désagréables" ("The Disagreeable Professions" [Pl. 69]) shows a dour-faced young man entering the service entrance of a theatre; a caption reads, "On voit souvent Ritonville, notre délicieux comique, se rendre au théâtre avec la mine que vous voyez,—et l'on ne voit jamais le théâtre faire relâche pour les chagrins de Ritonville." The pessimistic undercurrent seen
even in a piece of ostensibly comic intent is typical of the melancholic spirit that permeates such a large proportion of De Groux's paintings. Leclercq characterizes De Groux's contributions to *Uylen­spiegel* as revealing "une verve mordante et triste."\(^{47}\)

The first of De Groux's two lithographs portraying social realist themes in the *Uylen­spiegel* appeared on February 8, 1857 (Pl. 70) under the general heading "Sur le Pavé" (literally, "On the Street," idiomatically, "Out of Work"). In a snow-covered city street, a snugly dressed rich man is importuned by a destitute mother holding or surrounded by her four children. De Groux seems to have borrowed the idea for his print from a strikingly similar lithograph by Gavarni, *The Return from the Market* (Pl. 71), from the series *Les Anglais chez eux* (1851). The caption below De Groux's print reveals the man's callous indifference to the woman's plight.

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---Voyez, Monsieur, j'ai quatre pauvres petits enfants!
---Ça vaut bien la peine d'en parler: j'en ai douze moi, peut-être plus--Est-ce que je mendie?

The disregard of the rich for the suffering poor, hinted at in the 1854 *Paupers' Bench* and here made vividly explicit, will become a recurring motif in the remainder of De Groux's oeuvre. The compositional device of setting the figures against a wall which turns a corner into a tunnel of space formed by a narrow street or alley on the far right is another feature that De Groux introduces here which will be used frequently in the future.

Several weeks after the latter lithograph, the *Uylen­spiegel* carried a second illustration by De Groux with an alms motif titled "En Carnaval" ("Carnival Time") in the February 22 issue (Pl. 72).
Here a man and woman in costume, returning from a carnival late at night, stop next to a homeless beggar asleep on a doorstep. The man in a Pierrot costume reaches into his pocket as the following dialogue ensues.

—Dis donc, Mimie, si je lui donnais un sou?
—Bah! laisse-la dormir ... et passe moi le sou ...

Again, the selfish refusal of private charity to the poor provides the basis for a caustic bit of wit in a scene that reveals a considerably less optimistic view of human generosity than Alfred Stevens' *Soldiers of Vincennes* two years earlier. De Groux's niggardly carnival-goers reappear in a small watercolor, now in very poor condition (Pl. 93; c. 1857, M.R.B.A., Brussels) which employs the same composition as the lithograph in reverse, but whose date is uncertain.

Contrary to what one may expect, the *Uylenspiegel* did not militantly advocate realism in the arts as did Duranty's short-lived Parisian revue *Réalisme*, which folded after five issues published in 1856-7. The reaction to the French periodical by the *Uylenspiegel*’s art critic Emile Leclercq, writing under the pseudonym E. Pittore, was quite guarded, in fact. After summarizing Duranty's realist theory, with its stress on contemporaneity, Pittore criticizes the realists' single-minded insistence upon a literal transcription of reality, which, carried to extremes in literature, would admit only prose, at the expense of poetry:

Leur [the realists'] base fondamentale est: Que le passé n'appartient qu'aux historiens; que l'art doit s'inspirer de la nature et des scènes contemporains, privés ou publics ... Je ne sais si je me trompe, mais il me semble que l'art ne peut point se contenter de la photographie et de la sténéographie. Il faut demander ses inspirations à la nature et rester dans
le réel autant que possible. C'est, je crois, ce qu'ont fait les hommes de génie des siècles qui nous ont précédés. Homère et Shakespeare sont des réalisistes, parce qu'ils sont vrais; et cependant leurs œuvres ne ressemblent point au travail sec de la sténographie.49

He concludes his essay by supporting Duranty's objection to lifeless pagaentry and pastiches in literature and art but asserts that, in the final analysis, realism is nothing new; it is merely the resurgence of a periodically submerged constant in artistic creation.

Vous marchez dans une voie déjà frayée, messieurs. Rappelez les artistes et les poètes à la raison; empêchez-les de fouiller toujours dans les annales des siècles passés; mettez le doigt sur le défaut qui les empêche de faire des œuvres immortelles—l'aveuglement; arrachez-les à des travaux germés dans les idées rétrospectives; tuez le roman historique, les drames représentant des scènes du passé; n'admettez plus les tableaux pastiches des Rubens, des Michel-Ange, des Rembrandt. C'est très-bien; mais ne croyez point avoir trouvé une nouvelle voie; ce serait une erreur. Vous avez rencontré une voie abandonnée, voilà tout.50

Following the last issue of Réalisme, Pittore wrote a post-mortem reiterating his earlier opinion that the realist partisans in France were fatally lacking in "l'amour, ... la rêverie, ... l'extase. Si vous n'avez rien de cela dans l'âme, je vous plains."51 He then focused on the propensity of the French realists for concentrating solely on the lower classes of society, thereby limiting the potential scope of reality to be depicted. He also reiterates his disapproval of French realism's alleged parallel with photography, to his mind, a device for mere mechanical reproduction. Pittore's preference for a depiction of reality moulded by the artist's subjective vision will be realized in the spiritualizing stylization with which De Groux will imbue the realist subjects exhibited in the 1859 Brussels Salon.
Ils [the realists] étaient plus matérialistes que réalistes. Ils ont proné M. Courbet, l'auteur de ces fameuses baigneuses et de ces casseurs de pierres, qui étaient de fort beaux échantillons du matérialisme dans la peinture. Mais il y a pourtant autre chose que la reproduction exacte de la nature dans l'art. Et puis, la réalité ne se trouve pas plutôt dans le peuple, ses moeurs, son caractère, son costume, que dans les classes privilégiées de la société. Ne vouloir reproduire, en peinture comme en littérature, que l'homme du peuple, c'est tout simplement de l'absurdité. ... Je sais bien que la forme et les sentiments primitifs, sans arrangement, sans alliage, ont un côté pittoresque qui charme l'œil et l'esprit de l'artiste. Mais l'étude des manifestations extérieure du sentiment de l'homme civilisé, faite consciencemment, est peut-être plus difficile que l'autre parce que ses sentiments se manifestent d'une façon toute différente, dans une forme plus gracieuse, plus pure, moins saisissable, moins brutale.  

Belgians were confronted once again with the issue of realism when Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary, the first masterpiece of literary realism, was published in France. Although praised by Belgian critic Félix Coveliers writing under the pseudonym "Bénédict" in the Uylenspiegel,  the novel was panned by Louis Hymans in L'Etoile belge for its crude and mundane qualities and its immorality. The latter fault held little danger for the reading public, according to Hymans, since "rien n'est moins corrompant que l'ennui."  Karl Stur countered in the Uylenspiegel, defending realism as truth, however unpleasant it may be at times, unacceptable only because of the fantasy to which the romantics had accustomed readers. The close relationship with which literary and artistic realism were viewed in Belgium—and the French inspiration from which realism in Belgium had supposedly sprung—is underscored in a later article by Hymans in which he defines the movement as a scourge unleashed by the reprehensible duo of Courbet and Flaubert.
Quand je dis réalisme, je pense à cette école qui, en peinture, a pris pour dieu M. Courbet et, en fait de style, Madame Bovary, ce roman qu'un critique illustre appelait tout récemment une ignominie littéraire, et que je ne saurais assez flétrir, tant je le considère comme un hidieux symptôme d'avilissement et de décadence.56

The third realist-related item from France preceding the Brussels Salon and chronicled in the Uylenspiegel was the Paris Salon of 1857. Pittore took note of the social realist subject matter exhibited by Courbet with Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine (Musée du Petit Palais, Paris), Millet with The Gleaners (Pl.119; Louvre, Paris) and Jules Breton with Blessing the Wheat (Pl. 74; Musée National Compiegne), which depicted, respectively, city prostitutes and country peasants in the fields. All three paintings were highly praised by the Belgian reviewer who, in regard to Breton's painting, defended the principle of modernity in art (first promoted by Charles Baudelaire in his review of the Paris Salon of 1845), seeing this trend in painting following on the heels of the same currents already established in literature.57

The Brussels Salon of 1857 opened several months afterward. Its reviewers invariably devoted a large amount of space to De Groux's three entries, recognizing them—whether or not they approved or understood—as major realist statements painted in a new style. They also spotted enough other paintings in the Salon of similar subjects to be able to speak of a realist school of which De Groux was the leader. The conservative critic Van Soust, for example, noted that "Cette école [du réalisme] qui a pris naissance en France, a fini par gagner des disiples parmi nous et compte des représentants au Salon. M. Degroux en est le chef."58 It is not without significance, perhaps, that the subjects of De Groux's decisive paintings paralleled Courbet's

The two pilgrimage paintings of De Groux both depict traditional processions held at churches around the outskirts of Brussels. In The Pilgrimage of St. Guido, we see the annual horseback procession to Anderlecht, a suburban district of Brussels, honoring the relics of the local St. Guido (c. 950-1012), protector of horses and cattle, which was held on the day after Pentecost. It was led by a mounted guard of honor who is followed by other pilgrims riding on horses decorated with ribbons and banners.

De Groux shows a well-dressed man with a haughty expression astride a white horse leading a train of mounted followers around the west portals of the Gothic church (the Collégiale des Saints-Pierre et Guidon). The second rider with his ruddy face, stout build and peasant smock, is of a noticeably inferior social rank compared to the slender gentleman ahead of him. In marked contrast to all the riders, however, are the paupers on foot who occupy the foreground of the painting as they had in the Paupers' Bench. A crowd of loosely-painted and thinly outlined worshipers entering the church behind the first two riders is also reminiscent of the distant crowd in the Paupers' Bench. Those on foot in the foreground include a wistful little girl standing in profile slightly left of center; she is closest of all the figures to the spectator. Behind her, two women kneel as they reverently watch the procession pass while a third sits on a step and meditatively prays.
On the far right in shadow, a beggar kneels before an upturned hat, into which a blind man in a smock carrying a stick and led by a dog, drops in a coin. Behind them, a rather grotesquely-featured young man on crutches eyes the procession. The upper right contains De Groux's familiar tunnel of space, here formed by two rows of houses. Vaguely visible in front of these buildings are the festival tents erected in the square.

The Pilgrimage of Dieghem depicts the annual procession held on Easter Monday at the Eglise de St. Corneille (now St. Catherine) in Dieghem, a small village outside Brussels. Participants walk around the church and enter to venerate relics of St. Cornelius, a martyr-pope invoked to cure convulsions, epilepsy, rheumatism and other ailments, especially among children. De Groux's pilgrims are shown entering the south portal of the church. As in The Pilgrimage of St. Guido, rich are separated from poor. The former are grouped on the left, passing through the entranceway--most with their backs toward the spectator--and distinguished by their finer clothing and expressions of pompous, or perhaps hypocritical, piety. The dour-faced gentleman astride the white horse in St. Guido has a counterpart in the well-dressed woman on the far left in Dieghem, whose facial expression and conspicuously poised hands connote pious affectation. Meanwhile on the right, the poorer participants, who occupy approximately two thirds of the picture space, move toward the left. They are positioned in profile or three-quarter views. Closest to the door, a mother in simple white bonnet and solid-colored clothing accompanied by her son and daughter places a candle in the three-ring iron holder by the
entrance. Her melancholic expression is picked up in the profiled face of another young mother further to the right, holding an infant in her arms and walking beside an older daughter. Even the little girl on the far right turned in the opposite direction seems as serious-minded as the two adult women, her eyes meditatively cast down upon the banner she is fingering. She is the counterpart of the soulful child in the foreground of St. Guido.

Toward the center of the group a grim-faced man in a blue smock carrying a knapsack on his back awaits his turn to place a candle on the rack. His situation is not as unfortunate, however, as that of the despondent father abjectly seated on the far left, close to the spectator, next to a little cart bearing his sick child—a reminder of the healing powers of St. Corneille which attracted so many of the pilgrims. The cart has been pulled by a dog resting on the ground in a way that recalls Joseph Stevens' A Dog's Profession (1855, Musée de Rouen). This foreground configuration is completed by two more little children beside the cart, one holding a large tambourine, presumably to be used for begging: a second, in torn clothing and disheveled hair, her back to the spectator, kneels in the direction of the church, perhaps in emulation of the bald-headed man in front of her by the portal. As always, a glimpse into a small area of deeper space is provided on the far right, where village rooftops peep out over a high wall.61

In The Coffee Mill, a grocer, seated outside his shop on a cold winter day—drifts of snow cover the cobblestones and rooftops—turns the handle of his coffee mill. The heat generated by its flames has attracted a small group of unfortunates unequipped with mittens like
the grocer. All huddle around the fire for warmth. Two females in profile closest to the spectator, a young woman standing and little girl kneeling, hold their bare hands out above the heat. Behind them, a shivering young man and more mature woman in a traditional Flemish hooded cloak draw their arms in close to their bodies and look on with melancholic introspection. From the narrow street on the right—De Groux's familiar tunnel of space with a glimpse of light blue sky above—emerge a mother and child both in wooden clogs moving toward the main group. On the walls behind the figures one discerns phrases on the torn wall posters which provide ironic commentary on the foreground activity: "maison à vendre avec facilité de payment," "bal paré, masqué et travesti," "Extinction du pauperisme par ..."^62

The stylistic change from De Groux's early realism is complete in these paintings. The artist has moved from emotionally-charged small and moderately sized genre works to monumental-sized canvases whose tenor is much more restrained and stilled. The difference between the loose, painterly application and irregularly outlined forms of The Drunkard and The Paupers' Bench and the smoother handling and unbroken, regular, almost schematized contours of the 1857 paintings is very striking. De Groux's commitment to clean, simple linearity is revealed in a preparatory sketch of one of the male pilgrims in Dieghem (Pl. 78; formerly collection Crespin). Drapery folds in the mature works also take on a different character from the irregular curves and facets of the early works. As foreseen in The Promenade, folds become stiff, straight and angular. Lighting in the 1857 paintings has also diverged from the romantic contrasts of his early phase, where flickering beams
entered at a raking angle, casting irregular light and dark patterns over surfaces and consigning certain areas to deep shadow. In the pilgrimages and The Coffee Mill, the overcast skies provide an even, diffuse light over the entire scene, illuminating and defining rather than obscuring contours. The overall warm brown color scheme of The Drunkard, accented with vivid reds has been reduced, in 1857 to pre-dominately cool greys established by the stone of the background buildings. Occasional areas of red in the figures' clothing enliven the composition, but most of the garments are black, grey or white or drab shades of brown.

Another observable difference in De Groux's mature style is a flattening of space and horizontal compositional orientation already evident in The Idlers. Although the architecture on the left of St. Guidon and The Coffee Mill recedes diagonally, its cropping at the top and uniform color produce the effect of a flat backdrop. Dieghem is positively frieze-like, with both the architecture and figures arranged parallel to the picture plane. The little boy tugging at the smock of the man with the knapsack, in fact, is posed like the children in the Ara Pacis frieze (Museum of the Ara Pacis, Rome).

It seems quite certain that a major source of inspiration for De Groux's rather drastic change in format, style and emotional tenor in 1857 was the works of the Stevens brothers in the Exposition Universelle of Paris two years earlier. The similarities of De Groux's works with Joseph's Dog Market in Paris and Alfred's Soldiers of Vincennes, both of which hung alongside his own three Exposition entries in the Belgian section are readily apparent: starkly contoured figures
with simplified interior modelling, horizontally disposed and monumentalized against a grey wall parallel to the picture plane.

But De Groux was probably influenced just as greatly, if not more so, by Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* on display in the *Pavillon du Réalisme*, which in turn, as stated previously, had undoubtedly inspired the Stevens' entries of 1853. One can readily discern its impact upon De Groux's pilgrimages and *Coffee Mill*. The depiction of religious ritual in large-scale, frieze-like, flattened format with an austere color scheme based on greys, blacks, whites and browns are all shared characteristics. Like the Parisian press' criticism of Courbet's reduced palette, most Belgian critics carped about De Groux's greyish colors. The cantankerous Joly advised De Groux to abandon "cette gamme de tons boueux, marneux, qui envahissent toutes ses oeuvres; qu'il ne redoute pas les splendeurs de la lumière: une misère éclairée par un joyeux et brillant soleil est plus poignante que la misère dans l'ombre et la boue, qui semblent le cadre naturel des souffrances matérielles." Van Bemmel criticized De Groux's "lumière blafarde" and "teinte glaciale" which gave his figures a cadaverous, ghostly appearance. Both he and Van Sout complained that De Groux's cloudy skies deceived the viewer into thinking that the pilgrimages took place in winter when the dates were actually in spring. A lone word of praise for De Groux's overcast atmosphere was voiced by Pèlerin: "Mais ce qui est vraiment admirable dans ce tableau, c'est l'aspect, le ton, la lumière, la puissance des ombres, mystérieuse et pleines de profondeur. (Pèlerin was in good company, for De Groux's oppressive atmosphere was one of the qualities that attracted Van Gogh to his work.)
De Groux also seems to adopt Courbet's scattered patches of reds and aqua blues seen in the clerical robes of the Ornans clergymen and stockings of the right foreground figure, offsetting the otherwise dreary color scheme. De Groux's own appropriation of these small areas of red and blue is evident in his 1857 paintings—in the red patterned scarves and blue peasant smocks in the pilgrimages and in the grocer's red sleeves and red plaid shawl of the right-hand girl in the Coffee Mill. Van Soust took offense at such unorthodox coloring in his review of the 1857 Salon: "Enfin son [De Groux's] coloris, dont le caractère ordinairement terne et lourd n'est rompu que par des coups de pinceau criards et violents, réclame le charme d'un plus savant mélange de couleurs." Despite such criticism, De Groux retained this color device through the rest of his oeuvre.

Another stylistic feature very probably inspired by Courbet is the figures' flat, stiff sharply-contoured quality seen in the Burial at Ornans and even more prominently in The Meeting or "Bonjour M. Courbet" (1854, Musée Fabre, Montpellier), on display in the Exposition Universelle. De Groux's summary modelling and flattened space, wherever it may have come from, was also criticized by Van Soust:

Le plus souvent ... les physionomies de ses personnages manquent de modelé et n'accusent qu'une indication linéaire et une teinte plate. Parfois ses tons se confondent à des plans différents, et de cette confusion naissent alors des effets contre toute vérité." The most striking specific compositional similarity of any of Courbet's works with De Groux's is that between The Pilgrimage of St. Guido and Courbet's Peasants of Flagey Returning from the Fair (Pl. 79; 1855, M.B.A., Besançon), exhibited in the Pavillon de Réalisme. Courbet's
mounted horses and cattle wind forward at precisely the same angle as De Groux's procession horses.

In this latter instance, De Groux has transformed a secular subject into a religious ritual underscoring the crucial ideological difference between his works and those of Courbet in spite of all the stylistic affinities. While Courbet's realist doctrines emphatically deny the expression of spiritual, metaphysical or religious content in favor of only "objects visible and tangible to the painter," De Groux's pilgrimages embody precisely the religious piety and sentiment which Courbet rejected. If The Burial of Ornans can be viewed as a subversion of the traditional funeral painting with its suggestion of an afterlife, De Groux's pilgrimages reenforce the legitimacy of religious folk ritual. The poses and expressions of De Groux's lower-class pilgrims reveal a profound sympathy with the piety of the poor, as steadfast as the Gothic churches that rise up behind them and as sincere as that of the wealthier worshipers is hypocritical. This commitment to depicting the sincere Christian faith of the poor is a hallmark of De Groux's "religious genre," extending from The Paupers' Bench to scenes of his final years. It distinguishes his social realism from that of his Belgian contemporaries and is undoubtedly one of the chief reasons for the praise bestowed upon De Groux by Van Gogh and Gauguin, who sought themselves to capture that deeply rooted spirituality of simple folk in their own paintings.

In this connection, the work of two other French painters closer to De Groux's religious bent than Courbet, should be cited. Decisive works of Breton and Millet exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1857,
which opened a number of months before the Brussels exhibition and was reviewed by Pittore, were very likely seen by De Groux, who could easily have travelled back and forth to Paris, as the Stevens brothers were accustomed to do. Millet's *The Cleaners*, a depiction of contemporary French peasants at work in the fields, would likely have appealed to De Groux in its infusion of a secular scene with Biblical allusions to Ruth and Naomi in the fields of Boaz. Because of the consistent religious overtones in Millet's paintings of the French peasantry, it might seem more logical to connect De Groux's art with the Barbizon master than Courbet. While such a link may be established in regard to religious sympathies, it does not apply in regard to style. The shared characteristics of Courbet and De Groux—reduced modelling, stiff, flattened figures, walled-off background space and large scale—diverge from the more traditional execution and format of Millet. Furthermore, the assertive strength of Millet's hearty peasants is a far cry from De Groux's thin, sorrowful unfortunates. The same observation can be made in regard to the relationship of De Groux's works with those of Breton; the positive strength of Breton's figures executed with academic idealization differs once more from De Groux's emaciated unfortunates rendered in an unorthodox style. There are similarities that would seem more than fortuitous, however, between Breton's *Blessing of the Wheat* (Pl. 74), a long frieze-like processional in which foreground peasants observe their social superiors parading across the canvas. Moreover, the three bonneted women in the right foreground of Breton's painting are very close to De Groux's similarly placed trio of females in *St. Guido*. 
Paintings of contemporary religious folk processions existed long before those of De Groux and Breton. They can be found as far back as Bruegel's *Wedding Procession* (c. 1566, Musée Municipal, Brussels) and as recently as Samuel Palmer's *Coming from Evening Church* (1830, Tate Gallery, London). In the decades immediately preceding 1857, several examples of local Belgian pilgrimages are found in Salon catalogues of Antwerp and Brussels. In at least one instance, such a pilgrimage subject, exhibited in 1836, was criticized for the vulgarity of its figures, proving that resistance to contemporary lower-class subjects was not confined to De Groux's time.

Paintings of native Belgian processions related in format to De Groux's pilgrimages did not all depict religious rituals. A lost painting by minor Belgian genre painter Hendrik Dillens (1812-1872) shows a modern-day *Beer Festival in Ghent* (Pl. 80, before 1854) peopled with drunken revellers in costumes. The rider astride the horse in the left foreground and the descending slope of figures in shadow in the right foreground as well as the architectural backgropan obliquely-viewed looming façade of a Gothic church and receding tunnel of houses on the right—provide striking similarities to De Groux's *St. Guido*. One is struck, however, by the difference between De Groux's social realist close-ups of his figures and distinctive characterizations of them as opposed to Dillens' more remote vantage point and interest in topographic scope and anecdotal diversity. The difference between traditional genre and genre elevated to the Realist conception of contemporary history painting imbued with De Groux's special spiritual gravity is patent when one compares the two works.
An iconographic precedent from France depicting the French Pilgrimage of Saint-Ernier near Domfront appeared as an engraving after a painting by "J.L." in the popular Parisian journal L'Illustration on June 9, 1855 (Pl. 81). As in De Groux's St. Guido, a group of paupers in a triangular configuration huddles in shadow on one side of the picture, reverently watching the procession, many of whose members bear the dyspeptic expressions of De Groux's haughtier pilgrims.

It is quite apparent to the present-day viewer, however,—as it was to critics in De Groux's day—that his pilgrimages transcended mere transcriptions of observed contemporary reality. Of course, the events depicted, the costumes worn and the settings are accurate or nearly so. Moreover, De Groux's frank rendering of the unattractive features of his lower-class figures who occupy such large positions of the compositions were criticized by even the most sympathetic reviewer, Louis Pèlerin in the Uylenspiegel.

Je reprocherai à l'artiste de voir avec trop d'amour le côté laïd de la nature, de rechercher les types vulgaires ou même ignobles, c'est un grand tort. Tous les paysans rassemblés près de l'église d'Anderlecht sont d'une laideur maladive ou repoussante; c'est à peine si on trouve une ou deux têtes d'une forme présentable.

Nevertheless, the same critics were also correct in perceiving a peculiar stylization of figure types and their costumes. Pèlerin, in speaking of Dieghem, referred to "un faux air gothique, une naïvité cherché, un raideur fausse qui appartiennent aux peintres du XVIe siècle." Eugène van Bemmel accused De Groux of bowing to "un parti pris, un système," and, apparently referring to the German Nazarenes or English Pre-Raphaelites, warned that "Nous sommes loin d'avoir le
badaudisme de certain peuple voisin, et ce n'est pas dans la patrie des vieux maîtres de l'école flamande que l'on peut se poser en réformateur de la peinture."\(^{79}\)

It soon becomes evident that the figures' rigid poses, elongated anatomy and stiff, straight drapery folds are indeed reminiscent of the Flemish painters of the Northern Renaissance or Late Gothic period—Jan van Eyck, Hans Memling, Gerard David, etc. The verticality of almost all the figures in general and the procession leader of St. Guido in particular—accentuated by the rising Gothic architecture behind them—is especially close to the attenuated figure types of Dirk Bouts or Hugo van der Goes. De Groux's special way of rendering drapery folds so as to resemble the stylized patterns of the primitives is eloquently described by Barnavol: "Sa science des plis surtout est devenue curieuse. Il en a éliminé progressivement toutes les petites cassures, toutes les petites facettes d'ombre et de lumière pour tendre de plus en plus à une ligne sobre, grave, synthétique, à de larges plans apaisés qui ne disent eux aussi que l'essential."\(^{80}\)

De Groux's treatment of drapery, figures and space in St. Guido looks back to the style of any number of horseback processions, not necessarily religious, dating from the Late Gothic period. In the Limbourg brothers' manuscript illustration of May from the Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry (1413-16, Musée Condé, Chantilly), the verticality of the elegantly elongated mounted figures is reinforced by the trees and Gothic spires rising behind them; space is flattened by means of reduced modelling and flat, decorative patches of color, many of which are patterned. (Cf. this latter effect in the patterned scarves and
shawls of De Groux's female figures.) Perhaps the most outstanding masterpiece of early Flemish painting, Van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece (c. 1425-32, Cathedral of St. Bavon, Ghent) pictures knights on horseback on the outer left wings of the lower interior portions. They are complemented on the opposite side by hermits and pilgrims on foot; all converge toward the Altar of the Lamb in the central panel. It is not possible—to prove that there was a specific correlation between Van Eyck's groups of mounted and walking pilgrims in the Ghent Altarpiece and De Groux's analogous equestrian and pedestrian processions in St. Guido and Dieghem. Nevertheless, the unmistakable affinities of De Groux's paintings, beginning in 1857, with the art of the Late Gothic period demonstrate an intense interest in that glorious period of his country's past which is new to his art. To what may we attribute this phenomenon?

The idea of reviving neglected artistic styles of the past was one which De Groux had encountered firsthand during his Düsseldorf sojourn five years earlier and which he had exploited himself in the Nazarene Ruth and Naomi. A thorough consideration of the 1857 canvases reveals, besides the primitivizing qualities of the fourteenth and fifteenth century Flemings, a resurgence of Nazarene characteristics which had lain dormant for half a decade. One detects reminiscences of medieval cavalcades like those of Hans Pforr in The Entry of Emperor Rudolf of Hapsburg into Basel in 1273 (Pl. 82; 1809-10, Städelisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt). Pforr's central rider and horse strike the same pose as De Groux's procession leader in St. Guido as he strides past a flag-decked architectural backdrop that looks like De Groux's in reverse.
Within Pforr's overall surface of flat decorative color areas, the red and gold trim on the knight's white horse to the right of center is strikingly similar to the shawl of the analogously placed kneeling woman in St. Guido. The reader will also recall the strain of literary and historical genre painting incorporating Nazarene stylistic tendencies which developed in Düsseldorf and was exemplified by Louis Blanc in Woman Going to Church (Pl. 42). The essential theme and visual elements of Blanc's picture—pious simplicity of an archaically stylized figure before Gothic architecture—are present in De Groux (cf. especially the little foreground girl in St. Guido) but transposed to the present. 

It is easy to see how the Nazarenes' yearning for naïve piety expressed in the awkward, stylized art of the medieval and early Renaissance periods would have been so appealing to De Groux's strong Catholic bent. It is also logical, however, that De Groux, as a Belgian seeking a similar but individual means of expression in his own art, would have drawn upon the "primitive" art of his own country's past which itself was imbued with a distinctively naïve mysticism.

Still other factors that undoubtedly spurred, or at least reinforced, De Groux's "faux air gothique" may be cited. Henri Leys, De Groux's contemporary in Antwerp, developed an archaizing style based on Northern Renaissance prototypes like Quinten Metsys, Pieter Bruegel, Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein around 1854, partially as a result of travels through Germany and his study of medieval manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels. The subject matter painted by Leys in this style consisted invariably of genre scenes set in the fifteenth
or sixteenth centuries and depicting such activities as processions, banquets or ceremonies. Whether or not Leys incorporated specific historical events or personages into his genre scenes, they usually included a number of common folk, often in the foreground.

A typical example of Leys' painting is The Visit of Albrecht Dürer to Antwerp in 1520 (Pl. 83; 1855, K.M.S.K., Antwerp) which exhibits many of the qualities of De Groux's mature style and is particularly close to the Pilgrimage of Dieghem. A horizontal frieze-like procession of figures and row of spectators parallel to the picture plane are framed by a Gothic architectural backdrop; the two-dimensional quality of the painting is reenforced by the outlining of forms and the flat color areas formed by the frequently patterned costumes. The air of quiet solemnity which pervades Leys' scenes and marks the faces of his figures is also transferred to De Groux's mature works. Besides Leys' distinctive style, De Groux was undoubtedly drawn also to the recurrent theme conveyed by Leys' paintings, succinctly summarized by Cleaver: "a firmly ordered world in which people live and die, silently satisfied that they have done their part in continuing the rites and traditions that make daily life meaningful and give it value in the stream of history." How well this characterizes De Groux's pilgrimages! Van Bemmel may skeptically have asked how such pilgrimages, "qui ne sont le plus souvent qu'un prétexte de promenade, peuvent-ils donc inspirer un véritable artiste," going even so far as to muse whether the artist was expressing "l'horreur de la superstition," but the actual thought behind the solemn processions was just the opposite. They represent Christian faith and tradition that has descended from the time of the
archaizing style in which the figures are painted; by linking the faith-
ful paupers to their age-old ancestors, De Groux bestows dignity upon
them, just as he had done by contrasting them with their wealthier
foils.

De Groux's affinity with Leys was noted as soon as his pilgrimages
and winter scene was exhibited. Pèlerin in his Salon review remarked,
in reference to Dieghem, that "il semble que M. De Groux était préoccupé
de Leys quand il a fait ce tableau." As if more proof were needed of
the influence of Leys, we may cite several genre scenes set in the Late
Gothic period painted by De Groux himself. Appropriately, in relation
to the pilgrimage scenes, all of De Groux's known historical genre
paintings have to do with religious ritual. In The Morning Prayer (Pl.
84; c. 1857-70, M.B.A., Tournai), a woman in a wimple, seated in a
carved wooden chair, holds a Crucifix and listens to the prayer of a
little child at her knees. A triptych with the Virgin and saints hangs
on the wall to the right above a lectern with an open prayer book posed
upon it. Procession on Palm Sunday, Sixteenth Century (Pl. 85; c.
1870, location unknown) shows a crowded frieze of sixteenth century
worshipers, lay and clerical, moving past a large Crucifix in the middle
of a cobblestone street toward a church whose tower is visible in the
distance on the far right. Finally, a Crucifix Vendor (c. 1858-1870,
private collection, Brussels) set in approximately the same period,
pictures a merchant selling his wares for devotional purposes in a com-
position resembling a lost Selling of Candles during the Pilgrimage to
the Pays de Caux (c. 1857-70, formerly collection Barella), set in the
present. De Groux's historical genre pieces, with their wooden
articulation of figures, errors in perspective, and pseudo-Gothic decorative detail scarcely hold their own in comparison to Leys' meticulously rendered historical genre or to De Groux's realist paintings. They do demonstrate, however, his receptivity to the art of the primitives, and suggest that he indeed conceived his mature realist works with art of the late Gothic painters and/or Leys in mind.

Work by De Groux treating historical subject matter in two other media undoubtedly helped reenforce his adoption of archaic tendencies in the 1857 Salon entries. In 1857, De Groux, along with several other Belgian artists, contributed two etched illustrations to Charles de Coster's Légendes flamandes (see Part 2). These consisted of a man in chain mail spying on a beautiful maiden and a woman handing food down to a male figure from atop the crenellated wall of a castle. A more extensive project was his commission to design a series of stained-glass windows for the nave of the Cathedral of Saint-Michel (formerly the Collégiale des Sts-Michel-et-Gudule) in Brussels. Execution of the windows themselves was carried out by Jean-Baptiste Capronnier in the 1860s, but the cartoons of De Groux, preserved in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, date back to 1857; the reader may also recall that Deleutre, in 1854, said that De Groux had already been making a living by working on stained-glass windows.

The subject of the fourteen-window series was the History of the Holy Sacrement (L'Histoire du Saint-Sacrement du Miracle), a miraculous host housed in the Saint-Michel's. A comparison of the procession depicted in the tenth window (Pl. 86) with its horizontal frieze of stiffly posed, strongly contoured figures against a Gothic architectural
backdrop provides yet another clue to the archaic character of the 1857 pilgrimages. One readily assumes that De Groux's efforts toward an archaic, historicizing style in this important commission must have carried over into his painting of contemporary subjects. A similar comparison can be made with De Groux's cartoon for St. Barbara (Pl. 87) and the mother in clogs entering with her daughter on the right side of The Coffee Mill. Identical in pose and black outlining, the saint wears a richly embroidered gown and carries her attribute in her right hand, while the Belgian pauper is shrouded in a drab cloak and carries a bundle in her arm.

A further analysis of sources for The Coffee Mill reveals few surprises in relation to the artistic repertoire upon which the artist had drawn in previous works. The device of showing posters on the wall and goods in a shop window to contrast ironically with the misery of paupers in the street had been used by Alfred Stevens in The Soldiers of Vincennes and Begging Permitted, respectively. The hooded woman with head bowed in misery recalls the young female figure standing in the rear of Van de Kerkhove's Misery of Flanders. Reminiscences of Düsseldorf may, as so often before, have inspired the composition as well.

The Broken Soup Kettle by minor Düsseldorf genre painter August Dirks (Pl. 88; 1836, Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Düsseldorf) shows the result of a schoolboy prank on a city street during a winter day: the pieces of a broken vessel and its spilled contents in the foreground of the painting. Dirks' painting is a mere anecdote exhibiting neither the polemics of a Tendenzbild nor the poignancy or large scale of The Coffee Mill, yet it contains almost all of the elements seen in De Groux's
street scene. These include a destitute mother and child on the right, a kneeling little girl in the center, and even a shopkeeper, peering out of the window at the left. The architectural backdrop includes a crumbling brick wall with peeling posters and a view into a narrowly winding street in the rear.90

One figure in particular in The Coffee Mill, the shivering man standing to the right of the grocer, stands in the same pose and wears a hat similar to that of a figure standing in the rear of an etching by Rembrandt, Christ Preaching or "La Petite Tombe" (Pl. 89; c. 1652, British Museum, London). It is not hard to imagine that De Groux would have been attracted to the profound humanity of Rembrandt's depiction of the poor of his own day either in genre or religious scenes like the one in question, where contemporary Dutch people mingle with Biblical figures. Was not De Groux implying similar links between past and present with his archaisms in the pilgrimages? Signs of De Groux's attraction to Rembrandt's art may date back to The Drunkard, whose golden brown monochromatic color scheme and heavy impasto resemble Rembrandt's mature painting style. Seventeenth century Dutch art in general was an essential point of departure for nineteenth century realists, who were in one respect renewing the down-to-earth empiricism of their Netherlandish forebearers. Courbet himself in several instances seems to have borrowed motifs from works of Rembrandt, including the "Petite Tombe" etching in question.91

The critics were in general more favorably disposed toward The Coffee Mill than they had been toward the pilgrimages. Van Bemmel, in fact, expressed regret that the pilgrimages strayed from the
"excellentes tendances" of The Coffee Mill, which he found "empreinte d'un sentiment profond et juste, d'une vérité poignante: cela donne froid et cela rend triste ... ."92 Even the severe Van Soust found a certain "grace" and "élégance" in the woman wearing the grey cloak and had to admit that De Groux's greyish cast was appropriate for such a scene. What he could not accept, however, was the pity which the artist solicited from the spectator for the plight of the figures in the painting; Van Soust believed that De Groux would have been doing a greater service to his audience by encouraging moral strength and duty.92 The highest praise of all was proffered by Pèlerin, who went so far as to rate the Coffee Mill "bien près d'être un chef d'oeuvre."

Authenticity of characterizations and overall composition and execution were praised: "C'est admirable de vérité et d'observation. La femme en mantelet est une figure superbe, que nul artiste ne renierait. Le vieil épicié est bien le bourgeois obtus qui ne voit et ne connaît rien en dehors de sa boutique. ... C'est dans son ensemble une œuvre fort belle et fort remarquable, le fond surtout ne saurait être assez admiré."94

Before a final conclusion may be drawn as to the significance of De Groux's pilgrimages and Coffee Mill, it is necessary to examine a fourth painting which deserves to be grouped with the three preceding masterpieces of De Groux's mature style. The painting in question, Grace Before the Meal (Pl. 93; M.R.B.A., Brussels), was exhibited four years after the pilgrimages and Coffee Mill, in the Antwerp Salon of 1861 (no. 295). It was shown one year after De Groux had received high praise and an official government decoration as a Chevalier de l'ordre
Léopold for paintings of two historical subjects. Perhaps buoyed by the official support he had received after the critical reservations and outright hostility in 1857, he carried the stylistic innovations of his 1857 paintings to further extremes, simplifying or reducing pictorial elements of color, contour, composition and spatial relationships even further. Coupled with his selection of a subject that expressed the essence of private religious ritual and belief central to the daily life of the Brabant peasant, De Groux created a work that served as a point of departure for an early masterpiece of Vincent van Gogh, The Potato Eaters (1885, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam).  

Part 3. De Groux in the Antwerp Salon of 1861: Grace Before the Meal

Perhaps stung by adverse criticism to his efforts of 1857, De Groux made a brief foray into officially sanctioned history painting in 1860. This was merely a temporary respite, however, and not a retreat from his commitment to social realist subject matter. The Brussels Salon of 1860 in which he exhibited The Death of Charles V (Pl. 90; M.R.B.A., Brussels) and Francis Junius Preaching Reform in Antwerp in 1566 (Pl. 90a; M.R.B.A., Brussels) also contained a contemporary genre subject, The Return of the Conscript (Pl. 136; location unknown). Grace Before the Meal, fourth in the series of monumental realist statements of De Groux's mature period, would be exhibited the following year. Aside from one other recorded painting of a past historical event, The Burghers of Calais Before Edward III (Pl. 91; c. 1867, location unknown), and the handful of historical genre scenes cited earlier, the remainder of De Groux's easel paintings after 1853 are devoted to contemporary subject matter.
Both of the events depicted in the 1860 canvases take place in the sixteenth century, the era of which the Belgian romantics were so enamoured because of the parallels they perceived between the Low Countries' struggle with the Hapsburgs and the Belgian Revolution of 1830. It was a century also favored by Leys. Iconographically, De Groux followed in the footsteps of the arch academic romanticist Gallait, whose *Abdication of Charles V* (1841, M.B.A., Tournai) depicted a previous episode in the life of the great monarch.98 Francis Junius seems to look back upon Lessing's series on Jan Huss, the martyred Bohemian reformer, painted in Düsseldorf.99 Consistent with his predilection for themes involving sadness or tragedy and focusing upon religious faith, De Groux depicted, in *Charles V*, the last moments in the life of a pious monarch beloved of his subjects and, in *Francis Junius*, heroic resistance in the face of religious martyrdom; its French-born reformer gestures out the window to the *auto-da-fé* in progress below, the flames of which cast a bright glow over his apprehensive congregation. In an apparent indication of his ultimate belief in the supremacy of historical subject matter over genre, De Groux painted his two scenes on canvases whose sizes exceeded those of his largest realist genre subjects. Otherwise, neither painting departed greatly from the mature style in which the realist works of 1857 were painted. Now, however, critics did not castigate the sombre coloring, black outlining or stiffly articulated poses and straight drapery folds, presumably because the acceptable historic, nationalistic, romantic subject matter of *machine* painting permitted stylistic tendencies that were deemed inappropriate for contemporary themes.100
Grace Before the Meal (Pl. 92; 1861, M.R.B.A., Brussels), carried the horizontal frieze-like quality of his pilgrimages to new extremes by the use of an oblong rectangular canvas (80 x 154 cm.). Immediately associations of De Groux's eleven peasants at the meal table with depictions of the Last Supper come to mind, a comparison Van Gogh was quick to make: when someone challenged De Groux's aptitude for design, the Dutch painter claimed that anyone who would criticize De Groux's placement of heads in Grace Before the Meal would have to lodge the same complaint against Leonardo's Last Supper. 101

Without furthering this debate, it is still possible to point out that De Groux's placement of the unfinished wooden table parallel to the picture plane and the positioning of his pyramidal central figure, set off from the others by his broader mass and an aureole of light, do seem to recall to Leonardo. A more apt comparison with an Italian Renaissance prototype, however, may be with Andrea del Castagno's Last Supper (c. 1445-50, Sant'Apollonia, Florence), the background of which like De Groux's, consists of a wall parallel to the picture plane. Judas, seated on the opposite side of the table, assumes a pose like De Groux's little profiled girl in the foreground, and individual figures are isolated vertical units with distinct contour, unlike Leonardo's surging masses. A comparison with a Northern Last Supper such as that by Dirk Bouts (1464-67, Church of St-Pierre, Louvain) might be even more appropriate, in terms of the shared characteristics between Norther Renaissance painting and De Groux's mature realism already seen in the pilgrimages: thin, still vertical figures under heavy draperies falling in stylized folds in a flattened spatial setting. Regarding
religious prototypes, it is also important to point out that De Groux himself, at about the same time as the painting was done, had designed several cartoons of table scenes with part of his commission for the design of the windows of St-Michel (Pl. 93). It is not hard to imagine that the heavy contours, fixed poses of the figures, flattened modelling and space and air of spiritual reverence with which De Groux created such cartoons would have had their effect upon a painting that used the same compositional format.

The comparison with religious prototypes—a phenomenon in Belgian social realism dating back to 1848 with Van de Kerkhove's Misery of Flanders' similarity to a Pietà—is very appropriate here, given the transcendent quality that turns a mealtime prayer into a trance-like ritual suspended in time. The compelling solemnity of the painting was remarked upon by the critic of the Journal des Beaux-Arts. Although dissatisfied with the sombre coloring, "dessin ... négligé" and "sombre tristesse que n'ont pas, en général, les campagnards," he had to admit to the composition's "belle unité" and the artist's profound compassion for his subjects, which gave the painting its power. "D'où vient donc ce charme et pourquoi s'oublie-t-on à rêver devant cette toile? C'est que l'âme de l'artiste a peint ce tableau bien plus que sa main. C'est que sur toutes ces figures simples on retrouve l'empreinte immortelle; c'est que le receuillement de ces fortes natures est profond et sincère ...."102

As in De Groux's previous religious genre, the theme of the painting is the faith of the lower classes in the face of deprivation. Clothing, shelter and food are all rudimentary—as the reviewer remarked
in the Journal des Beaux-Arts, there is not even any steam coming from the kettle. More than in previous works of De Groux, however, emphasis is placed upon family bonds as much as faith. Three generations are seated at the table: the man saying grace is the patriarch with his elderly wife in bonnet and patterned shawl seated at his left. Two younger couples are shown, one on the left with their backs turned, seated directly across from their elders, and another on the right, the husband in the rear, his forehead resting on his folded hand and his wife, with a baby on her lap, in profile on the extreme right. Other children and young adults sit between.

Just as the composition, contours and modelling in Grace Before the Meal represent a more radical stage of the simplifications and schematization that began in 1857, so too have the colors become more austere and uniform. The familiar brown-and-green earth tones of the surroundings and the whites and blacks of bonnets and garments are relieved, as usual, by patches of blue (the smock of the young man with his back turned on the left), red (the blouse of the little girl in the foreground) and two-dimensional patterning (the grandmother's shawl). Now, however, an overall monochromatic quality predominates more than before, owing in no small part to the dimly lit interior setting.

Preliminary studies reveal how De Groux pared down a more complex conception to a definitive statement of elemental simplicity. A fragmented preliminary drawing in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tournai (Pl. 94) shows a freely sketched, densely crowded arrangement with greater overlapping and diagonal emphasis, more in keeping with the fresco of
Leonardo. A lost drawing of the praying father (Pl. 95; formerly collection Delacre), however, shows how, even while working directly from nature, De Groux thought in terms of stark, schematized contour; besides the heavy outline surrounding the figure, the outer shape is repeated in two successive silhouettes radiating from the figure, one dark and one light, foreshadowing the mysterious light in the final painting. Studies for the completed painting in the Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent (Pl. 96) and in a private collection in Brussels (Pl. 97) show how a less cohesive conception of background architecture was simplified in the final version to a door at the left and a fireplace at right, joined by a thin wooden strip that separates the plaster wall above from woodwork below and underscores the horizontality of the composition. Figures are also modified for the purpose of greater unity. A woman bringing in food, coming in from the right behind the table, is eliminated; the head and eyes of the little girl in the foreground are changed from a distracting glance away from the table toward the dog to an introspective profile view, and the face of the praying father changes from a strained countenance with eyes rolling upward and mouth wide open in the Ghent study to a calmer expression with eyes staring off vaguely in the distance and lips barely parted in the final painting. A final note can be made of the charcoal study of the father's boney hands folded in prayer in the M.B.A., Tournai (Pl. 98), a predecessor of Van Gogh's drawings of the hands for his Potato Eaters (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam).

As was the case with the pilgrimages, De Groux's selection of a meal-time prayer in a lower-class milieu was not new in Belgian
painting. What distinguished his *Grace Before the Meal* from its iconographic predecessors was its monumental presentation, a logical consequence of De Groux's own stylistic development and the probable result of influences of French paintings of analogous themes. In Belgian art, the peasant meal table can be traced back to the eighteenth century in J.-B. Lambrecht's *Peasants at the Table* (Pl. 99; c. 1700-31, location unknown), but the latter painting, with its boisterous activity, lush outdoor setting and abundant food is a veritable antithesis to the solemn austerity of De Groux's image. Closer in time and setting to De Groux's painting is Marie de Latour-Simons' *Breakfast on the Farm* (Pl. 100; c. 1770-1830, K.M.S.K., Antwerp) showing a more intimate family gathering inside a rustic interior but, like Lambrecht, Latour-Simons dwarfs her figures by placing them in attractively spacious and discursive setting, thereby creating an effect that is just the opposite of De Groux's monumentalizing close-ups. And again, plump healthiness and contented smiles contrast sharply with the sad, careworn faces of De Groux's figures. Much closer in character and theme to De Groux's work—and very likely an immediate source—is a lithograph which by Victor Vervloet after his lost painting bearing the same title as De Groux's work: *Grace Before the Meal* (Le Bénédicité [Pl. 101]). It appeared in the *Renaissance Illustrée* in 1852 and so was readily accessible to De Groux. In it, a father giving the blessing stands behind a table parallel to the picture plane with the mother on the opposite side in a position corresponding to De Groux's little girl in *the red blouse*; there is even a servant entering with a bowl from the rear, reminiscent of De Groux's preliminary studies. The mood is one of
quiet, intimate piety but the wealth of detail in the interior setting contrasts once again with De Groux's iconic simplicity.\(^{106}\)

Finally, there are several French paintings which, based on existing evidence, De Groux would undoubtedly have seen and, on the basis of striking visual similarities, would seem to have borrowed from for certain features used in Grace. When one compares Grace Before the Meal with certain paintings by Louis Le Nain, like the Meal of the Peasants (1842, Louvre, Paris) or Peasant Family (c. 1642, Louvre, Paris), the similarities are remarkable. The works of both artists share the air of quiet, almost religious solemnity around the meal table; figures have a monumental quality, existing in psychological isolation from each other and settings consist of dimly-lit interiors composed of monochromatic earth-toned color. Interest in the Le Nain brothers was stimulated by Champfleury, Courbet's outspoken apologist, who published a series of books and articles on the seventeenth century painters beginning in 1850.\(^{107}\) In 1860, the year before Grace was exhibited, three articles by Champfleury on the French painters appeared in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts and a book devoted to them entitled Les peintres de la réalité sous Louis XIII was released.\(^{108}\) Whether the Meal of the Peasants or Peasant Family would have been accessible to De Groux is questionable, however, since both entered the Louvre from private collections only after Grace had been painted.\(^{109}\) (This does not preclude the possibility of De Groux having seen the reproductions of them in any one of the many periodicals in which the painters were published during the latter half of the nineteenth century).\(^{110}\) One painting attributed to Louis which De Groux certainly might have seen
is *A Family Meal* (Pl. 102), housed since 1855 in the Musée de Laon, Louis' home town and a city on the route between Brussels and Paris. A description of the painting by Champfleury in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1860 might have drawn De Groux's attention to it, if he had not seen it already. Elements on the right side of the Laon painting—a mother suckling her child seated next to a pensive young girl in front of a fireplace—all recur in De Groux's *Grace*.

Passages in Champfleury's *Peintres de la réalité* which praise the Le Nains' naïve, unacademic style and lower class subject matter and consequently link them with nineteenth century realist doctrine are applicable to the work of De Groux as well.

They like the poor, preferred to paint them rather than the powerful, had the aspirations of a La Bruyère for the fields, were not afraid of the baseness of their subject matter, found men in breeches more interesting than courtiers in lace, obeyed their own internal feelings, fled academic teaching in order to put their own sensations better on canvas, and finally because they have remained, and will always remain three great painters, the brothers Le Nain.

More contemporary sources of inspiration for the subject of peasants in prayer would seem to have come from two depictions of the Angelus painted by French artists around 1859. One, by Alphonse Legros (formerly collection Lingard, Cheltenham) shows a group of homely peasant women and children at prayer in a church posed in iconic profiles, rendered with flat modelling and distinct contours and set in a geometrically austere environment much like De Groux's painting. The closest comparison of all, however, seems to be with *The Angelus* of Millet (Pl. 103; c. 1858-9, Louvre, Paris) which in 1860 had passed through the hands of Alfred and Joseph Stevens' brother Arthur, Millet's dealer at the time,
to enter the gallery of the Belgian collector Van Praet. Not only does Millet's praying duo, the man turned toward the spectator and woman standing in profile, resemble De Groux's central figure and little girl in the red blouse, but even the French painter's device of imbuing the natural with the supernatural via the halo of light radiating from behind the male figure finds its way into De Groux's painting. Here more than in any other pair of paintings does the kinship of De Groux's and Millet's work, so apparent to Van Gogh, become evident in their mutual elevation of the lowly peasant to the stature of a special creature of God thanks to his special virtues of toil, closeness to the earth, humility and, most importantly, piety.

The mature realist style introduced by De Groux in 1857 in his pilgrimages and Coffee Mill and definitively summarized in Grace Before the Meal in 1861 can be interpreted as a synthesis of opposing tendencies that were a part of his training and development in Brussels and Düsseldorf. Although he was given to romantic subjects and Biblical scenes during his student years in Brussels and temporarily yielded to the monumental style and historical subject matter of Nazarene art with his Ruth and Naomi in 1851, De Groux was eventually drawn almost exclusively to subject matter picturing the lower strata of the society in which he lived. Inspiration for the latter emanated from currents in Belgian painting and Flemish literature in the late 1840s and was doubtlessly reenforced by the anti-academic Tendenzmalerei to which De Groux was exposed in Düsseldorf. The evolution of De Groux's mature style may be viewed as a process whereby the artist sought to reconcile his commitment to contemporary lower-class subject matter with a
simultaneous yearning for the spiritual and historical depth fostered by his academic training and exposure to the Nazarenes. By depicting Belgian paupers of his own day using the archaic conventions of the Flemish primitives, De Groux was able to join the ranks of the most avant-garde movement of his day—he was unquestionably influenced by French realism—while adapting a stylistic idiom that permitted him, like his fifteenth century predecessors, to fuse the mystic with the mundane.

The objections raised by critics in 1857 and 1861 about De Groux's unusual synthesis of modern subject matter with an archaizing style have been cited. These same critics were also perplexed by the air of gloom which seemed to predominate, in all the paintings, in apparent contridiction to the realist ethos of factual objectivity. Should De Groux's somber canvases with their emaciated despondent figures and flattened space really be grouped with Courbet's here-and-now world of concrete things and Millet's and Breton's heroicizing generalizations? Pèlerin in 1857 asked this question, confessing confusion as to what the realist movement actually entailed and wondering how Courbet, Champfleury and De Groux could all fall under the same categoric umbrella.

On a dit que M. De Groux est un réaliste; tout le monde en paraît convaincu, excepté peut-être M. De Groux lui-même. Qu'est-ce qu'un réaliste? La réponse à cette question me paraîtrait fort simple si je pouvais établir un rapport entre les hommes qu'on a appelés ainsi; ... je ne comprends pas qu'on établisse un rapport entre M. De Groux, M. Courbet et M. Champfleury. M. De Groux est tout sentiment, M. Courbet se distingue pas des qualités admirables dans le rendu et M. Champfleury est un écrivain de quatrième ordre très prétentieux et très-incorrect. Je vois bien ce qui sépare M. De Groux et M. Courbet, mais je ne leur trouve pas un seul point de contact.
Si le réalisme est l'antipode de poésie, M. De Groux aurait le droit de se fâcher de l'épithète qu'on accole à son nom, car alors il la mérite moins qu'aucun autre artiste.116

Based on De Groux's new iconographic predelection revealed in the Salon of 1857, the critic suggests that perhaps the label "pèleriniste" would suit him better than "réaliste." All joking aside, however, Pèlerin was essentially correct in distinguishing De Groux's work from the theoretically objective movement of realism, at least as practiced by Courbet, because of the "sentiment" and "poetry" in De Groux's paintings—the air of melancholy and gloom which colors nearly all of De Groux's mature works, stamping the faces of his figures with a deeply introspective sadness that isolates them from one another.

... il est regrettable d'après moi que M. De Groux donne toujours à ses physionomies un aspect morne et concentré; les personnages qu'il met en scène ne se rencontrent jamais; ils ont un lien commun qui est presque toujours la douleur, mais ils ne communiquent pas entre eux. Les malheureux de M. De Groux sont trop malheureux; ils sont comme abrutis par la douleur: on dirait que chez eux toute fraternité est morte, et que l'égoïsme seul survit.117

In much the same way, Van Bemmel also views De Groux's injection of sombre gravity in his scenes as obstructive, and interprets it as a vain attempt by the artist to add some expressive interest to his banal subject matter—thereby contradicting the cardinal realist principle of truth to nature:

... M. De Groux a quelque peu modifié le caractère de ces réunions, en donnant à tous ses pèlerins des allures graves, solennelles ou même lugubres: on voit que l'auteur, poussé par ses premiers penchants, a voulu transiger avec sa conscience et introduire un sentiment quelconque dans cette scène toute banale. Mais c'est là précisément un défaut de plus, surtout pour un peintre qui ne veut que la vérité, toute la vérité et rien que la vérité.118
The critics' objections may be answered on several levels. In the first place, De Groux may not have been straying far from the truth after all in depicting the lower classes of Brabant as a chronically depressed people. Documentary reports from the period would seem to confirm De Groux's image of an undernourished, despondant people whose misery begins in childhood.

... gaity and playfulness give way to the sadness which comes to stamp its wrinkles and sombre colors on the faces of the young children; pale, puffy, their bodies emaciated, their joints swollen, their bellies inordinately bloated, these children are plunged into a dismal silence, and consumed by a slow fever. Furthermore, in view of the melancholic temperament of De Groux as chronicled by Leclercq and Lemonnier, the artist's expressively bleak manner of rendering people living under such miserable conditions seems quite understandable. What the critics also overlooked was the fact that the pathos in De Groux's paintings are a continuation of trends which had begun in Belgian literature and painting decades earlier. The modern-day characters in the novels of Conscience, Van Kerkhoven and Zetternam and the contemporary figures in the paintings of De Block, Geirnaert and Van de Kerkhove all endured considerable sorrow and suffering.

Wedded to an unorthodox style and a new artistic movement which was not wholly understood, however, the expressive tenor of De Groux's paintings consistently provoked criticism from contemporary reviewers. Ironically, the unrealistic qualities to which the nineteenth century critics objected constitute the true legacy of De Groux for future generations of Belgian symbolists and expressionists, as well as Van Gogh, who would come to use De Groux's formal and coloristic distortions and compelling sadness as points of departure for their own versions of the life of the lower classes of Belgium.
NOTES


2Quoted in translation in Lindsay, p. 138.

3Hymans, vol. 4, 1921, pp. 169, 211; Quetelet, p. 149: "Les derniers adieux de l'Académie royale ont été exprimés par son secrétaire perpetuel et une jeune élève de l'Ecole de peinture est venu, ensuite se rendre interprète des sentiments de douleur et de reconnaissance de ses camarades." The "jeune élève" was undoubtedly De Groux.

4Edmond About, Voyage à travers l'Exposition des Beaux-Arts (Paris, 1855) p. 106, states that "À droite du tableau, quelques amis emmènent un vieillard dont on ne voit pas la figure; et dont la douleur ne se devine qu'à son attitude abandonnée;" Leclercq's account of the paintings destruction is found on p. 218.

5a. J. Du Pays, "Beaux-Arts: Exposition Universelle," L'Illustration, vol. 25, no. 640 (June 2, 1855), p. 339. The same critic finds fault with the vulgar appearance of the central grave-digger leaning on a shovel: "Une seule figure de fossoyeur, placé à gauche du groupe, les jambes écartés et s'appuyant sur la bêche, contraste d'une manière trop grotesque avec la gravité triste de la cérémonie." In all likelihood, this is a self-portrait of De Groux, similar in appearance to the portrait found in Deleutre, p. 12 and the alleged self-portrait (see Leclercq, p. 210) in Uylenspiegel, no. 8 (March 22, 1857), p. 4.

6About, p. 106, registers a similar complaint.

7Ibid., p. 105.


9These include La tentative de réconciliation (c. 1853-56, M.B.A., Tournai), L'aumône (Pl.116), Le viatique (c. 1853-6, M.S.K., Ghent) and Le disciple or Les derniers confidence (c. 1857-70, location unknown).

10Courbet's anticlericalism is expressed on canvas in the lost Retour de la conférence and La Mort de Jeannot (c. 1868, private collection). Both were exhibited in the Ghent Salon of 1868 (see Appendix B). La Mort de Jeannot was based on one of several illustrations done by Courbet for an anticlerical pamphlet of the same title, one of two such booklets published in Brussels in 1868. The other was called Les Curés en Goguette. See Lindsay, p. 231; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Courbet und Deutschland, pp. 27-73.
12 Du Pays, p. 340; About, pp. 104-105: "La couple d'amoureux qui se promène au fond du tableau est doublement reprehensible; d'abord il est mal dessiné; puis, ce qui est plus grave, il manque de tenue. On ne court pas par les champs en se serrant par la taille. Si on le fait, on a tort. Si le garde champêtre le souffre, il manque à ses devoirs. L'idée serait tout aussi claire si les deux promeneurs se tenaient par le bras."


14 "Mais chez lui le dessin est insuffisant et la facture laisse beaucoup trop à désirer. Ce qui lui manque de ce côté, avec du travail il peut l'acquérir." Du Pays, p. 340.

15 Ibid., p. 105.

16 Gautier, p. 218.

17 Du Pays, pp. 339-403.


22 M.B.A., Toulouse.


27 About, p. 111.

28 Reproduced in Palais de Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, Rétrospective Alfred Stevens (Charleroi, 1975), no. 4.


30 "Les trois personnages de droite sont sur le même plan, et je ne sais comment ils trouvent la place de se mouvoir," About, p. 112.


32 Du Pays, p. 342.

33 Valleyres, p. 410.

34 Ibid.

35 About, p. 112.


38 Listed in the catalogue of Gustave van Zype, Les frères Stevens, p. 102, no. 64.

39 This painting is commented upon and reproduced in Edouard Michel, "Exposition des maîtres belges, 1830-1914 à Anvers," Gazette des Beaux-Arts (November, 1920), 344-45. See also Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, Rétrospective Alfred Stevens, no. 3.

40 Du Pays, p. 342.

41 Gautier, p. 220.

42 Un Métier de Chien, reproduced as an etching in La Renaissance, vol. 13 (1851), facing p. 68.

43 Paul Fierens, Joseph Stevens (Brussels, 1931), pp. 9-12.
44Uylenspiegel, no. 1 (February 3, 1856), p. 2. After 1860, the journal became more politically oriented, printing articles on workers' strikes, the Flemish movement, etc.

45De Coster's first publication, La femme du pauvre, in the Revue nouvelle (August 15, 1851), pp. 253-4 told the sad tale of a poor worker whose only consolation in life was his beloved wife. Joseph Hanse, Charles de Coster (Louvain, 1928), p. 73.


50Ibid.


52Ibid.

53Uylenspiegel, no 201 (June 14, 1857) and no. 21 (June 21, 1857).


55"Les réalists sont les hommes qui peignent la nature telle qu'elle est, ou du moins telle qu'ils la voient ... Les romantiers comme M. Flaubert sont peut-être un peu crus, ils ont une vertu et une sincérité que l'on trouve brutales parce que l'on est accoutumé aux choses imaginées par les romantiques et les fantaisistes. ... Soyez certain, Monsieur, que si Madame Bovary était l'oeuvre d'un Belge, nous ne tarderions pas à avoir une littérature." Karl Stur, "Mr. L. Hymans et Mr. G. Flaubert," Uylenspiegel, no. 22 (June 28, 1857).


57"Certainement, les artistes pendus à la tunique de Raphael ou la robe de Titien, et qui n'ont pour horizon que les plis du vêtement de ces deux grands hommes, diront:--C'est du genre; c'est le roman en peinture.---Mais oui, c'est cela, et non autre chose. Voulez vous ressusciter l'épopée? Ce n'est plus possible: c'est un fossile, le roman a détrôné le poème, comme la comédie de moeurs a détrôné la tragédie. Seulement, les peintres étaient d'un siècle en arrière, et c'est le pas immense qu'ils veulent tenter de faire qui nous effraie."


60Van Heurck, pp. 98-100; I would also like to thank Father A. Vancrombruggen of Dieghem for the information about the pilgrimage tradition with which he kindly provided me.


62This title may refer to one of two published proposals aimed at eradicating poverty in Belgium: J. Boelen, Extinction du Pauperisme par la fondation d'une société nationale d'avances pour favoriser la colonisation libre de familles belges aux États-Unis d'Amérique (n.d.) and F. P. (Membre du Conseil provincial de la Flandre Occidentale), De l'extinction du Pauperisme (Bruges, 1846).

63Joly, p. 358.

64Van Soust, pp. 100-1; Eugène van Bemmel, "Salon de 1857 à Bruxelles," Revue Trimestrielle, 16 (1857), 334.


66See, for example, Traibaut, p. 65.

67Van Soust, p. 104.

68Ibid.


70This term along with synonymous labels "religious sociology" and "religious anthropology" are defined by Nochlin as "meticulously objective descriptions of religious customs. ..." Nochlin, Realism, p. 80.

71Lemonnier, L'école belge de peinture, 1830-1905 (Brussels, 1906), p. 165, makes the following comparison: "[De Groux] était un Millet minoratif et qui n'avait de l'autre ni l'austère et primitif génie
C. Perremans exhibited Une jeune fille des environs d'Anvers, allant en pèlerinage, à Montaigu [the hilltop site of an annual pilgrimage in honor of the Virgin near Diest, in northern Brabant], no. 71 in the Antwerp Salon of 1849; J. B. Delandtsheer's Fête de Dieghem (Brussels Salon of 1836 [no. 87]) would have depicted the festivities following the pilgrimage painted by De Groux; Charles T'Schaggeny entered a Retour du pèlerinage de s. Guidon in the same Salon as De Groux's pilgrimages (no. 1062); cf. also an entry of Parisian artist Charles-Pierre Poussin, Un pardon, pèlerinage à Sainte-Anne-la-Baleine (Finistère) in the Brussels Salon of 1848 (no. 737), which carried the following note in the catalogue: "On renouvelle ses forces et sa santé en se versant dans le col et dans les manches l'eau des sources salutaires" (Histoire de Bretagne, par Pitre Chevallier).

The following criticism by Alvin of Henri de Coene's Le Retour d'un pèlerinage (Brussels Salon of 1836 [no. 71]) is quoted in Pol de Mont, De Schilderkunst in België van 1830 tot 1921 (The Hague, 1921), p. 92, n. 1: "Nous éprouvons une véritable peine à voir la route que M. de Coene a prise depuis quelque temps. Il paraît s'être exclusivement voué au culte de l'ignoble... Dans "le Retour du Pèlerinage" c'est un choix de figures communes. Vous voyez, sur le devant, un homme assis par terre, occupé du soin le plus dégoûtant de la toilette d'un piéton. Comment un peintre ne sent-il pas que de tels objets doivent inspirer le dégout? ..."

I have based my dating on a reference to a Kermesse aux environs de Gand, characterized as one of Dillens' "plus jolis tableaux" in Deleutre, Programme officiel... 1854, p. 3.

Pèlerinage de St-Ernier près de Domfront, d'après M.J.L., L'Illustration (June 9, 1855), p. 357.

The author's own observation of the Collégiale des Saints-Pierre et-Guidon, Anderlecht and the Eglise de Saint-Corneille, Dieghem revealed very little structural modification by De Groux. Van Soust claimed that, in St. Guido, De Groux had rendered the church accurately but had modified the town in the background: "Au véritable village d'Anderlecht, il a substitué son village de fantaisie: l'église seule a été conservée." Van Soust, p. 101.

Pèlerin, p. 2.

Ibid.

Van Bemmel, 333.

Barnavol, p. 164.

A lost Düsseldorf painting which was not Nazarene but may have been influential for the pilgrimages was Chapel with Pilgrims in the
Valley of Westphalia by landscapist J. W. Lindlar (1816-96). It was exhibited in the Ghent Salon at 1856, where De Groux entered a Blind Man's Buff.


83Ibid., p. 109.

84Van Bemmel, 332-333.

85Pèlerin, p. 2.

86This work is apparently one of four paintings by De Groux exhibited posthumously in the Ghent Salon of 1871 (no. 297).


88According to the Archives Photographiques of the I.R.P.A., Brussels, the earliest executed window in the series (the fourth) was completed in 1857, which establishes a probable date at which De Groux would have begun the cartoons.

89Deleutre, p. 10.

90Dirk's painting is described in Immel, pp. 275-6.

91It has been cited as a source for The Painter's Studio by Nochlin, Gustave Courbet, p. 216; for a general survey, see Petra Ten Doesschate-Chu, French Realism and the Dutch Masters (Utrecht, 1974).

92Van Bemmel, 332.

93"Mais l'épicier qui brûle son café, à demi gelé, lui aussi sûremenent de son côté il rage également contre le sort, en songeant à beaucoup de ses clients qui, à cette heure, reposent mollement sur la plume et sous l'édrédon. Il n'y a qu'inégalités dans le monde, depuis le bas jusqu'au haut de l'échelle. Le vie est un combat, et malheur aux vaincus! car c'est pour y triompher que Dieu a créé l'homme raisonnable, intelligent et libre. Au lieu d'une sensiblerie énervante, c'est la raison qu'il faut chercher à développer dans ses semblables, afin que chacun avec le sentiment de sa force, ait la notion de son droit et de son devoir. Voilà le respect, voilà la tendresse que l'on doit à l'humanité! Et l'art, en nous élevant à l'admiration du beau, concourt à cette mission sacrée par les moyens qui sont en lui." Van Soust, pp. 99-100.

94Pèlerin, p. 2.
95 See Tralbaut.

96 Mr. Sartiliot has identified this painting as the Burghers of Calais, one of the posthumous entries of De Groux's paintings in the Ghent Salon of 1871 (no. 294), on the basis of the heraldry on the shield in the lower left foreground. It is identified incorrectly in the I.R.P.A. files as Philippe le Hardi et les gantois.

97 De Groux's commissions for decorative art, on the other hand, all involved historical subject matter. The stained-glass window designs for St-Michel have already been cited. De Groux's other important decorative commission, received in 1863 and left uncompleted at the time of his death, was to design murals for the Halles d'Ypres. Photographs of the cartoons, picturing events in the early history of the town in a Gothicizing style, are preserved in the I.R.P.A., Brussels.

98 Cf. also Ingres' François I at the Death Bed of Leonardo da Vinci (c. 1824, Petit Palais, Paris) and Lessing's Ezzelino da Romano in the Dungeon (1838, location unknown), the latter reproduced in Schaarschmidt, p. 113.

99 The subject of reform preaching was seen in Lessing's Hussite Preaching (1836, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf); the pose of De Groux's Junius looks back to that of Lessing's Huss in Huss Before the Council of Constance (1842, Städelisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt a.M.).


101 Tralbaut, pp. 64-5.


103 Ibid.

104 Delacre, p. 60, identifies the model for this figure as one "Clément" of Braine-l'Alleud; five other pencil studies for the painting in the artist's studio at the time of his death are recorded on p. 63.

105 Renaissance Illustrée, 14 (1852), facing p. 174.

106 Several titles of paintings depicting grace before the meal or workers at mealtime appear in Belgian Salon catalogues from decades preceding 1861 including a Meal in the Country by De Groux's teacher Van Eyck (Brussels Salon of 1836, no. 498). Other such examples are I. van Regemorter (of Antwerp), Un bénédicité (Brussels Salon of 1833, no. 391); Ferdinand Daems (of Brussels), Le bénédicité (Brussels Salon of 1845, no. 118); F. Wischebrink (of Düsseldorf), Le repas de l'ouvrier (Ghent Salon of 1859, no. 602); a Diner d'ouvriers by Henri de Coene preceding 1854 is mentioned in Deleutre, p. 3.
107 Essai sur la vie et l'oeuvre des Le Nain, peintres laonnais (Laon, 1850); see Stanley Meltzoff, "The Revival of the Le Nains," Art Bulletin, 24 (September, 1942), 259-86. Meltzoff feels that Courbet's After Dinner at Ornans (1849, M.B.A., Lille) may have been inspired by Meal of the Peasants.

108 See Meltzoff, p. 266.

109 Le repas de paysans was acquired through the donation La Caze in 1869 and La famille de paysans went through the sale of the collection of the Marquis de M[armier] before its acquisition from the bequest Pernolet in 1915. Paul Pierens, Les Le Nain (Paris, 1933), p. 60.

110 Meltzoff, p. 266.

111 See Grand Palais, Les frères Le Nain (exhibition catalogue), (Paris, 1978), pp. 291-3. The painting in question is an anonymous copy after a lost prototype by Louis which would seem to have been quite highly regarded, considering the number of copies after it that have been located, another of which entered the M.B.A., Lille in 1876.


113 Bénédicités were also painted by both Antoine (collection David Weill, Paris and Hermitage, Leningrad) and Louis (Musée de Nancy and National Gallery, London) but whether these would have been accessible to De Groux before 1861 is uncertain.

114 Champfleury, translated in Meltzoff, pp. 272-73.


116 Pèlerin, p. 2.

117 Ibid.

118 Van Bemmel, 333.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL REALIST THEMES OF DE GROUX, 1853-1870

Part 1. De Groux's Social Realist Subjects, 1853-1870

Few if any of De Groux's paintings done after 1861 rival the strength of his 1857 pilgrimages, Coffee Mill, or Grace. His imagery of the lower classes continued through the 1860s until his premature death in 1870 from a chronic pulmonary ailment, in essentially the style he had established in 1857. Having established the evolution of De Groux's iconography, style and critical reception from the early to mature years, it is now possible to examine those social realist canvases not yet treated. Some belong to De Groux's early realist period but were not cited earlier because of their uncertain dating. Of those reflecting De Groux's mature style, several are identifiable Salon entries or at least dated, but most are either undated, lost or destroyed. Rather than continue with a chronological account of De Groux's œuvre, the interests of this study, which are essentially iconographic, will best be served by grouping the remainder of De Groux's social realist paintings into thematic categories.

Examples of most of these categories--drunkards, alms, religious ritual, family crisis and labor--have already been seen and may now serve as points of departure for the forthcoming examinations of later or alternate variations of the same themes. In all these paintings
De Groux's social vision remains constant, demonstrating the same viewpoints and concerns of his earliest social realist paintings. His poor are pathetic victims, prey to debilitating vice or to any number of heartbreaking losses: of family members or of property, by disasters both natural and manmade. Occasionally aided by charity, De Groux's figures are more frequently forced to endure the haughty condescension of the rich. Through it all, their steadfast piety, illustrated time and time again by De Groux, makes them objects of the spectator's admiration. My analysis of these works will demonstrate the necessity of viewing them within the context of Flemish literature, paintings of early nineteenth century Belgians, of Düsseldorf artists and of Millet, as well as illustrations in popular journals and novels—the same types of sources used in the paintings viewed so far. The inevitable questions concerning the potential political implications of De Groux's preoccupation with the misery of the Belgian proletariat will be dealt with subsequently.

Drunkards

Drunken husbands, the subject of De Groux's first extant example of social realism, were portrayed several times later in his career. Painted in the more restrained style of his mature years, these later paintings exchange the melodramatic tenor of the 1853 work for a more somber, low-keyed approach. The most outstanding of the later drunkard paintings is A Cabaret Scene (Pl. 104; private collection, Brussels), exhibited in the Ghent Salon of 1868 (no. 247). The same exhibition contained twelve entries by Courbet (see Appendix B), the most he ever
exhibited in a single Belgian salon, making it a high point for realism in Belgium. De Groux's setting is a dimly lit cabaret in which the father lies passed out on the table at the far left. His daughter attempts to wake him by shaking his shoulder as the mother, standing to the right with her child in her arms, looks on with dismay. The painting bears the hallmarks of De Groux's mature style, with its horizontal alignment of figures parallel to the picture plane, its system of strong vertical axes established by the columnar drapery folds, elongated figures, even the spindly furniture legs.

Even as late as 1868, De Groux had not forgotten Düsseldorf genre painting, since the source for his Cabaret Scene is unmistakably Knaus' Card Sharps (Pl. 50). Here, more than in the 1853 Drunkard, the motif of the little girl appealing to her father to leave the tavern is virtually identical. While Knaus preaches against the evils of gambling, De Groux sermonizes against intemperance, a point emphasized by "E.V." in a compte-rendu of the Salon, who called it "un énergique plaidoyer en faveur de l'instruction" against alcohol abuse, "une des plus tristes plaies de notre société." The reviewer, who proffers favorable comments on Courbet elsewhere in the catalogue, thus allying himself with the realist movement, supports De Groux with equal enthusiasm because of the moralizing intention of his works. Proclaimed "le peintre du vice, de la misère et de l'ignorance," De Groux's paintings are called "le procès-verbal de tout ce qu'elle [society] a de hideux et de lamentable," intended to inspire "une pensée généreuse et attendrie pour les souffrances de vos frères malheureux." Once again we are reminded of the connection of De Groux's social realism with the
morality dramas of Greuze and his nineteenth century Belgian reviver, Hunin. The reviewer concludes his commentary on the painting with an elaborate scenario hypothesizing the possible background of the scene depicted and its possible outcome—a happy one, where the father, inspired by his daughter's innocence, gives up drinking. Such is the effect which E.V. would hope the painting could have on an actual alcoholic who might view the painting, to judge from the critic's faith in the moralizing, instructive function of De Groux's work.

The little scenario, reminiscent of Valleyres' commentary on Stevens' Soldiers of Vincennes, provides yet another example of the way in which contemporary audiences would have viewed such a painting—as the illustration of a single episode in a story whose details the viewer was left to fill in with his imagination. After describing the scene, the reviewer focuses on the plight of the drunkard's wife.

Dieu sait combien jadis elle s'est révoltée contre l'ignoble conduite de son mari, alors que ses enfants en pleurs lui demandaient du pain, tandis que leur père dépensait en genièvre le dernier sou de son salaire! Dieu sait quelles tortures son âme a subies, et les sinistres pensées qu'elle a rouliées dans sa tête! Mais cette fois elle est résignée, elle s'arrête au fond de la salle [sic], portant dans ses bras le dernier de ses enfants! Elle est là immobile et muette, l'œil sec et vitreux comme si depuis longtemps elle avait versé toutes ses larmes. Mais ce qu'elle n'a pu obtenir, ce miracle, sa jeune fille, enfant de onze à douze ans, va peut-être avec les seules séductions de l'innocence de son âge, parvenir à l'opérer. L'enfant s'avance timidement vers son père, et le bras étendu, va lui mettre la main sur son épaule. Qui sait ce que produira cet attentement? Cette fois, pas de reproches, pas de plaintes, peut-être un sanglot étouffé: quand l'ivrogne ouvrira les yeux, et verra là devant lui cette pure et douce créature, à laquelle le respect pour le sommeil de son père permet à peine de comprendre l'état honteux dans lequel il se trouve, peut-être un rayon de lumière pénétrera dans cette âme oblitérée, et la remettant en possession d'elle-même, lui donnera la force nécessaire pour triompher du vice sous lequel était restée courbée si longtemps.
A variation on the Cabaret Scene in which the drunkard's wife assumes the pose of the daughter is found in a Drunkard scene in the M.B.A., Tournai (c. 1857-70), a watercolor version of which (Pl. 105; c. 1857-70) is housed in the M.R.B.A., Brussels. In these latter two paintings, the state of the drunkard's deterioration is somewhat more serious—he is missing one of his shoes, and his jacket, draped over a stool in the Cabaret Scene, is lying on the floor. Finally, in a lost painting of The Drunkard's Return (Pl. 106; c. 1870), De Groux goes back to his original theme of 1853 showing the dissolute husband staggering through the door of his home. His wife, an old woman with grey hair and wrinkled skin, does not lie on her deathbed but instead holds open the door and rolls her eyes in mortification as her spouse, leaning on a cane, struggles up the last steps before the threshold. The painting exhibits the anatomical and perspectival inaccuracies and wooden articulation of figures seen in De Groux's very late works and is probably unfinished.

Alms

The alms or beggar scene, a staple in Belgian painting for centuries, was an ideal vehicle for De Groux to present destitutes in a pathetic light that would be endearing to spectators as they observed the gratitude with which the paupers accepted the generosity of others. As a traditional means of showing the Christian virtue of charity, alms scenes had been a favorite genre of Navez (Pl. 34). Although the paupers of De Groux's teacher were inevitably inhabitants of the distant contemporary Belgians, victims of the grinding poverty that had
subsided after the Flemish economic crisis ended in 1849 but which still existed during the next three decades. Statistics of visitors to Belgian shelterhouses for mendicants indicate that begging in the third quarter of the century peaked in 1861-62. Alms scenes by De Groux's contemporaries previously examined, like those of Hunin and Alfred Stevens, parallel episodes involving beggars in countless Flemish novels of the period. They essentially reflect the same faith in and praise for acts of individual charity as De Groux in most of his alms scenes. This inadequate, stop-gap solution to poverty was of course odious to adherents of the Belgian left whose demands for militant organization of workers were increasingly heard as the century wore on.

While De Groux was not a partisan of radical politics, certain of his alms scenes take on a view of alms-giving that is considerably more skeptical than that displayed by his contemporaries. His skepticism is attributable most likely to the generally pessimistic tone that permeates most of his oeuvre. In his Uylenspiegel lithographs "On the Street" (Pl. 70) and "Carnival Time" (Pl. 72, 73) we have already seen how those figures in a position to give money refuse or are prevented from doing so, providing quite a contrast to the iconographic tradition of the alms-giver-as-hero, so prevalent in Belgian painting.

The same situation occurs in a lost painting called The Poor Children or Alms (Pl. 107; c. 1857-70), either a sketch or an unfinished painting done on the type of oblong horizontal canvas used in Grace and Return of the Conscript. On a snowy street, a fashionably and snugly dressed little boy loaded down with a toy hoop and what looks like a basket of food eyes a group of four little shabbily dressed
urchins with an expression of curiosity mixed with condescension. His mother, sporting an elegant coat, bonnet and fur muff, guides him past the paupers. The painting is bracketed on either side by two poor women in white bonnets, one seated on the left and the other striding off to the right. De Groux's mother and child look as if they could have been taken from a contemporary fashion plate (Pl. 108) wherein a mother, dressed and posed like De Groux's figure, watches her daughter give a coin to a grateful urchin girl seated on the ground. There is no indication that such a generous action has or is about to occur in *The Poor Children*. We are merely presented with a scene which exposes the indifference of the rich to the plight of the poor, De Groux's recurring theme.

Skepticism about private charity by the wealthy in nineteenth century Belgium did not originate with De Groux but can be found in contemporary Flemish literature as well. It is well exemplified in Conscience's mordant conclusion to *What a Mother Can Suffer*, when the heroines who have just saved a poor family from bankruptcy, starvation and disease, reveal in their conversation afterward the true motive of their act of charity: self-gratification. Moreover, Conscience's last sentence makes clear to the reader that their mission of mercy was brief and superficial. Adela's closing lines are as follows:

—Poor little Jan! Tears were flowing from his eyes when he saw you leave. Tell me, my dear, is there a greater happiness on earth than ours? These brave people were dying of hunger; they were lifting their hands toward the sky and asking for help from the Lord. We came to them like ministers of divine mercy; they knelt down before us as they would have before angels coming to tell them that their prayer had been answered, and it was God that they blessed and thanked, through us. . . . Oh! from now on
I want to go out with you every day to visit the poor and take part in your good works. Yes, because before today I never experienced such celestial joy, a kind of beatitude on earth . . . Blessed charity! how unfortunate are the wealthy who do not know you! What sweet emotion, what a delicious feeling they are deprived of! . . .

At that moment, they turned the corner of the street; and they disappeared behind the angle of the houses. 8

**Visit to the Sick Child** (Pl. 109; c. 1857-70, Crédit communal belge, Brussels) 9 shows another motif also used by Conscience in his story, the intercession of the wealthy to aid the sick child of a poor family. Painted on a horizontal canvas, this painting looks like a pendant for the unfinished **Poor Children**. Again, a fashionably-dressed mother in dark clothing occupies the center stage, exposing her offspring to the plight of children not as fortunate. In both compositions, a standing and seated female occupy the outer edges; in **Visit to the Sick Child**, a young woman picking up a chair stands on the right and an old grandmother holding a cane occupies a chair on the left. A charcoal and pencil study of the latter figure is found in the M.B.A., Tournai (Pl. 110). As in his **Drunkard** of 1853, De Groux has taken up a theme of Greuze, in his case, **The Lady of Charity** (Pl. 22; 1775, M.B.A., Lyon), a painting which had been described in the review of the Brussels Salon of 1848 printed in **La Renaissance** in regard to Hunin's **Distribution of Alms in a Convent**. 10

The charitable females in the **Sick Child** may inspire more sympathy than the wealthy mother and son in the **Poor Children**, but De Groux's greatest preference seems to be for alms-givers of more modest means, for whom the generosity involves greater sacrifice. The woman giving
aid in *Charity* (Pl. 111; c. 1857-70, formerly collection Clarembeaux, Brussels) is not as elaborately dressed as her counterparts in the previous paintings. Her face is not as beautiful nor her pose as refined as that of the wealthy mother in the *Sick Child*, but there is an air of great sincerity in her gesture of offering food to the destitute mother and child on her snowy doorstep that seems to be missing in the *Sick Child*. Prototypes of destitute mothers and their infants on doorsteps would have been available to De Groux in such forms as the frontispiece by Dujardin in the first edition of *Mr. Luchtervelde* (Pl. 112; 1848)\(^\text{11}\) or a painting of Tassaert like *Poor Children* (Pl. 113; 1855, formerly collection Dumas fils). The indigents in the latter two cases are not as fortunate as De Groux's paupers, however, for no one will open the door to help them. *The Beggars* (Pl. 114; c. 1857-70, formerly collection Clarembeaux, Brussels)\(^\text{12}\) is similar in format to *Charity*, taking place as it does on a snowy doorstep from which an older woman emerges to aid the needy. Here what appears to be a whole family of paupers is involved. The generous old woman helps a little boy up the stairs as a bearded man, probably his father, tips his hat in gratitude and his wife, carrying a basket, looks on.\(^\text{13}\)

It is significant to note that in each of De Groux's alms scenes, the dispenser of charity is always a female. When men were in the position to offer aid, as in his two *Uylenspiegel* lithographs, they refused. De Groux's charity scenes are thus a continuation of the long tradition of proffering heroic status to female alms-givers which has been previously traced in eighteenth and nineteenth century French and Belgian painting (Greuze, Geirnaert, Leys, Hunin) and has been seen
in nineteenth century Flemish novels (Conscience's What a Mother Can Suffer, the conclusion of Zetternam's Mr. Luchtervelde, to name only two). Nor did the tradition die with De Groux. A work like Charles Baugniet's Visit to the Widow (Pl. 115; 1881, Musée Communal Anderlecht), in which the chic beauties visiting the deceased fisherman's hut are worthy successors to the charitable lady in De Groux's Sick Child, shows that such scenes continued into the final decades of the century.

De Groux did paint one charity scene picturing an alms-giver who was male, but a man of the cloth. The clerical motif of this Alms scene (Pl. 116; c. 1854-70, collection Delporte, Brussels) connects it to Hunin's Distribution of Alms in a Convent, although it takes place not in a cloister but on a country road with a church seen in the distance. In the foreground, a young priest hands money to a barefoot girl standing beside her companion. The very loose brushwork and lack of detail indicates that the work is unfinished.

In The Gleaners, existing in two versions, De Groux depicts a system of rural charity whereby indigents are licensed by law to follow harvesters and gather left-over grain. De Groux painted at least two versions of gleaners, one in the M.R.B.A., Brussels (Pl. 117) and the other, now lost, formerly in the collection De Craene (Pl. 118). We may assume that the first version was painted after 1857 because of the apparent inspiration from Millet's famous version of the subject (Pl. 119; 1857, Louvre, Paris). Both of De Groux's paintings show a man in the center holding a jug of water from which a little girl drinks. The man's blue trousers and the girl's red blouse set up
De Groux's typical color scheme. The Brussels canvas shows only one figure in the process of gleaning, posed like the isolated figure on the right in Millet's composition in reverse, turned toward rather than away from the spectator. On the opposite side of the central figures, a young woman seated on the ground with grain in her hand looks up at an old woman and blond-haired girl turned in profile.

In the lost painting, two gleaners, a woman and girl, assume the crouching poses like those found in the foreground of Breton's Return of the Gleaners (Pl. 120; 1859, Musée d'Arras). On the far left in the background a little boy playfully struggles with a woman to grab some of the grain she holds in her apron and raised hand. On the right, two figures rest, a young woman in the background and, in the foreground, a little boy sprawled out on his back with legs spread apart, reminiscent of the sleeping men in Bruegel's The Harvest (1565, Metropolitan, New York). The lost painting is far weaker than the Brussels version, containing many awkward passages and areas of summary execution which indicate that it might be incomplete.

It is difficult to view the peasants in these paintings outside the context of Conscience's own description of his depiction of the Flemish peasant as "gentle, quiet, religious, patriarchal, attached to his morals as he is to his soil."¹⁴a His figures are engaged in timeless, ritualistic actions in scenes no more removed from religious implication than Grace Before the Meal. The women gleaning harken back to the Biblical story of Ruth and Boaz, and the action of the father and daughter in the center recall Christ's words "I was thirsty and you gave me drink"; as if to underscore the Christian overtones, a church
steeple rises above the trees in the background of the lost canvas.

Religious Ritual

Catholic faith and ritual among the humble poor is a theme which permeates all phases and aspects of De Groux's oeuvre from the Biblical scenes of his student years in Brussels and Düsseldorf to his earliest genre scenes (The Paupers' Bench), the masterpieces of his mature years (St. Guidon, Dieghem, Grace) and even his final efforts (Procession on Palm Sunday in the Sixteenth Century). On the basis of his training by Navez and the deeply pious Van Eycken, both of whom painted many Biblical scenes themselves, his own receptivity to Nazarene religious art demonstrated in Ruth and Naomi and his execution of church commissions, from the Stations of the Cross in Notre-Dame-du-Finistère to the windows of Saint-Michel, it seems safe to assume that religion occupied an important place in De Groux's life. That the piety of the poor, recounted in both social documents of the period as well as Flemish novels, must have touched him deeply seems evident, to judge from the large number of paintings which appear to be genuinely heartfelt, of the poor in church or going to or coming from church or pilgrimage sites.

Such iconography was not original with De Groux, of course. Paintings such as Prayer to the Virgin (1827, Musée de la Rochelle) by Navez's colleague Schnetz show humble church goers, but, true to his social realist vision, De Groux transplants such idealized scenes from Italy to Belgium and makes little attempt to hide the poverty or homelessness of his figures. The early date of De Groux's first Paupers'
Bench of 1849 precludes initial influence from Millet's or Breton's scenes of religious ritual among French peasants, which did not appear until well into the 1850s, but the French artists' monumental elevation of such subject matter eventually seems to have been instrumental to the development of De Groux's mature style, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. De Groux's religious genre scenes fall into two main categories stemming from his themes introduced in prominent works of his early and mature periods. These are, respectively, scenes of devotion within the church related to the Paupers' Bench and scenes involving pilgrimages or holy days—either processions toward the church, as in St. Guido and Dieghem or preparations for or departures from such a ceremony.

The earliest work belonging to the former category is Woman Praying (Pl. 121; c. 1854, M.B.A., Tournai), executed in De Groux's early style, with loose brushwork and raking light that dissolves in flickering shadows. The scene in question seems to take place in the same church as the 1854 Paupers' Bench. We see the same pattern of floor tiles and the base of a round white column cut off at the top by a partially arched frame. Woman Praying is smaller (58 x 45 cm.) than the Paupers' Bench, however, and focuses on a single figure, an impoverished woman with a careworn face clutching a rosary, raising her eyes heavenward in prayer. She wears a drab blue cloak over a brown dress and greyish apron; with the brown of the bench and greys and blacks in the shadowed areas, the painting takes on the overall monochromatic effect of The Drunkard and gives some idea of the "couleur tannée" of which Cels complained in the 1849 Paupers' Bench. To the
woman's right, a little boy holding his cap and jacket kneels and bows his head in prayer.

Two unlocated paintings of mothers assisting their children in church devotions exhibit the verticality and columnar drapery folds of De Groux's mature style. The first, *In the Church* (Pl. 122; c. 1857-70) shows a lower-class mother in white bonnet supporting her little girl as she reaches up toward a statue of Christ with the Crown of Thorns. A second woman behind in a black cloak and scarf waits in line at the left, gazing up at the statue. In *Girl Kissing the Reliquary* (Pl. 123; c. 1857-70), probably a watercolor, a woman resembling the mother in the previous painting and bearing a remarkable likeness to the profiled lady in the foreground of Legros' *Angelus* lifts her daughter up high enough to kiss the reliquary held out by a stern-faced priest. The face of the girl's father looking on is seen from behind the head of his wife. These paintings more than any others seem to exemplify the simple piety of the poor which novelists like Conscience were so fond of describing.

An instructive comparison between De Groux's handling of a similar subject in his early and late styles is provided by *The Paupers' Bench* of 1854 and *Ash Wednesday* (Pl. 124; Museum Wuyts-Van Campen en Baron Caroly, Lier) exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1866 and not to be confused with the lost painting of the same title shown in the Brussels Salon of 1854. The Lier painting shows worshipers filing past a priest rubbing ashes on the forehead of a woman in a patterned headscarf. The distinction between rich and poor introduced in the Brussels painting has become very pointed in the Lier panel, perhaps more so than any other
of De Groux's paintings. In the center of the composition, De Groux has placed an old woman in patched, ragged clothing, hobbling on crutches, her back turned toward the spectator, staring into the face of a wealthy man in a fur-trimmed coat. He glares disdainfully at the cripple while leaving the altar. Behind him a fashionably dressed woman waits her turn, in contrast to another impoverished crone approaching the altar from the left foreground. The right foreground area is occupied by a modestly but well-dressed young woman leading a somber-faced little girl with her head wrapped in a scarf.

One can readily discern how De Groux, in the later work, has departed from the irregular, complex drapery folds and flickering patterns of light and shadow of the *Paupers' Bench* toward regularity and simplification in *Ash Wednesday*. Lighting is more even and diffuse, brushstrokes are more evenly blended, producing broad areas of relatively uniform color bordered by distinct black outlines, especially toward the bottom of the painting. The artist has also retreated, in *Ash Wednesday*, from the depiction of a huge crowd of figures extending into deep space seen in the *Paupers' Bench* to a close-up view that does not include more than a dozen people set against walls that are set in a parallel—not diagonal—relationship to the picture plane, and not very far behind it.

Lemonnier, a defender of the realists from very early on, was somewhat critical of certain of De Groux's stylistic devices in his review of the painting. He felt that the black outlining was somewhat detrimental to the "harmonie rude et virile" of the composition and, although considering the design of the figures somewhat rigid,
conceded that such eccentricites constituted part of the appeal of De Groux's paintings, which, like the rest of his works, exuded a touching air of melancholy.

The stiff, frozen Gothic quality noted by Lemonnier calls attention to De Groux's continuation of the archaizing qualities begun in 1857. His kinship with the Flemish primitives in this painting, or at least the revival thereof by Leys, is borne out by a comparison of Ash Wednesday with Leys' Leaving Mass of the same year (Pl. 125; K.M.S.K., Antwerp) wherein the mother and child in the right foreground among the congregation of Leys' sixteenth century worshipers closely resemble the young woman and child in the right foreground of De Groux's composition.

In turning from scenes of devotion within the church to those of ritual surrounding pilgrimages, we begin once again with a painting executed in De Groux's early style. A Pilgrimage (Pl. 126; c. 1853-56) in the K.M.S.K., Antwerp exhibits the small scale (33 x 43 cm.) and painterly handling, irregularly curving contours, flickering light, diagonal organization and deep space of De Groux's early style. It shows lower-class pilgrims with their backs turned toward the spectator heading toward a church, a fragment of whose porch and Gothic portal is visible in the far background, partially blocked by the high
walls of earth which border the pilgrims' path. A few pilgrims ride horses, but most are on foot. There are figures of all ages, including a husband and wife walking on either side of their little child in the left foreground, an old man on crutches in the center, and, further back, a father carrying his little boy on his shoulders. In considering the great difference between this early pilgrimage and De Groux's important high realist treatment of the subject in St. Guido and Dieghem, one begins to understand the bewilderment of critics accustomed to small-scale, unobtrusive genre treatments of pilgrimage themes when confronted with the large, unorthodox versions of the same theme in 1857.

The Antwerp painting has been titled Pilgrimage to Dieghem, but a comparison with the Church of St. Catherine and surrounding terrain in Dieghem provide no points of similarity that would bear out such an identification, given the general accuracy of settings in the two pilgrimages of 1857. Mr. Sartiliot suggests that the Antwerp Pilgrimage might have some connection with the lost Selling of Candles during the Pilgrimage of the Pays du Caux (Pl. 127; c. 1857-70) because of the similarity of the high white bonnets worn by the women in the Antwerp painting to the headdress of the woman in the Selling of Candles. Caux is a region of Normandy between Rouen, Le Havre and Dieppe to which De Groux could easily have travelled, given its close proximity to Belgium. It is true that the Antwerp and Caux paintings are the only ones among De Groux's extant works to show bonnets elevated in the rear, but a close examination reveals that the types of bonnets in the two paintings are not identical. Furthermore, there is
apparently quite a time lag between the early Antwerp painting and the Pilgrimage of Caux, whose schematized, linear design and smooth application place it closer in time to the 1866 Ash Wednesday. An alternate solution for the identification of the Antwerp painting not yet considered might be found in linking it with the Pilgrimage of Notre-Dame-de-Hal (a church in the town of Hal in Brabant, southeast of Brussels) listed in a sale of 1877.19

Two more paintings belonging to De Groux's mature period depict the participation of the poor in festivities surrounding Palm Sunday. In Preparation for the Procession or Les marchands de rameaux (Pl. 128; c. 1857-69, formerly collection Lenoir) De Groux shows two women carrying bundles of branches of their heads accompanied by a group of children who form a frieze-like train across the canvas. A girl in front carries a basket of flowers and two girls and a boy behind the women reach up and pull down some of the branches. In the upper left-hand corner an old woman is glimpsed through her window, in which she has set two little vases of flowers between a crucifix and candle. The two women recall the female peasants hoisting fruits of the harvest which cover their heads in Rubens' Return from the Fields (c. 1637, Pitti Palace, Florence), but the solemn austerity of De Groux's presentation seems to deliberately contradict the Baroque exuberance of his Flemish predecessor. De Groux checks Rubens' dynamic flow, fluid brushwork and profusion of curves with his typical stiff, frozen poses, closed, outlined contours and insistence upon verticality and rectilinear organization. Here more than in any other of De Groux's paintings—except for Grace—is the latter quality stressed. The foreground
figures are arranged parallel to the picture plane and to the wall behind them. The verticals and horizontal of the foreground, emphasized by the perpendicular relationship of the figures' upright poses and columnar drapery folds to the branches being carried above, are reenforced by the squares and rectangles formed by the doors, windows and horizontal wall division behind them.

Verticity is the stylistic keynote of Palm Sunday (Pl. 129; 1857, collection Van Zuylen, Liège) which shows a family of flower-sellers, mother, father and daughter at a church door. The eye is directed from the columnar drapery folds of the elongated figures up to the rising colonettes of the Gothic architecture behind them; the canvas itself is shaped vertically. The lowly station of the figures is emphasized by the patches on the daughters' cloak. Her mother, wearing a hooded cloak, resembles the similarly clothed woman in the foreground of The Coffee Mill, painted the same year and the long, thin face of the father foreshadows the standing figures in Grace Before the Meal. As always, melancholic expressions sadden the faces of the figures, and the three family members exist in psychological isolation from each other.

Besides painting paupers on their way to pilgrimages, De Groux also depicted them returning, a subject that had been treated by Belgians before him.\(^{20}\) Return from the Pilgrimage (Pl. 130; c. 1853-4, M.R.B.A., Brussels, missing)\(^{21}\) is readily identifiable as an early work. The free paint application is especially evident in the flecks of pigment in the foreground. The composition is organized along a diagonal established by the pathway which curves back into a
distant landscape behind, so different from the rising walls of his mature works which block spatial recession. A storm seems to be brewing in the turbulent sky, from which flashes of light emerge from the diagonally arranged clouds, casting irregular areas of light and shadow in the foreground area—not the even, diffused light of his later works. The family of pilgrims includes a mother and grandmother, who walk behind the central group composed of a little boy carrying a pennant like the one held by the little girl in Dieghem. He tugs on the jacket of his father, barefoot like himself and holds a baby in his arms. The man looks like the same figure as the profiled pilgrim with the knapsack in Dieghem, who is also accompanied by a child tugging on his smock. The same figure, carrying a baby and accompanied by his wife, reappears in a more monumental format in The Family (Pl. 131; c. 1855-7, Musée d'Ixelles), a watercolor picturing the family trio walking through a gloomy, vaguely indicated landscape, probably returning from a pilgrimage. These figures resemble the family of flower sellers in the Van Zuylen Palm Sunday but the Ixelles work was probably done earlier because of the atmospheric qualities with enveloping shadows.

Family Crisis

De Groux's gloomiest scenes—those involving crises which afflict unfortunate families—almost all date from the last decade of his life, apparently reflecting a growing pessimism to which he succumbed during his final years. A Departure of the Conscript, picturing grief-stricken family members in an open field mourning their separation from a son departing for military service, was exhibited in the Ghent Salon
of 1871 (no. 296). Two versions of this subject by De Groux exist. Both show the conscript's parents, a young woman and two little girls, standing in the foreground as the draftee walks away down a distant path with a companion in the upper left. In the uncompleted painting of the M.R.B.A., Brussels (Pl. 132; c. 1870), the young woman holds a second elderly man by the arm. The latter figure has been painted over in the version in the collection Metsers, Brussels (Pl. 133; c. 1870). Here figures are surrounded by leafy shrubbery, not silhouetted starkly against the peculiar sunset sky as in the museum's work. These paintings are related iconographically to the Return of the Conscript (Pl. 134) exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1860, depicting a soldier flinging open a door, to the great surprise of his sweetheart, who has not yet awakened an elderly couple asleep beside the fireplace on the right.

De Groux had many iconographic precedents from which he could have drawn for his conscription scenes. A popular French print from the first half of the century (Pl. 135) depicts the departure and return of a conscript with a cruder technique, but the sentiment and stock gestures used by De Groux—weeping women at the departure and open-armed rushes to embrace at the return—are already seen. In French painting, Departure of the Volunteer (c. 1792, Musée Carnavalet, Paris) by the minor master François Watteau de Lille shows a French Republican soldier whose enlistment was voluntary but whose departure for the front is painful nevertheless. In Belgium, domestic scenes of soldiers' departures and returns early in the century are found in the oeuvres of Henri de Coene and Jozef Geirnaert. In De Coene's Cripple, Family
Members and Boy in Uniform (Pl. 136; 1800-10, Museum Vleeshuis, Antwerp), a man about to leave for military service despite his wife’s tears is encouraged to do his duty by a peg-legged veteran motioning toward a statue of Napoleon. Geirnaert’s Officer Returning Home (Pl. 137; c. 1810-31, M.R.B.A., Brussels) shows a reunion in an upper-class household, in which the wife, like De Groux’s in Return of the Conscript, flings out her arms in joy. While the latter two scenes do not necessarily deal with forced service, Hunin took up the theme in Conscription, a lost painting exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1851 and described by Joly, which illustrated the potential sorrows caused by the draft.23

The burden of obligatory military service in Belgium, governed by a lottery system since 1798, was particularly hard on the poor, for whom a conscripted son or husband often resulted in extreme financial hardship. The rich, on the other hand, could avoid service by paying for a substitute. Many Flemish novelists had treated the problem before De Groux, including August Snieders in De Arme Schoolmeester (The Poor Schoolteacher) of 1851, E. van Driessche in De Moeder des Lotelings (The Mother of the Conscript) of 1853 and P. Geiregat in Verhalen voor Jongelieden (Tales for Young People) of 1854.24 Perhaps the most famous of stories with such a theme was Conscience’s De Loteling (The Conscript) of 1850 wherein the unfortunate protagonist, Jan, is forced to leave his widowed mother and sweetheart, Trien for military service. Once in the army, he is blinded by disease, but eventually returns to his little village and regains his sight. Conscience’s description of Jan’s departure gives some idea of the
lachrymose tenor of the literary prototypes which paralleled De Groux's paintings. The scene was illustrated by Du Jardin (Pl. 138) in the original edition and provides yet another prototype for De Groux.

... every eye is filled with tears. The mother embraces her son with bitter lamentation, and though the others stand ready to say the melancholy farewell, she will not let her dear firstborn go: again and again she kisses the tears away from his cheeks, and utters unintelligible words of love and sorrow. At last she sits down on the little bench exhausted and fainting, but still weeping.

John hastily embraces his grandfather and Trien's mother, with kindly force separates himself from his little brother, who clung crying to his legs; once more presses his mother to his breast, and kisses her brow, and with a final adieu, hastens towards the village without venturing to look round, till he has turned the corner of wood, and is out of sight of his relations.  

Another departure of a young man from his loved ones for unspecified reasons is depicted in The Separation (Pl. 139; M.R.B.A., Brussels) exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1869. Here a young man with a sack in one arm joins hands with his sweetheart while a young girl and older woman turn away and weep. It is likely that the youth is headed for a large city in Belgium or is emigrating to France or America, the two most popular destinations for impoverished Flemings seeking a better future. Emigration was another common theme in nineteenth century Flemish novels. In Sleetba's Zelfopffering, for example, the fiancé of the young female protagonist leaves for Guatamala in the beginning of the story to escape the ravages of the economic crisis of 1845-8.  

Two of De Groux's canvases concern destruction or loss of property. The peasant family in The Lost Crop (Pl. 140; 1870, M.B.A., Tournai) is a victim of natural disaster: a storm has left their crop in ruins. The father looks down in anger and discouragement, his wife buries her
face in her hands, but the daughter turns away to look toward the horizon, where a rainbow provides a symbolic ray of hope. The theme of submission to a higher power in the face of disaster for hope in the future—either in this life or the hereafter—was used in De Groux's earliest realist canvases like the Drunkard and Paupers' Bench and here reappears in one of his final works. The freely brushed style of The Lost Crop recalls De Groux's early works; if not for the date of 1870 next to the signature, it might be placed beside his paintings of 1853-4. The loose, delicate strokes representing the grain in the foreground are reminiscent of Millet's flecks of gold paint at the bottom of The Gleaners. De Groux's rainbow also foreshadows Millet's landscape Spring (Louvre, Paris), begun in 1868 but not completed until 1873, three years after De Groux's death. Inspiration may also have emanated from Düsseldorf. Jakob Becker von Worms' Peasants of Westerwald Surprised by the Storm (Pl. 141; 1840, Nationalgalerie, Berlin), exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1842 (no. 15) pictures a group of farmers in the fields massed in the left foreground watching their burning village on the distant horizon to the right which had been set on fire by lightning.

Düsseldorf sources may also have remotely inspired the unfinished Eviction (Pl. 142; c. 1857-70, K.M.S.K., Antwerp) in which an extended family of five carrying its scanty belongings walks out of its home into city streets filled with chaotic heaps of rubble from massive demolition projects in progress. Other uprooted unfortunates carrying away their possessions are seen in the rear. Scenes of distrainting for rent descending from Wilkie (1815, National Gallery of Scotland,
Edinburgh) were painted by Hübner (1847, location unknown) and Schwingen (1840s, location unknown) but the most logical and similar-looking source is Geirnaert's Expropriation (Pl. 11) of 1835. Geirnaert's profusion of picturesque detail, anecdotal narrative and rural setting contrast with the uniformly grim, unembellished quality of De Groux's scene of tragedy in an urban slum.

Sickness among the underprivileged classes was a theme already seen in paintings examined in other contexts. These include The Sick Child (Exposition Universelle de Paris, 1855), Visit to the Sick Child (Pl. 109) and The Drunkard of 1853, where the wife of the alcoholic husband lay dying on her bed. Disease was rampant among Belgium's lower classes in the nineteenth century because of poor diet and unsanitary housing conditions. Tuberculosis or pulmonary consumption, typhus and cholera took the highest toll among the poor. Severe epidemics of the latter two diseases broke out in 1866, the year before which De Groux exhibited The Doctor's Visit (Pl. 143; location unknown) in the Exposition Universelle de Paris of 1867. The patient is a tiny little girl who sits on her mother's lap as a doctor feels her pulse and the father looks on anxiously. As in the case of the previous painting, an example of the same type of subject exists in the œuvre of Geirnaert. Conscience spoke of working class girls who were victims of consumption in Het Geluk van rijk te zijn (The Happiness of Being Rich) of 1855.

The examination of De Groux's images of family crises may be concluded with two depictions of widows, one poor and one of better means. The first, The Widow or Visit to the Cemetery (Pl. 144; c. 1857-70,
K.M.S.K., Antwerp) is a black crayon drawing showing its subject in white bonnet and hooded cloak, her head bowed, leading her two children by the hand through the graveyard as a second woman and girl follow behind. The widow's little girl looks very much like the child in the right foreground of the 1866 Ash Wednesday. The whole scene is veiled in an expressively somber darkness, probably to indicate a twilight setting. The propensity for the prosaic for which De Groux encountered so much critical hostility is evident in comparing his drawing with a painting by Gallait, The Unfortunate Mother (Pl. 145; 1843; K.M.S.K., Antwerp), which treats the same subject in a romantic way. Gallait shows a weeping widow who is younger and more attractive than De Groux's, with long, flowing hair and a satiny robe which seems vaguely classical, removing her from the contemporary Belgian setting upon which De Groux has insisted. In contrast to the old church, spiky trees and unkempt tombstones of De Groux, Gallait shows only a cloudy sky in the background. In the left foreground of The Unfortunate Mother stands a tall block of stone surmounted by a statue decked with a garland to which Gallait's widow looks up, clutching her two cherubic infants to her breast. A comparison with the hysterical tenor of Wiertz' treatment of the window and orphan theme in The Orphans (Pl. 17) underscores once more the low-keyed sobriety of De Groux's mature realist works.

Consolation of the Widow (Pl. 146; 1862, private collection, Brussels), a watercolor, is one of the few works in which De Groux shows an upper-class subject. In it, he demonstrates that the rich, although materially comfortable, are no more immune from sorrow than the poor. His widow sits in a living room with an elaborately gilded
fireplace; a fancy little dog sits at her feet. She is consoled by a priest seated to her left and on the other side stand two sorrowful children. Like so many other of De Groux's paintings, this one descends from a work by Greuze, *The Widow and Her Priest* (Pl. 147; c. 1784, Hermitage, Leningrad). Insofar as the social standing and attractiveness of De Groux's widow, as well as her well-furnished parlor are concerned, the watercolor bears comparison with Alfred Stevens' *Consolation* (Pl. 147a; 1857, private collection). This may be a rare instance in which De Groux has drawn upon Stevens' feminine imagery of the years following 1855, but consistent with his other works, De Groux maintains the severity of his rectilinear design, the suppression of decorative detail and his ubiquitous air of somber pessimism. His grieving female is much too plain in features and dress to ever be mistaken for a Stevens figure.

Part 2. Charles de Groux, Socialist or Social Romanticist?

In 1857, with the appearance of De Groux's first group of mature realist canvases depicting Belgium's poor in a monumental format, critics raised the question of possible political implications of his canvases. As was the case when Courbet's *Stonebreakers* and *Burial at Ornans* made their appearances in Paris six years earlier, the press suggested links with left-wing socialist politics or asked whether De Groux's canvases reflected "la protestation d'une conscience en révolte contre les inégalités sociales." In his biography of De Groux published in 1871, Leclercq stated emphatically that "Ç'a été une grande erreur d'en avoir fait un peintre socialiste. Personne
n'était moins révolutionnaire que De Groux." Although De Groux himself left few recorded statements as to his political views or those which might have been expressed in his paintings, we can only speculate on the problem by examining the content and style of the works themselves, and the backdrop of socialist thought in Belgium to which he could have been exposed. In the final analysis, Leclercq appears to have been correct in his conclusions. De Groux's sensitivity to the problems of the poor seems to have involved humanitarian sympathy stemming from the mentality of the romantic movement, not socialist polemics. The relentless pessimism and resigned attitudes of his figures as well as the consistent infusion of religious overtones into his paintings contradicts the socialist hope for a better future that did not, in most cases, include the Christian church.

The apolitical nature of De Groux's paintings becomes apparent in comparing them with Düsseldorf Tendenzbilder. These German paintings undoubtedly played a large but not exclusive role in De Groux's commitment to social realist subject matter after his return to Belgium in 1852 and echoes of Düsseldorf themes and compositions appear in paintings dating from 1853 well into his final years. De Groux, however, never went so far as to expose specific political abuses like his German contemporaries, who aligned themselves with left-wing factions and, in some cases, actively participated in revolutionary incidents in 1848. Pointed references to specific abuses--exploitation of weavers (Hübner's Weavers of Silesia), unjust taxes (Kleinenbroich's Meal and Salt Tax), archaic feudal privileges (Hübner's Gaming Laws), or political repression of rebellious workers (Heine's Chapel in the
Penetentiary)—are absent in De Groux's oeuvre, as are images of proletarian resistance (Hasenclever's Workers and Town Council). It is important to point out that Düsseldorf Tendenzmalerei flourished primarily in the period preceding 1848, when dreams of a redress of the grievances depicted via social reform or revolution were still active. After hopes were dashed in 1848, most German genre painters abandoned tendentious social themes and it was during this postdiluvian period of disillusionment and reaction that De Groux came to Düsseldorf.

Only in rare instances does De Groux specify the sources of distress of his lower-class subjects, for example, in The Departure of the Conscript. Even then, the tone is not accusatory—no villainous exploiters are shown to drive home a political point—and connections with previous iconographic and literary prototypes further dilute any potential tendentious intent. The one painting by a Belgian social realist of the period under consideration which would seem to correspond to the reformist intentions of the Düsseldorf Tendenzmaler, Alfred Stevens' Soldiers of Vincennes, was painted with no such thought in mind. Although it actually gained Stevens a following among Paris radicals, the painter himself claimed afterward, "... je n'avais, je vous jure, en faisant mon tableau, obéi à aucune pensée politique."36

One searches in vain in the oeuvre of De Groux for an accusation of the socio-political establishment responsible for the plight of his sufferers. On the contrary, it sometimes happens that the victims themselves are made to seem responsible for their own misery. In the drunkard scenes or The Idlers, for example, it is the paupers' own vice which is to blame, either intemperance or sloth. Sometimes his poor
are victims not of human oppression but natural disaster (*The Lost Crop*). In the bulk of De Groux's social realist scenes, where the poor are shown participating in religious ritual or accepting charity, the source or causes of the poverty of his figures are neither depicted nor implied; they are irrelevant to the subjects depicted. It would seem that De Groux was so attuned to the mentality of the figures he was depicting that, like them, he did not question but rather accepted their unfortunate plight. A historian's description of the Belgian proletarian's situation in 1848 corresponds to De Groux's recurrent depiction of him throughout his oeuvre.

Trop ignorant pour comprendre leur [the republicans'] langage et trop religieux pour ne pas se resigner à son sort, il [the proletarian] ne répondait à leurs avances que par une morne indifférence. Il s'abandonnait, comme depuis longtemps, à la direction traditionnelle du clergé et des puissances sociales. On rencontrait encore dans les campagnes des paysans qui ne manquaient pas de se découvrir en passant devant la maison du seigneur. En Flandre, l'influence de l'Eglise restait aussi puissante que jamais. ... Ces pauvres gens n'attendent que du ciel les remèdes à leur détresse. À Gand, en 1846, les ouvriers d'une usine dangereuse ne voient d'autre moyen d'échapper aux accidents que de faire dire des messes.37

Had De Groux wished to align himself with socialist doctrine, he he would have been at no loss as a resident in mid-century Brussels to find any number of political clubs, societies and groups dedicated to bettering social conditions of the poor and working class, but with a few possible exceptions, the principles and theories of these organizations clash with the mentality reflected in De Groux's paintings. No socialist party on a national scale existed in Belgium until the birth of the Parti Ouvrier belge in 1885, fifteen years after De Groux's death. This faction finally provided a progressive alternative
to the conservative Catholic and Liberal parties which had controlled Belgian politics during De Groux's lifetime.

During the third quarter of the century, however, Brussels had played host to a large number of French and German socialist proselytizers, many of whom sought refuge in Belgium, a country with very liberal press laws, after having been expelled from their own countries. The most notable among the latter in terms of socialism was Karl Marx, who arrived in Brussels in 1845, a political exile from Paris, only to be expelled from Belgium three years later during the turmoil of 1848. During that time he was joined periodically by other German radicals like Freiligrath, who was soon to become an agitator in Düsseldorf and a familiar figure among its artists. (It is the proletarian members of his Volksclub who are depicted in Hasenclever's Workers and Town Council and it was Freiligrath's membership in the Malkasten which forced Schadow to drop out.)

While in Brussels, Marx made a definitive ideologic break with the theories of the utopian socialist writers who preceded him and developed his principles of historic materialism. In 1847 he published The Misery of Philosophy, written in response to Proudhon's Philosophy of Misery and contributed articles to the Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung, a biweekly newspaper published by a colony of German socialists living in Belgium. The Flemish weaving crisis was at its peak during Marx's Belgium sojourn and his observation of its devasting effects would surely have reenforced the tenets elaborated in the Communist Manifesto, prepared in collaboration with Frederick Engels, who visited Marx on and off in Brussels. The manifesto had been commissioned in November,
1847, by the Communist League in London, composed in Brussels and sent back to London to be published in German during the first months of 1848, weeks before Marx's expulsion from the Belgian capital. It is unlikely that De Groux would even have been aware of the existence of this as-yet obscure German philosopher in his home city and inconceivable that he would have been drawn to the atheistic, militant tenets of Marxist socialism once they became known in the coming decades.

Long before the first Marxist workers' organization, the Association internationale des Travailleurs (1864-73) appeared in Belgium, the doctrines of French social reformers Claude Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier were being heard throughout the country. These utopian socialists preached a peaceful, evolutionary transition of society from private ownership of goods and land to a brotherly system of cooperative sharing in which enlightened "social engineers" would preside. Many of their followers in France led "missions" into Belgium seeking converts during the 1830s and 1840s. They found many followers, and under the leadership of Belgians like Jacob Kats (1804-1886), Jan Pellerin (1817-1877) and Lucian Jottrand (1804-1877), clubs and societies were formed, in which utopian socialist ideas were discussed, petitions, broadsides and journals were circulated encouraging reform, and several trades, such as typographers, jewelers, and tailors formed cooperative organizations for mutual aid. Most of this early reformist activity, however, maintained a paternalistic attitude toward the average worker and commanded the following primarily of intellectuals from the privileged classes, so that it had little effect on the suffering masses.
The effects of utopian socialism upon De Groux appear just as negligible as the doctrines of Marx, for the generating force of Saint-Simonians or Fourierists, optimistic hope for a better future of Universal Harmony, contradicts the unremitting pessimism of De Groux's canvases in which poverty and suffering appear as permanent conditions to be ameliorated or at least compensated for only in the hereafter, not on this earth. The crumbling wall poster bearing the words Exinction du Pauperisme seen in the background of The Coffee Mill seems to drive home this point: pauperism will never be extinct, no matter how many panaceas are devised. Moreover, the utopian socialists' substitution of the goals of happiness and social justice on this earth for Christianity's promise of celestial joy in the next is contrary to the Catholic ideology which runs consistently through De Groux's oeuvre.

De Groux would never, however, have subscribed to the doctrines of Belgium's Catholic party, which consistently opposed social reform through government legislation until the 1880s. Up until that time the Church itself was largely responsible for the education and charity administered to the poor, functions for which it was inadequately equipped. Government measures to turn over such obligations to the state, however, would have stripped the Church of considerable power, so it stubbornly clung to the status quo. Despite the many paintings by De Groux which depicted the dispensation of charity as a Christian virtue, the artist could hardly have agreed with opinions such as those expressed by Catholic leader Charles Woeste, who feared the eradication of poverty because it would deprive Christians of the practice of private charity, one of the cardinal virtues.41
There were a small number of socialist thinkers active in the first three quarters of the century who conceived of socialist reform based primarily upon the doctrines of Christianity to which De Groux would presumably have been more sympathetic. The leader of this evangelic form of socialism was Félicité de Lamennais of France, whose influential *Paroles d'un croyant* (1834) preached an evolutionary move toward an egalitarian society based upon Christ's principles of love and justice. The inspiration of Lamennais upon Tassaert's painting was exposed to Belgians in the Antwerp Salon of 1855, whose catalogue carried a passage by the French writer to accompany the painter's *La famille malheureuse* (no. 665). It recounted the steadfast faith in God of a destitute mother about to die in a freezing garret. Lamennais' admiration for the faith of the poor in the face of misery constitutes the same mentality governing De Groux's numerous depictions of unfortunates involved in religious ritual. They bear out, in a contemporary idiom, Christianity's promise that the poor, the hungry, the meek and the persecuted will be comforted and inherit the kingdom of heaven. However clearly De Groux's religious sincerity may appear to modern eyes, it should be acknowledged that to his contemporaries, the motivations behind De Groux's depictions of the poor observing religious rituals remained open to question. Van Bemmel asked whether the 1857 pilgrimages expressed "une pensée pieuse" or "l'horreur de la superstition." Leclercq seemed convinced that De Groux was depicting the exploitation of ignorant paupers by the Church. A comparison of De Groux's religious genre scenes with the works of anticlerical artists like Geirnaert or Courbet, however, sufficiently contradicts
any suspicions that De Groux may have been a religious skeptic.

Adherents to social Catholicism in Belgium had an ideologic leader in Paul Huet, professor at the University of Ghent from 1846 to 1850, whose theories were expressed in *Le Règne social du Christianisme* (1853) which outlined a collectivist society bonded by fraternal love that would conform to Christ's vision of an ideal earthly society corresponding to his celestial kingdom. During De Groux's lifetime, socially oriented Catholicism, like utopian socialism, was a movement confined primarily to ideas rather than practical implementation, and it is unlikely, again, that De Groux's pessimism would have tolerated Lamennais' or Huet's apocalyptic hopes for a heaven on earth.

The ideas of Saint-Simon, Fourier and Lamennais were diffused to a wider public largely through the efforts of a number of French novelists, poets and playwrights of the romantic era who conceived of their art as a means of guiding humanity toward a better future. The figures in question include poets Alphonse de Lamartine, Alfred de Vigny, novelist George Sand and, most important, Victor Hugo, novelist, poet and playwright. The works of these writers which expose the misery of the lower classes fall under the category "social romanticism," a genre studied in detail by Roger Picard, and can be regarded as counterpart of the socially conscious Flemish novels which flourished during the 1830s and 1840s. The social romanticists appealed to the reader's sympathies by stimulating humanitarian pity for the plight of the oppressed and expressing hope for a utopian future in which social justice will prevail. Lamartine's lengthy poem *Jocelyn* (1836), for example, contains passages which rhapsodize over the backbreaking
toil of the peasants and situate them within a cosmic scheme wherein
divine love and justice will triumph. During her most socially con-
scious period, from 1836 to 1848, George Sand, in novels like
Jacques (1834), Le Compagnon du Tour de France (1840) and Le Meunier
(1845), addressed herself to the struggles of the exploited and, in-
spired by various socialist theorists, advocated social equality.
Following 1848, her militancy became somewhat diluted when she turned
to rural idylls like François le Champi (1850), or La Petite Fadette
(1849). 47

The towering figure of literary romanticism Victor Hugo, on the
other hand, continued his ideologic battle for the rights of the
oppressed until his death in 1885. Early novels like Le dernier jour
d'un condamné (1829) and Claude Gueux (1834) chronicled proletarian
squalor and protested the death penalty, and poems contained in the
1846 collection Contemplations ("Chose Vue un jour de printemps"
[1840] and "Intérieur" [1841]) which describe squalid working class
homes containing families whose lives are destroyed by hunger, disease
and alcohol, constitute literary counterparts to De Groux's 1853
Drunkard. 48 Hugo was no stranger to Brussels, in fact, having fled
there for political reasons in 1851 after Louis Napoleon's coup
d'état. 49 He returned from his exile in Guernsey in 1861 to work on
some final portions of his greatest roman social, Les Misérables,
which was published the following year in Brussels. The artistic com-
munity of Brussels was fully aware of the publication of Hugo's
masterpiece in their city. Considerable publicity was given to the
novel in the *Ulysses.* Following its publication, Brussels hosted a lecture on the work, a dramatic production based upon it, and paid homage to its author by arranging a banquet in honor of the book's publication in 1862 attended by Alfred Stevens. In the preface of his monumental account of the sufferings borne by the convict Jean Valjean, Hugo enumerates the "trois problèmes du siècle" treated in his novel: "la dégradation de l'homme par le prolétariat, le déchéance de la femme par la faim, l'atrophie de l'enfant par la nuit." Hugo's conviction that suffering on earth will never be eradicated, expressed in his notes for the novel, comes much closer to the unremitting pessimism that pervades De Groux's *œuvre* than the utopian visions that pervade the writings of the other social romanticists.

Do away with poverty and destitution we can; but do away with suffering we can not. Suffering, we profoundly believe, is the law of this earth, until some new divine dispensation. . . . The quantity of fatality that depends on man is called Penury and can be abolished; the quality of fatality that depends on the unknown is called Sorrow and can only be contemplated in fear and trembling.

The close ideologic relationship of De Groux's paintings to *Les Misérables,* the swan song of romantic novels, published five years after Madame Bovary, underscores the fact that De Groux's approach to poverty was that of the romantic era. The poor of De Groux's canvases are neither Courbet's objective facts nor Millet's stalwart people of the earth. They are objects of pity for whom hope lies in heaven, not in political organization or agitation. The preceding discussion of social romanticism makes clear the fine line which De Groux steers between the iconography and limited stylistic characteristics of the French realists and the ideologic approach of social romantic
literature and art. De Groux's humanitarian, Christian pity which appears in abundance in Tassaert, Wiertz, Hugo and Sand but is conspicuously absent in Courbet and Flaubert was discerned by several contemporary critics.

Adolphe Siret, in discussing various approaches to the depiction of poverty in art, decries the incendiary manner of certain unnamed artists and writers, which only causes further problems. How can such people persist in depicting misery, he asks, "sans la résignation qui l'ennoblit, sans l'espérance qui la console, sans l'amour qui l' Juneau?" Such redeeming sentiment is present in De Groux's paintings, he later implies, since the artist demonstrates "la conscience du devoir, la conscience des âmes sérieuses."53 In the same vein, the reviewer of the Ghent Salon of 1868 believes that De Groux's "mission" is to prick the consciences of the well-to-do, if only for a moment, by revealing the sufferings of unfortunates: "Vous tous, favoris de la fortune, qui voyez d'un oeil distrait des maux du peuple, vous aurez, quand ce ne serait que pour un moment, une pensée généreuse et attendrie pour les souffrances de vos frères malheureux, quand De Groux avec son éloquence d'artiste les étalera à vos yeux" [italics my own].54

Such appears to be the only real social "message" of De Groux's canvases: Pity the unfortunate poor. The impetus behind the painter's iconography of proletarian misery, moreover, seems to be his melancholic temperament rather than a desire for revolt or reform--another indication of the romantic nature of De Groux's social realism. The foregoing conclusions are confirmed by a conversation with the artist at an unspecified Salon recorded by Max Sulzburger. When presente...
the notion that his paintings could be interpreted as socialist propaganda or revolutionary manifestos, De Groux acknowledged having been repeatedly accused of left-wing proselytizing but could not convince such critics that he was simply compelled to paint the way he felt: "... j'ai dû entendre plus d'une fois ce reproche, et si je réponds que je ne puis pas peindre autrement, on ne me croit pas. C'est cependant la sainte vérité." When a dealer told De Groux the difficulty he had selling his scenes of proletarian misery and asked for some scenes of lighter subjects, the artist explained how he found it impossible to paint a happy subject, no matter how hard he tried. According to De Groux, an artist should devote himself exclusively to his art (another romantic notion), involving himself in public life only for purposes of observation, and even that for as briefly as possible. He insisted that art has no influence upon society in spite of what certain critics might say, and that Wiertz' downfall came when he forsook making art for dabbling in social reform.

For all the speculation about his political motives, De Groux reveals himself to be indifferent to issues of reform through art, despite the examples of socially committed painters from Düsseldorf and writers from France to which he was most certainly exposed. His wish to inspire a "generous and tender thought" by depicting the "ennobling resignation" of his lower-class subjects is a sign of De Groux's melancholic, fatalistic temperament, not of his flirtations with left-wing politics. The only consistent ideological alignment revealed in his paintings is with Christianity—or, more accurately, Catholicism. It is this commitment to Catholicism in De Groux's art,
along with the stylistic Gothicisms of his mature style, and the fatalistic melancholy which connect his paintings with social romanticism, even though they exist in chronological agreement with the realist movement. It is the spiritualizing romantic qualities of De Groux's painting, however, which make it an essential point of departure for Belgian art devoted to showing the lower classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
NOTES

1Messiaen, p. 408.

2A 24.5 x 30 cm. pencil drawing after this painting is housed in the M.B.A., Tournai.

3Salon de Gand, 1868 (Ghent, 1868), p. 20.


5De Pillecyn, p. 115.

6See De Pillecyn, pp. 114-116, 135-144.


8Conscience, "Ce Que Peut Souffrir une mère," Scènes de la vie flamande, Première Série, vol. 1, trans. by Léon Wocquier (Paris,

9My thanks to Mr. Sartiliot for informing me of the location of this painting.

10*Revue de l'exposition en 1848,* La Renaissance, 10 (1848), 92. See Chapter I.


12Again, I thank Mr. Sartiliot for supplying me with information on the former whereabouts of this painting.

13A similar alms scene, now lost, exhibited in the Exposition Universelle de Paris of 1867 is described by Hymans, vol. 4, 1921, p. 248, as involving "une femme et ses deux enfants mourant de fain et de froid."

14For more examples, see De Pillecyn, pp. 136-7.

14aEekhout, p. 82.

15See, e.g., Neuville, vol. 1, p. 117.

16Camille Lemonnier, Salon de Bruxelles. 1866 (Bruxelles, 1866), p. 48.

17Ibid.

18See K.M.S.K., Antwerp, Schilderkunst in België ten tijde van Henri Leys (Antwerp, 1969), no. 100 and K.M.S.K., Antwerp, In the
Archives Photographiques, I.R.P.A., Brussels, it is identified only as De Bedevaart (The Pilgrimage).

17 H. Mireur, Dictionnaire des Ventes d'Art faites en France et à l'Etranger, vol. 3 (Paris, 1901-12), p. 373. Another unlocated Pèlerinage, was exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1869 (no. 331), but the late date eliminates the possibility of its association with the Antwerp painting in question in view of the early style of the latter work.

18 Cf. Henri de Coene's Le Retour d'un peléranage, Brussels Salon of 1836 (no. 71). Geirnaert and De Block painted Returns from the Kermesse (Siret, Biographie Nationale, vol. 7, p. 559, and Immerzeel, p. 59); Geirnaert entered a Retour de la foire in the Brussels Salon of 1839 (no. 247).

21 The painting was last reported in storage in Namur, where it was probably destroyed during World War II. This information was provided by Mr. Sartiliot.

22 My thanks again to Mr. Sartiliot for informing me of the location of this painting.

23 Joly, p. 130.

24 See De Pillecy, pp. 75-79 for other stories about conscription.


26 See De Pillecy, pp. 177-185 for more examples of emigration themes.

27 Mr. Sartiliot suggests that the upheaval depicted in the Eviction may be related to the massive urban renewal project in Brussels c. 1870.


29 De Pillecy, pp. 169-173.

30 Thieme-Becker, vol. 13, p. 349, lists a Besuch des Arztes in Malines.


32 Van Soust, p. 98.

34 Leclercq, p. 221.
Although the political implications, if any, of Courbet's and Millet's paintings are still open to question, both artists have left isolated statements about their political views which provide at least some first-hand evidence for scholars. See, for example, Courbet's letter to the Paris Messager in 1851 in which he proclaimed himself "not only a socialist but also a democrat and a Republican: in a word, a supporter of the whole Revolution," quoted in Clark, *Image of the People*, p. 113; Millet, in an 1863 letter to Alfred Sensier in Richard Friedenthal, ed. *Letters of the Great Artists: From Blake to Pollock*, trans. by Daphne Woodward (New York, 1963), pp. 112-114, denied any socialist intentions in conceiving Man with a Hoe.


De Meeüs, p. 328.

"... Le vent soufflait au dehors, et la neige blanchissait les toits. Sous un de ces toits, dans une chambre étroite, étaient assises, travaillant de leurs mains, une femme à cheveux blancs et une jeune fille. Et de temps en temps la vieille femme réchauffait à un petit brasier ses mains pâles. Une lampe d'argile éclairait cette pauvre demure, et un rayon de la lampe venait expirer sur une image de la Vierge, suspendue au mur. Et la jeune fille, levant les yeux, regarda en silence, pendant quelque moments, la femme à cheveux blancs; puis elle dit: "Ma mère, vous n'avez pas toujours été dans ce dénuement." Et il y avait dans sa voix une douceur et une tendresse inexprimables. Et la femme à cheveux blancs répondit: Ma fille, Dieu est le maître, ce qu'il a fait est bien fait. Ayant dit ces mots, elle se tut en peu de temps ..."

Van Bemmel, p. 332.


For more on Catholic socialists, see Francesco S. Nitti, Catholic Socialism (New York, 1895); Brouwers, pp. 47-49.

On social romanticism, see Roger Picard, Le Romantisme social (New York, 1944); David Owen Evans, Le roman social sous la monarchie de Juillet (Paris, 1936) and Social Romanticism in France, 1830-1848 (Oxford, 1951); and Charles Brun, Le Roman social en France au XIXe siècle (Paris, 1910).

My thanks to Mr. Sartiliot for calling my attention to the latter two poems. The Uylenspiegel, no. 7 (March 20, 1862), pp. 2-3, contained several verses on charity from Hugo's Feuilles d'automne in an article by D. Bancel, "Discours sur la charité."

Other political dissenters from France to whom Brussels played host at various points during the nineteenth century include Victor Considerant, Louis Blanc, Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, Pierre Proudhon and Thore-Bürger. See Van de Wiele and Piérard.

The book was mentioned in the following issues: no. 37 (October 13, 1861), p. 3; no. 11 (April 13, 1862), p. 2; no. 16bis (May 22, 1861), p. 2; no. 34 (September 28, 1862), p. 1; no. 37 (October 19, 1862), p. 3; no. 38 (October 26, 1862), p. 4; no. 49 (January 11, 1863), p. 3.

Mitchell, Alfred Émile Léopold Stevens, p. 23.

Quoted and translated in Evans, Social Romanticism, pp. 80-81.

Ad. Siret, "Réponse à une lettre parisienne," Journal des Beaux-Arts et de la littérature

E.V., Salon de Gand, 1868 (Ghent, 1868), p. 20.


"J'achèterais volontiers l'une ou l'autre de vos toiles, me disait, il y a quelques jours, un de nos principaux marchands de tableaux, mais où et à qui les vendre? Les gens assez riches pour
acheter des tableaux n'aiment pas qu'on leur rappelle si amèrement les misérables qui vivent et meurent de privations. Faites-moi un sujet agréable, quelque chose qui plaît et qui flatte, je le payerai le prix que vous voudrez.' Je l'avoue, je me mis à l'œuvre pour la centième fois, et toujours avec le même résultat. J'avais commencé avec la ferme résolution de faire un tableau gai, ... lorsque je quittai le chevalet, mon idylle s'était changée en élégie." Ibid.

57'"L'artiste, me disait-il, doit vivre exclusivement pour son art. Il doit s'y dévouer tout entier. La vie est déjà si courte, ajouta-t-il, en regardant ses mains allongées, blanches, moites. Chaque moment a son prix. L'artiste ne doit se mêler à la vie publique que pour étudier et observer et encore le moins longuement possible; il n'a pas de temps à perdre. Je ne l'ignore pas, messieurs, les critiques d'art ne sont pas de cet avis. Ils écrivent des articles intéressants sur l'influence réciproque de la société et de l'art, qui, en fin de compte, se comprennent peu et n'ont guère de points de contact. ...

'Supposez, me dit-il, ... que Wiertz se fût contenté de dessiner, de modeler et de peindre, au lieu de trancher du philosophe ou du réformateur social. Quel chef-d'œuvre n'eût-il pas créées? Ah! que n'est-il resté dans la voie large et féconde ou il avait trouvé sa bataille homérique du Patrocle!" Ibid., p. 393.
CHAPTER V

SOCIAL REALISM IN THE WORKS OF OTHER BELGIAN PAINTERS, c. 1857-1875

Part 1. The "School" of De Groux

Beginning in 1857, critics began speaking of "disciples" or a "school" of De Groux. Jules Dujardin, in his history of Belgian painting published in 1896-1900,\(^1\) cites a list of "imitateurs" of De Groux which includes Léonard van de Kerkhove, Henri Bource (1826-1899), Emile Leclercq (1827-1907), the Comte Louis Dubois d'Eische (1822-1864)\(^2\) and Constantin Meunier (1831-1905). My analysis of works in the Brussels Salon of 1848 has shown that Van de Kerkhove's entry Misery of Flanders (Pl. 27) was one of the paintings that preceded and set the stage for De Groux's social realism, whose genre works do not appear until 1849. By the time De Groux unveiled his trio of mature realist canvases in the Salon of 1857, however, he was acknowledged as the leader of realism in Belgian painting. There were enough gloomy genre scenes of lower class life in the 1857 Salon for Lemonnier to remark that "Jamais on ne vit autant de scènes navrantes réunies, autant de palettes endeuillées qu'au Salon de 1857."\(^3\) Hymans agreed that "Jamais le noir ne fut à la mode comme cette année-là."\(^4\) Van Sout, in his review of the Salon, noted that "Autour de M. Degroux vient se grouper un petit nombre d'artistes, les uns annonçant
ouvertement les mêmes tendances, les autres s'en séparant par de cer-
tains côtés et s'en rapprochant par certains autres." The painters
in question whom he went on to discuss were Jules Léonard (1827-1897),
Bource, Leclercq, Dubois d'Eische and Meunier.

An evaluation of the effect of De Groux on the aforementioned
artists must be limited at this time for the most part to titles of
their Salon entries and descriptions of the works in comptes-rendus
since all of these artists, with the exception of Meunier, who will
be treated in the Epilogue, are minor figures whose works for the most
part are lost or unlocated. Before treating these painters, however,
mention can be made of at least two actual pupils of De Groux, Ernest
Kathelin (dates unknown) and Louise Steffens (1841-1865). Kathelin,
listed in the catalogue of the Brussels Salon of 1863 as an "élève
de M. Charles De Groux," exhibited a genre scene, The Visit (no. 638),
as well as Portraits of Children (no. 639) and two works commissioned
to hang in churches, The Sacred Heart of Jesus for the Eglise de
Nodebais and a Station of the Cross for the Eglise de Xhendellesse.
Other of his genre scenes, all unlocated, include The Morning
(Antwerp Salon of 1867), as well as several titles bearing only vague
relationship to themes of his teacher, such as The Fortune-Teller
(n.d.), 6 Interior of a Synagogue (n.d.) and Boarders in a Choir Loft
(n.d.). 7 Steffens, who was born in The Hague and died at the age of
twenty-four in Brussels, is characterized in Marius' Dutch Painting
in the Nineteenth Century as a "Catholic painter" who specialized in
genre and convent scenes. 8 Like Kathelin, she exhibited in the
Brussels Salon of 1863. One suspects that her two entries, The
Festival of St. Mary (no. 1031) and Consolation (no. 1032) would have borne some similarities to De Groux's pilgrimages and Consolation of the Widow (Pl. 146), respectively.

Henri Bource lived in Antwerp, where he studied at the Academy with Gustaf Wappers (1845-50) and Jozef Dyckmans (see Pl. 57), before proceeding to Paris to study with Ary Scheffer. While Bource's early works included Biblical scenes and subjects from ancient history, he had painted scenes of wine harvesting as early as 1851 (Return from the Wine Harvest, Brussels Salon of 1851, no. 133) and 1852 (The Little Wine-Harvesters, Antwerp Salon of 1852, no. 63). By the time of the Antwerp Salon of 1855, his predilection for pathetic narratives showed itself with his painting A Young Skater, Victim of his Carelessness, is Carried Back, Drowned, to the House of His Parents (no. 73). This painting was exhibited again in the Brussels Salon of 1857 as A Victim of the Ice (no. 82), along with two pastel allegories of spring and autumn and The Farewell, of Marie-Antoinette of Austria, Queen of France (no. 81). The latter painting, pathetic in sentiment like his Victim of the Ice, was one of the last history scenes exhibited by Bource, most of whose subsequent works were genre scenes. In reviewing Bource's Victim of the Ice in 1857, Van Soust observed happily that the artist's genre painting remained independent of the preoccupations of "certain persons" (meaning De Groux's paupers). The critic took note nevertheless of the artist's setting of a gray winter day, giving him cause to snipe that "l'école réaliste a une singulièr e préférence pour cette saison aux effets bornés." Pèlerin praised the painting's composition and sentiment but pointed out
certain technical difficulties, in particular, the coloring of his figures' clothing, which he suggested that Bourse modify to conform to the demands of color harmony, since "en peinture, la vérité absolue conduit à l'absurde, il faut se contenter de la vérité relative."\textsuperscript{10}

In the Antwerp Salon of 1858, Bourse introduced the thematic pre-occupation that would occupy him for the rest of his career: the life of the fisherman and coast dwellers. His entry that year was titled \textit{Devotion of the Pilots of Antwerp Saving the Crew of a French Ship Near Flessingue} (no. 63),\textsuperscript{11} accompanied in the catalogue by an account from the \textit{Moniteur belge} of the actual event upon which the painting was based. In his focus upon the fisher folk, frequently from Holland, Bourse may well have taken a cue from Düsseldorf ethnographic genre painters who exhibited in Belgian Salons and to whom De Groux might have drawn his attention. Artists like Adolph Schrödter (1805-1875), Rudolf Jordan (1810-1887) and Henry Ritter (1816-1853) had been painting their scenes in the lives of German or Norman fishermen since the 1830s.\textsuperscript{12} Several years before Bourse, such subject matter was taken up by Jozef Israels (1824-1911) who was to become the leading artist of the realist painters in Holland known collectively as the Hague School. Israels was a frequent exhibitor in Belgian Salons from 1853 onward.\textsuperscript{13}

Surviving paintings from the late 1860s take up De Groux's typical theme of family crisis—death of a family member in both cases—set in fishermen's cottages. \textit{A Sad Return} (Pl. 148; M.B.A., Liège), was exhibited in the Antwerp Salon of 1867 (no. 104) and the Ghent Salon of 1868 (no. 90). An empty cradle reveals the cause of the sorrow of
the fisherman's wife, who buries her head on the shoulder of her husband as an old grandmother enters the room from the right. In The Fatal News (Pl. 149; 1869, Musée communal, Anderlecht), another hapless wife grieves the loss of her husband at sea. Scenes of this subject with similarly posed figures had been painted in the 1880s by Schroedter in The Grieving Pilots (Pl. 150; 1832, Städelisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main) and Jordan in The Death of the Pilot (Pl. 151; 1836, Altonaer Museum, Hamburg). The narrative quality of Bource's painting, as well as its concentration on the range of human reactions to the event, from the troubled helplessness of the sailors and the unbridled grief of the wife to the blissful ignorance of the baby on the far left harken back to Greuze. The pose of Bource's grandfather gesturing toward one of the fisherman parallels that of the daughter in Greuze's Return of the Drunkard (Pl. 46) or the father in The Village Bride (c. 1761, Louvre, Paris). The horizontal arrangement of the figures against the rear wall parallel to the picture plane reflects compositions of both Greuze and De Groux's mature style.

Emile Leclercq, De Groux's biographer and fellow student in the studio of Navez, exhibited regularly in the Belgian Salons from 1848 into the 1870s in addition to writing fiction in the realist idiom and reviewing art in the Uylenspiegel. At first a painter of Biblical and historical subjects, Leclercq exhibited a landscape and three genre scenes with innocuous titles in the Antwerp Salon of 1855, but turned to more somber genre scenes in the Brussels Salon of 1857. The Child Saved (no. 669, location unknown), depicting a doctor's visit to an ailing infant, incorporated the theme of De Groux's Sick
Child exhibited in the Exposition Universelle of Paris in 1855.\textsuperscript{20}

Van Soust regretted Leclercq's retreat from romantic subjects set in the past in favor of prosaic realism.

Cet art qui consiste à représenter avec grandeur, dignité et poésie les scènes intéressantes du passé, a perdu tout charme pour l'artiste. Vieilleries dignes de feu; que tout cela! Dans quelle profonde erreur il versait! Mais maintenant ses yeux sont désillés. L'homme est un être sans veille ni lendemain. Tout entier il appartient au présent, à l'heure qui s'écoule. Là est la vérité.\textsuperscript{21}

The critic opined that Leclercq's true vocation was literature, not painting, in view of the demise of his art precipitated by his capitulation to the realist principles expounded in his art reviews.

Although acknowledging a certain ideologic kinship with De Groux, Van Soust deemed Leclercq a mere theoretician, not a capable painter.

Si nous classons M. Leclercq à la suite de M. Degroux, ce n'est pas que sa peinture rappelle de moins du monde celle de ce dernier. Mais nous ne pouvions séparer ces deux artistes, prêchant la même foi, l'un par sa parole, l'autre d'exemple.\textsuperscript{22}

Undaunted by such harsh criticism, Leclercq continued to paint scenes of peasants and fishermen, who were sometimes beset by tragedy, during the following two decades. These paintings, all lost, include Hay-making scenes (Antwerp Salon of 1867, nos. 646, 647), The Fatal News (Brussels Salon of 1875, no. 127) and The Fisherman's Family (Brussels Salon of 1875, no. 128). Leclercq's other salon entries consist for the most part of portraits and landscapes.

The Count Dubois d'Eische was a pupil of Henri Leys, the Antwerp painter influential in the development of De Groux's mature style. Classified as an "amateur," the count enjoyed critical praise nonetheless for his two entries in the Brussels Salon of 1857. The first,
Cemetary of the Village (no. 364, location unknown) showing two children clustered around a freshly covered gravesite in a churchyard, bears a thematic relationship to De Groux's Last Farewell from the Paris exhibition of 1855. In Visit to the Sick One (no. 365, location unknown), Dubois d'Eishce, like his colleague Leclercq, drew upon De Groux's 1855 Sick Child. The setting this time was the interior of a rustic farm cottage, where a young woman and her child approach the sick bed, recalling Greuze's Lady of Charity (Pl. 22). Unlike the other realists, the count's efforts received praise from nearly all quarters. His application apparently had a rough, unfinished quality, for Pèlerin opposed his canvases, "peints largement, à touches mâles," to the polished and smoothly finished surfaces of Jozef Dyckmans (Pl. 57). Even conservatives like Joly and Van Soust looked upon Dubois d'Eishe's paintings with favor, praising his faithfulness of observation and even his naïveté, which prevented him, according to Joly, from bowing to "le chic ou le parti pris," as De Groux and Alfred Stevens had been accused of doing.

In his review of the Antwerp Salon of 1861, Paul Mantz, who praised De Groux's Grace Before the Meal, also admired the count's Admission of a Dignitary to the Guild of St. Sebastian of Edegem (no. 432), which would seem to have depicted a traditional ceremony performed in the present with lower-class onlookers like De Groux's pilgrimages. Nevertheless, Mantz expressed the typical complaint against realism in criticizing the count's disregard of beauty in favor of ugliness in his depiction of peasants: "Nous ne prétendons pas que les paysans des environs d'Anvers doivent prendre les attitudes
grandioses de l'Apollon pythien, mais nous doutons beaucoup que la peintureait pour but suprême la représentation strictement fidèle de toutes les laideurs individuelles."26 Other Salon entries of Dubois d'Eische during the 1860s with titles of a social realist nature enclude Preparations for the Procession (Brussels Salon of 1863, no. 401), possibly deriving from De Groux and Leys and Poor Interior (Brussels Salon of 1866, no. 288).

Jules Léonard was a student of Navez in Brussels after having studied earlier at the Academy of Valenciennes. Van Soust considered him the ablest painter among the realists. Even though "le génie de la misère l'inspire," according to the critic, "il ne cherche pas le laid."27 His painting in the 1857 Salon took up the typical sick room theme and was titled The Paupers' Doctor (no. 686). It pictured a parade of patients too poor to pay for medical aid being attended by one of the doctors assigned to charity patients, described in several stories by Zetternam.28 From the analyses in the reviews, which emphasize Léonard's concentration on varieties of facial expressions and gestures of the unfortunates ("toutes les douleurs, toutes les chutes sociales sont représentés.")29 showing variously differentiated stages and degrees of suffering,30 one suspects that the painting resembled a work by Greuze or his Belgian imitator Hunin in a painting like Distribution of Alms in a Convent (Pl. 20). Both Pèlerin Van Soust were quick to draw distinctions between De Groux's work and Léonard, similar, they said, only in subject and "la gamme sourde de [la] couleur."31 Stylistically, Léonard relied on traditional modelling and detailed execution as opposed to De Groux's bolder
tendencies to flatten form and schematize detail. Although pointing out certain inadequacies in handling and contours, the critics were more favorably disposed toward Léonard's time-tested presentation of the Caritas theme than De Groux's more innovative approach to scenes of the poor. Several of Léonard's entries in future Salons, like The Orphans (Brussels Salon of 1863, no. 720) and Return from the Fair (Brussels Salon of 1875, no. 742) indicate a continuation of social realist themes. By 1860, he had won several awards at French provincial salons and eventually served as a museum official in Valenciennes.

Part 2. La Société Libre des Beaux-Arts

Three days before his death, De Groux cosigned a document identifying him as vice-president of an artists' organization in Brussels known as the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts. The document in question was a petition addressed to members of the Brussels conseil communal proposing that the commission to decorate the Hôtel de Ville with murals be given to Alfred Stevens, who, as a representative of contemporary art, who would paint modern subjects. The proposal was rejected, but De Groux's support for the project and membership in the Société Libre demonstrates his partisanship with Belgium's avant-garde artists. The organization, which was founded around 1868, consisted of artists who resisted the conservative restraints in style and subject matter imposed by the Brussels Academy. Their credo, expressed in a Profession de foi formulated in 1871, reveals the group's commitment to artistic freedom and predilection for contemporary
subject matter or "modernité:"

"Il ne s'agit point pour nous, ni de chercher un succès, ni de prêcher un évangile au nom d'un coterie, ni même de faire une propagande quelconque. Il s'agit simplement de constater ceci: Nous représentons l'Art nouveau, avec sa liberté absolue d'allures et de tendances, avec ses caractères de modernité."

The Société Libre included a wide variety of landscapists, portraitists and animal painters as well as genre painters. De Groux, in fact, was the only full-fledged social realist in the group, although the oeuvres of several other members contain paintings of a social realist nature. A brief examination of the origins, artists and activities of the group will be useful in furnishing the broader ideologic context of Belgium's independent-minded avant-garde art community within which social realism must be viewed.

As early as 1846, artists in Brussels who wished to work independently of the Academy banded together in the Atelier Saint-Luc. They rented a makeshift studio, charged membership fees and worked in the casual, sporadic manner of Parisian bohemian artists. Their free-spirited camaraderie and inspiration from the French avant-garde is described by the contemporary critic Jean-Baptiste Rousseau:

Gageons que vous regardez ces bohêmes de Saint-Luc comme n'étant pas autre chose que de prétentieux et détestables pastiches des bohêmes de Mürger. ... Pardon, tout ce que je dit est vrai ... Tout ... Qu'ils vivent dans un grenier, comme un type de Béranger,—qu'ils soient pauvres comme un type de Champfleury, et inconscients comme un type de Mürger—qu'ils soient Français à ce point, à ces trois points ... Et de fait la Vie de Bohème, l'évangile d'une bonne partie de la jeunesse belge artistique et lettrée, n'était pas sans exercer son influence sur la valeur de ses productions.
Despite their proclaimed independence, the group did seek guidance from established artists, such as the genre painter Jean-Baptiste Madou, who refused, and they were not even adverse to asking for limited help from the arch academician Louis Gallait, who also showed little interest. Most of the members of the original Atelier Saint-Luc are now forgotten figures, with two exceptions: Tony Voncken, who was to lithograph De Groux’s Paupers’ Bench in 1854 and Hippolyte de La Charlerie, who would be a cofounder of the Société Libre. After the original group disbanded around 1850, a second Atelier Saint-Luc was born three years later through the efforts of Voncken and Louis Dubois (1830-1880), a young Belgian artist whom Voncken encountered in Paris and who was to become an important spokesman for the Société Libre. The new Atelier Saint-Luc, which lasted until 1863, continued the bohemian spirit of the earlier group and provided an alternative for painters alienated by the plodding training process and artistic straitjackets of the Academy to experiment and develop their art along the lines of the ever-growing realist currents. Besides Dubois, several other members of the second Atelier Saint-Luc eventually became important figures in the Société Libre: Félicien Rops, Constantin Meunier, Jules Raeymaekers (1833-1904) and Charles Hermans (1839-1924).

According to Charles Bernard, in the catalogue of a commemorative exhibition of the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts in 1932, the group was officially founded on March 1, 1868 during a meeting at the home of Camille van Camp, a landscapist. Subsequent meetings were held at the café Le Jardin de Flore, situated almost directly opposite the
Café de l'Observatoire, headquarters of the circle of conservative academic artists, the Cercle de l'Observatoire. The original members of the Société Libre are depicted in a group portrait by Edmond Lambrichs (Pl. 152; c. 1871, M.R.B.A., Brussels), painted soon after the group's founding. De Groux is pictured third from the left in the bottom row of seated figures, surrounded by colleagues whose names have been cited previously—Rops, Meunier, Van Camp, Dubois and De La Charlerie—as well as other painters who specialized in landscapes (Louis Artan, J. Raeymaeckers, Théodore Baron, Edouard Hubert) and animal paintings (Alfred Verwée). Also pictured is Félix Bouré, a sculptor whose works adorn many public buildings in Brussels, and Eugène Smits, a painter given to freely brushed Rubenesque allegories (see, for example, March of the Seasons [1868, M.R.B.A., Brussels]), demonstrating the wide range of styles tolerated by the group which, it should be noted, favored contemporary subject matter insofar as it was characteristic of the most advanced artistic current, but did not prescribe it as a prerequisite for membership; the credo of the Société Libre was artistic freedom. Lambrichs himself (1830-1887), pictured in the extreme upper left of the painting, was sometimes considered a follower of De Groux on the basis of the subject matter of several Salon entries depicting gloomy lower-class subjects, such as Misery (Brussels Salon of 1854, no. 572), The Winter Vigil (Brussels Salon of 1857, no. 641) and Halt of the Saltimbanques, Prayer Before the Meal (Brussels Salon of 1863, no. 681). (Lambrichs also entered A Corner of the Cabinet of M. Ch. D. in the Brussels Salon of 1866 [no. 463].) Unfortunately, his portrait of the Société Libre is
almost the only one of his paintings which has not been lost and is hence the sole surviving work on which his reputation rests.

The year in which the Société Libre coalesced, in 1868, a pamphlet was published by Arthur Stevens, brother of Joseph and Alfred who was an art critic, on the subject which was to increasingly characterize the art of most of the Société Libre's members as well as the paintings of other progressive Belgian painters outside the group: modernity. Written in the form of a response to a critic hostile to the increasing rejection of academically-sanctioned historical scenes in favor of contemporary subjects, the pamphlet immediately reveals Stevens' loyalty to his brother's iconographic predilections by linking the term modernité to images of contemporary fashionably dressed women which evolved from the peasants of Millet: "La modernité ... commence aux paysannes de Millet, et finit aux femmes d'Alfred Stevens." In an effort to validate his ideas, Stevens includes a long excerpt from Baudelaires's Le peintre de la vie moderne, which lauds the beautiful, well-dressed modern woman as the worthiest of subjects capable of inspiring a painter. Stevens then lashes out at the anecdotal costume pieces of history painters ("J'ai la conviction que le public n'est pas éloigné de rire de ces marionnettes que certains costumiers nous présentent pour des pages d'histoire."), noting recent changes in the works of romantic artists and writers, like Meissonnier and Hugo toward modern-day themes. He later observes that certain small-scale, unpretentious depictions of contemporary subjects like Meissonnier's The Barricade (1849, Louvre, Paris) or Wiertz's Portrait of the Artist's Mother (1838, M.R.B.A., Brussels) far excell the
large-scale history paintings of these artists. History painting, Stevens declares, is decadent to art, subverting its purpose—to involve the spectator emotionally by simulating the world around him—and cites old masters like Veronese and Rembrandt, who peopled their scenes set in the past with contemporary figures so that, in their œuvres, "La peinture dite historique est absente."55

The observations expressed by Stevens in De la Modernité reflect the burgeoning impressionist movement which was to become the successor of realism, continuing the earlier movement’s commitment to contemporary subject matter but placing greater emphasis on accurate rendering of direct retinal perception by means of innovative color and brushwork. Their tendency to focus their attention more upon the upper bourgeoisie than the lower classes is an iconographic trend which will increasingly make its influence felt in the paintings of Belgian realists during the 1970s. In 1875, Charles Hermans’ At Dawn (Pl. 165; M.R.B.A., Brussels) will definitively mark the incorporation of impressionistic subject matter and style into social realist subject matter, consequently signalling the end of that phase of social realism initiated by De Groux and his generation and the beginning of a new stage with a different stylistic bent.

Aside from the petition to the Brussels conseil communal cited earlier in the text, much of the visible activities of the Société Libre took place de Groux’s death in 1870. These included several exhibitions of organization members held independently of the official Salons in 1868 (in which De Groux participated) and 1872 (in which six of De Groux’s works, including Departure of the Conscript and Grace,
were exhibited posthumously). These exhibitions were designed in large measure to circumvent Salon juries and selection committees which still exhibited preferential treatment for traditional styles and subject matter. The Société Libre has the distinction of being the first in a series of independent exhibiting organizations of avant-garde artists hostile to the conservatism of the Salons. The chain of such groups which begins with the Société Libre and carries many of the same artists through successive unions and dissolutions of new organizations, include La Chrysalide (1875), L'Essor (1876), and, finally, the most well-known, Le Cercle des Vingt, founded in 1883.

In addition to organizing exhibitions, the Société Libre issued two periodicals in which members expressed their views and sought to publicize their efforts, L'Art Libre—Review Artistique et Littéraire (1871-2) and L'Art Universel (1873-6). On the staff of L'Art Libre are found the names of writers who had long supported social realist painting, Emile Leclercq and Champfleury, as well as Camille Lemennier, an early defender of realism who was already gaining a reputation on the basis of his naturalist novels as "the Belgian Zola." In 1872, the call for more social realist subject matter was fervently sounded by Lemonnier in his review of the Brussels Salon printed in the Art Libre:

Montrez-moi le prolétaire avec ses sueurs, prostrée sous les conjurations des castes, vivantes jusque dans cet âge même, éternellement vivantespar la fatalité des choses humaines; montrez-moi dans des figurations claires, évidentes, tangibles, de fanatisme, de débauche, l'ignorance, la haine, les révoltes des principes les uns contre les autres, les soulèvements de l'Homme collectif sous la pression des tyrannies: à la bonne heure, nous sortons du transitoire; nous entrons dans l'éternel . . . . Peignez l'homme de chair et de sang, de muscles et de nerfs, avec ses lâchetés, ses haines, ses héroïsmes, l'homme moderne, que est h'homme de tous les temps....
Several months earlier, a poem by Albert Merat entitled *Prolétaires* told of a lower-class couple whose only balm for their dreary existence was the anticipation of their coming marriage:

*Ils viennent du travail; et toute la journée,
Dans l'usine fumée ou l'atelier malsain,
Ils ont plié leur corps sur la tâche ordonnée
Tandis que s'envolaient leurs rêves en essaim.*

The allegiance of the *Société Libre* to De Groux is made clear in the devotion of the first three issues of *L'Art Libre* to a three-part serialization of Leclercq's monograph on the late painter. Two years later, however, in the pages of the *Art Universel*, the writer E. Thamner took a harsher view of De Groux in his retrospective of Belgian painting during the last quarter of the century. While he praises *St. Guido* and *The Coffee Mill* for their "rare sincérité," he nevertheless regrets the artist's single-minded insistence upon portraying the poor in such a uniformly gloomy, sickly fashion—a tendency he attributes to an unspecified chronic illness.

*Ce qui frappe de plus dans l'ensemble de son oeuvre, c'est l'absorption de sa personnalité tourmentée, enfievée, et*
While Thamner's opinions are indicative of the new objectivity of later nineteenth century painting, to which the consistent imprint of De Groux's melancholic temperament on his subjects is foreign, the writer's castigation of De Groux's style and approach certainly bears no weight for the generations of Belgian artists succeeding De Groux, whose artistic legacy stretches well into the twentieth century (see Epilogue).

Another contributor to the Art Libre was the painter Louis Dubois (1830-1883), a guiding spirit of the second Atelier Saint-Luc and Société Libre who wrote under the pseudonym "Hout" (Flemish for "wood"). Dubois' first contribution to L'Art Libre pokes fun at conservative artists popular with the public such as Madou ("Ses sujets de prédilection étaient ... les politiques, réunion des gens stupides lisant des feuilles bêtes, des effusions d'ivrognes."). Later articles attacked Belgium's academic training program which mechanically cranked out uninspired history painters year after year, castigated official portraits for their lack of vitality and individuality, and advocated freedom of artistic technique ("Peignez comme vous voulez, pourvu que vous mettiez la vrai ton à la vraie place.").

Titles of a few of Dubois' Salon entries during the 1850s, now lost, would seem to bear some relationship to social realist themes of De Groux (Scene of Beggars at the Door of a Church [Antwerp Salon of 1855]) or Bource (Flemish Fisherman on the Seacoast, at Heyst, West
Flanders [Antwerp Salon of 1858]). Aside from the many animal paintings, landscapes and still-lifes which constitute most of his oeuvre, one intriguing piece of social realist observation stands out, originally titled Corner of a Gaming Table when exhibited in the Antwerp Salon of 1861 and subsequently known as The Roulette Game (Pl. 153; M.R.B.A., Brussels). This painting, along with an animal scene painted two years earlier, The Storks (1855, M.R.B.A., Brussels), constitute Dubois' two most important works, according to Rops in a letter written around 1880. Like De Groux in his mature period, Dubois, in his painting of figures clustered around a gambling table, establishes a link with his country's Northern Renaissance predecessors. His theme and composition are reminiscent of an early secular genre scene by Lucas van Leyden, the Card Players (c. 1514, Wilton House, Salisbury). Unlike most of the Belgian social realist scenes of the 1850s which focused primarily on the lower classes, however, Dubois' figures clearly belong to the middle and upper strata of Belgian society, engaged in a leisurely passtime. Their fashionable dress, especially that of the woman in the foreground with gloves and plumed hat, are indicative of the new emphasis on modernité of the 1860s and 1870s.

Three years before Dubois' painting, the activities of roulette-players in Belgium were chronicled at length in the pages of the Uylenspiegel by E. De Villebelle in an article on the Belgian resort town of Spa. De Villebelle's Balzacian descriptions of those people involved in the game corresponds very closely to the incisive characterizations in Dubois' painting. In the case of several figures, the Corner of the Gaming Table even seems to be an illustration of the
journalist's text, which states, in fact, that the scene described is worthy of an artist's rendering: "Dieu! quelle magnifique pâture, pour un dessinateur, est là accroupie aux bords de ce tapis vert! Quels types!"\(^69\) An earlier edition of the Uylenspiegel contained, in fact, a lithograph by Gerlier set in a casino whose slightly caricatured figures, while not engaged in gambling, are nevertheless grouped around a fragmented foreground table in a manner resembling Dubois' painting (Pl. 154).\(^70\) In several cases, Dubois' figures seem to be direct illustrations of De Villebelle's text, which describes Prussians and Russians with enormous whiskers, an intense gentleman with a high, bald forehead and a woman sporting a feathered hat:

> Il y a aussi quelques Prussiens et quelques Russes reconnaissables, à leur taille élevée et à leurs favoris énormes qui pourraient leur servir d'épaulettes. ... Quels types! En voici par exemple: corps effilé comme une anguille, tête chauve garnie seulement de quelques touffes de cheveux gris au-dessus des oreilles, front large et élevé, yeux brillants enfoncés dans de noires orbites, visage étroit et rasé, teint blême, lèvres minces et blanches ... [Les] petits yeux gris [de la dame] refluissent sous le toit d'un chapeau d'une forme réjouissante au possible. Cela s'appelle un bibi ou un rossignol en termes de boutiquier, je crois.\(^71\)

Dubois' immediate point of artistic departure seems to be the Düsseldorf painter J.P. Hasenclever (1810-1853), several of whose genre scenes peopled with portly, caricatured bourgeois figures were exhibited in Belgian Salons prior to 1860.\(^72\) A painting like The Reading Cabinet (Pl. 155; 1843, Städtisches Museum, Remscheid), one of Hasenclever's typical Gesellschaftszene, shows an entire room of rotund, balding German burghers grouped around tables who resemble Dubois' massive gentleman on the far left. It should be noted also that Hasenclever himself painted a Gaming Table in Monte Carlo in the 1840s, now lost.\(^73\)
The oeuvre of another member of the Société Libre, Félicien Rops (1833-1898) also contains several works which can be characterized as social realist. Rops, it will be recalled, had composed a "comic Salon" in 1851 under the pseudonym "Japhet" which contained a parody of Courbet's Stonebreakers (Pl. 43) with an accompanying poem referring to the French artist as "le peintre soc-humanitaire" (probably meaning "socialiste-humanitaire"), thus acknowledging the socio-political implications of Courbet's art. Rops' oeuvre contains relatively few paintings. He was primarily a graphic artist whose early works of the 1850s were published in the Belgian satiric reviews the Crocodile, the Corsaire and the Charivari belge.

Rops also contributed several illustrations to the Uylenspiegel during the same period in which De Groux's works appeared in the journal, two of which deal with social inequality in a manner more sarcastic and pointed than that of his colleague. The first (Pl. 156), appearing on September 28, 1876 and signed with the pseudonym "Vriel," exposes the hypocrisy and ineffectiveness of Belgium's political leaders in dealing with the grinding poverty of so many of the nation's citizens. In it, a politician stands on a step outside a building which, according to a sign posted, houses a "Congress on Charity" ("Congrès de Bienfaisance"). Opposite him is a withered old beggar woman leaning on a cane who extends her hand in hopes of receiving a coin, but, handing her a book, the politician counsels her instead to read his discourse of the previous day:

--Mon bon membre du Congrès de bienfaisance, un sou s'il vous plaît, je meurs de faim ...
--Tenez, prenez plutôt mon discours d'hier, et lisez-moi ça.
As in De Groux's two lithographs with beggars (Pl. 70, 72) charity to
the needy is refused, but Rops points closer to one of the major
sources of the problem of poverty in his exposé of political double-
talk. Another illustration which appeared in the Uylenspiegel on June
7, 1857 (Pl. 157) pictures a wrinkled old woman hunched over a broom
whose low station in life will never permit her to wear clothing any
finer than the rags she has on. The caption reads: "Ne lui parlez pas
de crinoline." In this illustration, Rops has reduced his figure to a
grotesque caricature, exaggerating her wrinkled skin, gnarled features
and tattered clothing to a degree that De Groux never approaches.

Rops' predilection for caricature is seen again in his lithograph
The Walloon Funeral (Pl. 158; c. 1872, collection Babut de Marès,
Belgium) which is clearly meant to be seen as a regional Belgian ver-
sion of Courbet's Burial at Ornans, unlike De Groux's earlier funeral
painting, The Last Farewell (Pl. 60) which bore little relationship to
its French antecedent and even contradicted, with its reverential qual-
ities, Courbet's anticlerical tenor. Rops' composition fills an oblong
horizontal canvas like Courbet's in which the mourners and clergymen,
as in the painting, are spread out in a row parallel to the picture
plane and to a horizontal behind them which in Rops' work, consists of
a wall. As in Courbet's prototype, the horizontal orientation of the
upper half of the picture is broken only by a lone crosier. Rops ren-
ders the features of his clergymen, particularly the trio standing to
the left of the grave, with considerably more exaggerated grotesqueness
than Courbet; the clumsy obesity of the priest reading the last rites
makes him a comic figure, in fact. An examination of the mourners' faces, however, particularly the malevolent-looking woman staring into the grave, reveals an almost sinister tone which Rops felt was characteristic of the society of his time, as he states in a letter about the painting:

L'amour des jouissances brutales, les préoccupations d'argent, les intérêts mesquins ont collé sur la plupart des faces de nos contemporains un masque sinistre, où l'instinct de la perversité, dont parle Edgar Poë, se lit en lettres majuscules; tout cela me semble assez amusant et assez caractérisé pour que les artistes de bonne volonté tâchent de rendre la physionomie de leur temps. 79

The sinister mask attributed to preoccupation with money is also seen in one of Rops' few figure paintings, 80 known both as The Pawnbroker and Jew and Christian (Pl. 159; n.d., location unknown) in which a gnarled old pawnbroker hunched behind his desk scrutinizes a young man standing in front of him. Rops' painting recalls several early efforts of Alfred Stevens. The Jew in Rops' work looks like an update of Stevens' medieval Miser of 1851 (Pl. 63) and the pawnbroker theme was treated by Stevens in his First Day of Devotion (location unknown) of the Paris Salon of 1855 which showed a beautiful young woman entering a "cold, dark, reeking" pawnshop. 81 The free brushwork and outlining of forms in The Pawnbroker link it to De Groux's early realist style prior to 1857, but the nervous, slightly stylized contours and sharp, incisive poses and gestures suggest the style of Daumier.

The subject matter for which Rops is most reputed, however, is his erotic, often pornographie depictions of prostitutes as objects of lust and incitements to vice, often fused with surrealist demons or skeletons that identify him as a symbolist by the 1870s. An early
treatment of the prostitute theme which falls before 1875, the date at which this study terminates—and the year after which Rops settled in Paris—is a lithograph entitled The Absinthe Drinker (p. 160; c. 1869, collection Pigneur, Namur). Rops' subject, provocatively leaning against a post bearing a poster with the word "bal" (cf. Stevens' Soldiers of Vincennes and De Groux's Coffee Mill), is presented here with realist objectivity that foreshadows the courtesans in Charles Hermans' At Dawn (Pl. 165; M.R.B.A., Brussels), but at about the same time as the lithograph in question, Rops was also preparing Death at the Ball (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo) in which a skeleton lurks behind a strumpet's clothing, foreshadowing the artist's increasingly bizarre, diabolic symbolist bent.

The Société Libre was based in Brussels, but several artists working in Antwerp who were not members also turned their attention to contemporary society during the 1860s and 1870s, thereby demonstrating resistance to the preferred historical subject matter of the Antwerp Academy. Two of these artists—Henri de Braekeleer (1840-1888) and Jan Stobbaerts (1838-1914) usually figure prominently in accounts of Belgian realism, but it should be noted that they are of a generation several decades younger than the Brussels artists in question. Their social realist subject matter consequently emerges during the years following the début of De Groux's first mature works.

Henri de Braekeleer was the son of the well-respected but conservative, anecdotal genre painter Ferdinand de Braekeleer (Pl. 7, 8) and nephew of historical genre painter Henri Leys (Pl. 83). His works which can be characterized as social realist, along with those
of Stobbaerts, his student colleague at the Antwerp Academy (where De Braekeleer studied from 1854-61), differ from most paintings by Brussels painters in that the figures, drawn from the artisan classes, are shown at work. An early painting called The Potters (Pl. 161; Brussels Salon of 1863, formerly collection Brijs, Antwerp) pictures its subjects earnestly bent over their respective tasks; the artist faithfully renders the unkempt appearance of the workers (note especially the foreground figure) and the dingy shop which they inhabit, where light can filter only partially through the dirty window panes. The stiff, awkward poses of the figures and the artist's insistence upon the thick, heavy paint application, suggesting the texture of the potters' clay, are reminiscent of Courbet's depictions of workers like The Stonebreakers or The Knife Grinders (c. 1849-9, Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio). The Coppersmith (Pl. 162; 1861, K.M.S.K., Antwerp) is another example of De Braekeleer's early paintings of artisans at work, now in a bright, shining interior. Here the nature of the subject permits De Braekeleer to demonstrate his skill at intricate detail, seen in the paraphenalia on the shelves and hanging on the walls, passed on to him by his father and uncle. After a trip to Germany and Holland in 1863, De Braekeleer gradually abandoned his social realist tendencies. While still preserving his compositional preference for interiors illuminated by light filtering in obliquely through windows on one side, his emphasis shifts from the activity of work to the evocation of mood—invariably of solitude and intimacy—which seems to be inspired primarily by Vermeer, to whose subjects he frequently turns in such paintings as The Lacemaker (1869, formerly
collection Arthur Boitte, Ittre), The Geographer (Brussels Salon of 1872, M.R.B.A., Brussels) and The Studio of the Painter (1873, M.B.A., Tournai). De Braekeleer's talent in rendering light effects, seen as early as The Coppersmith, made him immediately receptive to impressionism, which strongly marks the paintings of his later years.83

The social realist content in the paintings of Jan Stobbaerts, the colleague of Henri de Braekeleer at the Antwerp Academy, is found in the peasant figures who people his numerous barnyard and stable scenes, much like the lower class types found in the early dog paintings of Joseph Stevens. Trained by a traditional animal painter Emmanuel Noterman from 1855-8 and counselled, like De Braekeleer, by Henri Leys, Stobbaerts began exhibiting scenes of farm animals in the Brussels Salon of 1857 and continued in the following decade to paint ingratiating, anecdotal scenes of cows, dogs and cats. Occasionally, some of these early scenes contained depictions of human figures corresponding to the lonely toilers or bystanders in Stevens' works, such as the isolated peasants standing amidst the herd of cows in The Cattle Market of Antwerp (1861, K.M.S.K., Antwerp), comparable to Stevens' Dog Market in Paris (Pl. 65). In 1873, Stobbaert's Slaughter-House (Pl. 163, K.M.S.K., Antwerp) became the succès de scandale in the Antwerp Salon because of the artist's brutal naturalism in placing the stream of blood gushing from the neck of a bound cow in the foreground of his picture, which included two sturdy butchers impassively conducting the slaughter. The painting launched a press battle between defenders and squeamish detractors of Stobbaert's slice-of-life objectivity84 not unlike the controversy which engulfed the American exhibition of Thomas
Eakins' depiction of a surgical operation in *The Gross Clinic* (Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia) three years later, which also incited outrage against the trickle of blood confronting the spectator at eye level. Stobbaerts' paintings of barnyard scenes peopled with the robust, hearty Flemish peasants which descend from his seventeenth century Antwerp predecessors Rubens and Siberechts continued into the later decades of the century. As in the case of De Braekeleer, impressionistic techniques eventually softened and dissolved his formerly solid forms; in his final years, he frequently abandoned realism to people his rural settings with mythologic nymphs and goddesses.

Of lesser stature than De Braekeleer or Stobbaerts, Willem Linnig, Jr. (1842-90), another Antwerp Academy student who dropped out after a conflict with Nicaise de Keyeser, is best remembered for his *Wedding in Antwerp* (Pl. 164; K.M.S.K., Antwerp), exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1866 (no. 501) and Antwerp Salon of 1867 (no. 670). In the latter Salon, Linnig also exhibited a typical social realist subject, *At the Cemetery* ([no. 671], formerly collection C. Boukaert-Linnig). The *Wedding in Antwerp*, with its outdoor, festive procession of dancing brides'-maids following behind the nuptial couple, is not unlike a seventeenth century Flemish kermese scene. The frieze-like arrangement of the figures placed in front of a background wall parallel to the picture plane and horizontal oblong canvas, however, are a distant echo of Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*, and the depiction of a traditional cultural ritual emphatically localized by costume and setting (note the Antwerp horizon line above the wall) are not unrelated to De Groux's pilgrimages. Nevertheless, Linnig's painting is
clearly characteristic of realism of the late 1860s with its accent on modernité reflected in the stylish costumes of the wedding participants, who are clearly middle-class figures. (Its air of bustling activity and situation of fashionably-dressed figures beneath the vertical tree trunks on the right owes less to Courbet or De Groux than to Manet's Concert in the Tuileries Gardens [1862, National Gallery, London]). Differentiation of social classes is evident, however, in Linnig's inclusion of a beggar and ragpicker on both extremities of the picture and the glimpse of a man in a worker's smock and cap directly behind the bride's wrinkled old servant wearing a traditional Flemish bonnet in the center of the picture. Linnig continued to paint themes of a social realist character in the 1870s, exhibiting a lost Pawnbroker in the Antwerp Salon of 1873 ([no. 664]; cf. Rops's Pawnbroker [Pl. 151]) and a Worker on Strike (location unknown) in the Antwerp Salon of 1870. He reverted to romantic subject matter with which he had begun his career later in the 1870s with Martin Luther Attending Plague Victims in Wittenberg (1877, location unknown).  

Part 3. Charles Hermans' At Dawn

The painting which signals the turning point between social realism of De Groux's generation and the next is At Dawn (Pl. 165; M.R.B.A., Brussels) by Charles Hermans (1838-1924), a Brussels artist who, while not an original member of the Société Libre, participated in an important exhibition of the group in 1872, three years before his decisive painting was unveiled at the Brussels Salon of 1875. As a young art student, Hermans had received early advice in painting from the
academicist Louis Gallait, but demonstrated his independent leanings by joining the second Atelier Saint-Luc, working alongside Dubois, Rops and Meunier. In 1857, the year in which the mature realist canvases of De Groux made their début in Brussels, Hermans was off to Paris, where he studied with Charles Gleyre, a traditional but open-minded teacher through whose studio impressionists Monet, Renoir, Sisley and Bazille would all pass. The young painter then spent several years in Rome, travelling to Spain as well. In 1866, Hermans began exhibiting scenes of Capuchin friars engaged in genre activities—bowling, dining, strolling, attending a burial—which are related iconographically to De Groux's scenes in the life of the clergy (Pl. 61). Hermans' entry in the Brussels Salon of 1872, Job Visited by his Friends (location unknown) shows that, like De Groux, he did not restrict himself to genre scenes, and the following year, his Sunday Visit to the Children's Ward at St. Pierre Hospital in Brussels (Pl. 166; Musée de Termonde), already anticipates certain qualities of At Dawn. In the former painting, pathetic, endearing depictions of sick children being visited by their parents and tended by nurses provide an array of sentimental, anecdotal episodes over which the spectator could linger, while a Crucifix hanging prominently on the wall above puts the scene in a Christian context, consistent with Hermans' previous themes—and with the works of De Groux as well. The large scale of the painting and the effective, painterly treatment of the effects of light entering through the window inspired Hermans' biographer to declare that, in the Sunday Visit, "le tableau de genre se haussait au niveau d'une page de l'histoire contemporaine, de l'histoire du peuple" and that the
work reveals an impressionistic technique. Neither of these two qualities is as noteworthy as Solvay would have us believe, since the genre-as-history concept had been introduced by Courbet decades earlier and by 1873, French impressionists had gone much further in experimentation with the break-up of color and brushwork than Hermans.

Both of these qualities are nevertheless very much in evidence in *At Dawn* of 1875, whose dimensions (248 x 317cm.) exceeded even the largest mature realist canvases of De Groux, and whose freely brushed forms—considerably firmer than the painterly preparatory sketch, however (Pl. 167)—are enveloped by the tonalities of early morning light. The painting is a far cry from the increasingly remote, detached objective viewpoints of the French impressionists, however, for Hermans, as in *Sunday Visit*, presents the spectator with a moralizing anecdote. In the center of his scene set at daybreak, a tipsy gentleman in tails and tophat has just stepped out of a cabaret and hesitates between two chicly attired prostitutes, one of whom motions with her fan toward a waiting coach around the corner while the other wraps her arm around his neck, trying to coax him to stay with her. Behind them, another courtesan and fashionably clad client cross the threshold. On the left, closest to the spectator, a group of miners on their way to work armed with shovels and picks eye the debauchery. In front, a wife turns her head toward the spectacle before her, which causes her cheeks to blush; as her young son at the far left glances up as well, the father casts his eyes to the ground, embarrassed and perplexed. A bouquet of flowers, present also in the sketch, lie scattered by the curb in the foreground next to a pile of refuse, symbolically
underscoring the sullied virtue and debauchery above.

As had been the case when Courbet's *Stonebreakers* was exhibited next to an arch-conservative academic history painting in the Brussels Salon of 1851, so too did spectators at the 1875 Salon take note of a romantic costume piece by Slingeneyer hanging on the wall opposite Hermans' work, a scene in the life of Luis de Camoens, the sixteenth century Portuguese poet.92 This time, however, it was the traditional painting which was the object of ridicule. Solvay reports that "Slingeneyer et les pieds de son Camoëns étaient un intarissable sujet de plaisanteries ... L'Aube d'Hermans, comme un drapeau vainqueur, se dressait rayonnante en face du Camoëns de Slingeneyer!"93 Critical reception of the painting was indeed favorable--Siret stated that upon seeing the work, "Je me croyais en présence de presque un chef d'oeuvre." Although objecting to the gray tonality in which the figures were enveloped, Siret excused it as an expression of the artist's temperament94 and defended the grand scale of the painting as appropriate to its moralizing content:

> On a blâmé les dimensions données au sujet: sans doute c'est une grandeur inusitée, mais je ne vois aucun mal à faire de la haute morale dans de vastes dimensions. Qui donc s'en plairait! Si dans nos hôpitaux, nos palais de justice, nos maisons de correction, on exécutait, dans de colossales proportions, des sujets destinés à moraliser, à guérir, à corriger, où serait le mal, s'il vous plaît?95

The latter commentary is very telling, for it explains why such a painting, despite its unorthodox size and, to a lesser extent, style, was acceptable to its audience, whereas Courbet's *Stonebreakers* or De Groux's 1857 paintings were not. Courbet's painting was a statement of fact, offering no moral commentary and De Groux's paintings were
similarly perplexing in their refusal to expound a clearly defined viewpoint. (Van Bemmel, the reader will recall, was uncertain as to whether De Groux's pilgrimages were criticizing religious superstition and Van Soust objected to De Groux's failure to inject a moralizing content into *The Coffee Mill*). Hermans himself explained his objective in painting *At Dawn* to present a contrast between virtue and vice by letting the facts speak for themselves; he even rejected an earlier plan to portray one of the prostitutes as a sister of the worker's wife since it would have been too "sentimental" and "romantic." And, consistent with statements by both De Groux and Alfred Stevens, Hermans firmly denied any socialist intentions:

> A ceux qui ne saisissent pas nettement la portée de l'Aube, je conseillerai de faire, à l'occasion, semblable promenade matinale car, dans ces conditions seules, le contraste entre le bien et le mal, le vice et la vertu, frappe l'esprit avec éloquence. J'ai donc reproduit la scène absolument comme elle a fait impression sur mon imagination, me contentant uniquement de rester aussi simple que possible. On a prétendu que mon tableau avait une portée socialiste. C'est une erreur. Je n'ai jamais songé à ennobrir l'ouvrier en montrant la décadence du débauché. Et c'est même pour cela que j'ai renoncé à mon idée première de faire l'une des grandes vicieuses sortant du cabaret particulier la soeur de laTHE. C'est une erreur. Je n'ai jamais songé à ennobrir l'ouvrier en montrant la décadence du débauché. Et c'est même pour cela que j'ai renoncé à mon idée première de faire l'une des grandes vicieuses sortant du cabaret particulier la soeur de la digné ouvrière marchant à côté de son mari.

> L'exécution de cette idée aurait, en effet, nécessité un jeu de physionomie qui me paraissait légèrement sentimental et trop romantique.98

Iconographically, *At Dawn* belongs to a tradition of depictions of profligate philanderers descending from prodigal son imagery and brothel scenes which date back to the sixteenth century and flourished in the seventeenth. The inclusion of a poverty-ridden unfortunate as a foil to the debauchés in order to render their moral depravity more striking had secured in 1836 in *The Gormandizer* of Viennese painter Jozef Dannhauser (Pl. 168; *Osterreichische Galerie*, Vienna) picturing
two dissolute gentlemen in the company of a pair of floozies guzzling wine and sumptuous food as a pathetic beggar emerges form the curtains at the far right, extending his hat in hopes of alms. The following year, in Belgium, Leys' Rich and Poor (Pl. 24) introduced a composition very much like Hermans', showing a family of paupers in the left foreground who contrast with a procession of elegantly clad aristocrats descending a flight of stairs to their right. If Hermans had Leys' prototype in mind when conceiving his own canvas—and, judging from the compositional similarity, it seems likely that he did—it seems that he looked upon his own canvas as a modernization of Leys' scene, small in size and set in the seventeenth century. Whereas Leys' painting is an exemplum virtutis, showing the high-born beauty exercising her noblesse oblige by giving alms to the beggar girl, Hermans' work suggests that, in comparison to their predecessors, the wealthy of late nineteenth century Belgium are a selfish, decadent breed.

Another reason for the paintings' success besides the overtly moralizing content was the fact that, while it dealt with lower-class subject matter, the center of attention is focused on the beautiful, fashionably-dressed women in the foreground, who answer the demand of Arthur Stevens and the Société Libre's statement of aims for modernity. Hermans' impressionistic rendering of these high-fashion beauties, in spontaneous, flirtatious poses brings them very close to Alfred Stevens' women, in fact. Nor should it be overlooked that Stevens himself, in The Soldiers of Vincennes, incorporated an attractive, well-dressed young woman in the foreground, where she provided an eye-pleasing contrast to the lower-class woman in rags behind. The favorable reception
of Stevens' painting, like Hermans', was attributable not only to his feminine flourish but the immediately comprehensible sentiment. De Groux's major painting of urban life, The Coffee Mill, on the other hand, offered no aesthetic relief from his paupers in terms of a more attractive foil, nor was an exemplum virtutis or any narrative anecdote present to fulfill spectators' expectations to be instructed or entertained. All they saw was the artist's stark vision of poverty as an unpleasant but inevitable fact of human existence.

In the final analysis, At Dawn confirms the conservative character of Belgian social realism in relation to the latest currents in contemporary French painting. Hermans' timid, halting exploitation of the new impressionistic technique serves not as a means to better convey the character of outdoor light in an unplanned composition, as it had Monet or Renoir. On the contrary, the Belgian painter's interest is not sunlight but rather his human subject matter, which he has selected and positioned so as to form the type of moralizing anecdote which the French impressionists specifically eschewed. Despite, or perhaps because of its retardataire qualities when viewed in a French context, the painting served at last to legitimize the use of contemporary subject matter in full-scale painting, signalling a belated victory for Courbet and De Groux, and a fulfillment of the objections of the Société Libre, which by this time had dissolved and was replaced in 1875 by another avant-garde circle, La Chrysalide.

Solvay, again overstating his case, perhaps, rhapsodized in retrospect over the significance of Hermans' work for the future of Belgian painting, noting the prophetic implications of its title:
C'était bien une aube, en effet l'aube de l'Art nouveau. Elle apportait la formule de la vraie peinture d'histoire: l'histoire de notre temps, l'histoire de tous les jours. Celle-là seule était possible. Vivent les vivants! A bas les morts! Qui donc prétendait que les sujets modernes, réservés jusqu'ici à la peinture de genre, ne comportaient par les dimensions de la grande peinture? Pourquoi un homme d'aujourd'hui, habillé comme vous et moi, ne pourrait-il pas être représenté grandeur nature, aussi bien qu'un personnage attifé d'un costume de théâtre? Et chacun jurait de ne plus peindre que des scènes de la vie ordinaire, sur des toiles d'au moins cinq mètres sur trois ...

Solvay's final observation about the proliferation of large-scale scenes of everyday life painted in the wake of Hermans' canvas is worth noting. If At Dawn signals the end of the era of social realism launched in 1848, it also marks the beginning of the first of the new waves of social realist imagery in Belgian painting which flourished during the last decades of the nineteenth century and early part of twentieth and are wedded to impressionist, symbolist and expressionist currents from abroad.
NOTES


2 Alternate spellings of the Count's name as "Aissche" or "Eische" are found elsewhere.

3 Lemonnier, cited in Hymans, L'art du XIXe, p. 223.

4 Hymans, p. 224.

5 Van Soust, p. 105.


8 G. Hermine Marius, Dutch Painting in the Nineteenth Century, trans. by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (London, 1908), pp. 172-4. See also Thieme-Becker, vol. 31, p. 535. My thanks to Mr. Sartiliot for informing me that Steffens was a De Groux pupil.

9 Van Soust, p. 106.


11 Exhibited the following year in the Ghent Salon of 1869 (no. 36).


13 Les orphelins, Ghent Salon of 1853 (no. 228).

14 Brussels Salon of 1869 (no. 135).

15 Cf. also Bource's motif of the smiling child ignorant of the tragedy, banging her spoon on the table and a painting by a Greuze follower, p.-A. Wille fils, The Last Moments of a Dying Wife (c.1785, Musée Municipal, Cambrai) wherein a little girl plays her drum at the foot of her mother's deathbed. Wille's theme of the dying wife can also be compared to De Groux's Drunkard of 1853.

16 A biographical sketch of Bource is found in Gustave de Graef, Nos artistes anversois (Antwerp, 1898), pp. 33-6. Other unlocated paintings of fishermen and/or family crisis include La femme inquiète (Antwerp Salon of 1861, no. 106), Le retour du pêcheur; côte de
Holland (Antwerp Salon of 1861, no. 108), Le départ du pêcheur d'un voyage en Laponie (Antwerp Salon of 1861, no. 105) and Jours de tristesse (Ghent Salon of 1865, no. 66). Le retour (1875), picturing a happy reunion of fishermen with their families, is found in the K.M.S.K., Antwerp.

Leclercq's literary efforts, including approximately thirty novels, began in 1857. His Avocat Richard (1858), a study of life in the Belgian provinces, was modelled upon Champfleury's Bourgeois de Molinchart. Subsequent works championed the peasant and proletarian classes. See Charlier, "Les Débuts du Réalisme," in Histoire illustré (Brussels, 1958), pp. 294-5.

Descent de la Croix (Brussels Salon of 1848), Une famille Huguenote pour suivre (Antwerp Salon of 1849, no. 341), both unlocated.

Le croquis (no. 425), Les amoureux novices (no. 426). Les joueurs de quilles (no. 427), Un coin de bruyère (no. 428), all unlocated.

Leclercq's other entry was Mère et nourrice (no. 670, location unknown). Both paintings were accompanied in the catalogue by verses from Leclercq's poem L'amour maternel.

Van Soust, p. 107.

Ibid., p. 108.


Joly, p. 390; Van Soust, p. 108.

Joly, p. 390.


Van Soust, p. 105.

Schets uit het Werkmansleven (1847) and Een zonderlinge Bedelares (1851); see De Pillecyn, p. 140.

Joly, p. 387.

"Elle n'exprime, à part le personnage du médecin, beau de vérité dans le recueillement de la science, qu'un sentiment: la souffrance; mais cette expression est multiple et varie suivant la nature du mal, le tempérament de l'individu ou son énergie morale.
Les airs de tête, toujours d'accord avec les attitudes, témoignent d'observations conscientes." Van Soust, p. 105.

31 Van Soust, p. 105.


33 Médaille d'or, Exposition de Cambrai 1859 and Médaille de vermeil, Exposition de Rouen, 1860, listed in the catalogue of the Brussels Salon of 1866.

34 Thieme-Becker, vol. 23, p. 72.

35 According to Leclercq, De Groux remained active up to the very day he died. "Il a travaillé jusqu'à son dernier jour. La veille de sa mort alors qu'il n'avait plus que le souffle il se traînait encore devant son chevalet, et de ses yeux vitreux, déjà hagards, il cherchait quelque place où appliquer une touche de sa main débile." Leclercq, L'art et les artistes, p. 220.

36 Roelandts, pp. 4-5, in discussing the origins of the group, presents evidence which dates the founding anywhere from 1866 to 1868.


38 Quoted in Hymans, L'art du XIXe, pp. 185-6.


40 For a lively account of the Atelier Saint-Luc, see Hymans and Rousseau, Le Diable à Bruxelles, vol. 2, pp. 203-225.


42 Other members of the second Atelier Saint-Luc were Ernest Slingeneyer, Désiré Lap, Léopold Speckaert, Amédée Bourson, Armand Dandoy, Jean Venel, Alphonse de Walshe, Hector Goddyn, Napoléon Hiel and one British member, Henri Burowes; Du Jardin, p. 186.


44 Not pictured in Lambrich's group portrait is Hippolyte Boulenger (1837-1874), the pioneer of realist landscapes in Belgium who never joined the Société Libre. Upon moving to the Tervuren forest surrounding Brussels in 1860 to better capture the spontaneity of nature

Verwee (1838-95) specialized in paintings of cows, making his début in this genre in the Brussels Salon of 1857. His works reveal the influence of Barbizon painter Constant Troyon as well as seventeenth century "little masters" of Holland, Albert Cuyp and Paul Potter.

See Roelandts, p. 61.

The artists in Lambrichs' portrait are arranged as follows:
upper row (left to right)—E. Lambrichs, L. Artan, F. Rops, J. Raymaeckers, J.-B. Meunier, E. Smits, T. Baron, H. de la Charlerie; bottom row (left to right)—E. Huberti, F. Boudin, C. De Groux, C. Van Camp, F. Bouré, A. Verwee, C. Meunier and L. Dubois.

See, for example, Lemonnier, L’école belge, p. 77.

Most of Lambrichs' other works bear titles of innocuous-sounding genre scenes, such as Jeune coquette (Antwerp Salon of 1858), Le chant de Noël (Ghent Salon of 1856), Echo! ... écho ... (Ghent Salon of 1862) and Confidence (Brussels Salon of 1866), all lost.

Arthur Stevens, De la Modernité dans l'art: Lettre à M. Jean Rousseau (Brussels, 1868).

Ibid., p. 8.

Baudelaire took up residence in Brussels in 1864 in the hopes of finding a more receptive audience for his writings than he had in Paris, but the frustration of such hopes prompted a bitter attack on Belgium in his book Pauvre Belgique of 1866, found in Œuvres complètes de Baudelaire, vol. 2 (Paris, 1955), pp. 803-956. See Maurice Kunel, Baudelaire en Belgique (Liège, 1944).

"C'est une espèce d'idole, stupide peut-être, mais éblouissante, enchanteresse, qui tient les destinée et les volontés suspendues à ses regards." Ibid., p. 12.

Ibid., p. 17.

Ibid., p. 21.
See Roelandts, pp. 50-56; see also J. Rousseau, "L'exposition de l'Hôtel d'Assche," L'Art Libre (April 1, 1872), p. 113.

See Lemmonnier's Salon de 1863 (Brussels, 1863) and Salon of 1866 (Brussels, 1866).

Lemmonnier, "le Salon, L'Art Libre (September 1872), pp. 246-7.

L'Art Libre (June 15, 1872), p. 198.

L'Art Libre (December 15, 1871), (January 1, 1872) and (January 15, 1872).


Ibid.

Hood [sic], "Les Biographes et les Biographies," L'art Libre (January 1, 1872), pp. 24-6.

Hout, "Le Peintre d'Histoire," Ibid (February 1, March 1, 1872).


Hout, "Du Procédé," Ibid. (September 15, October 1, 1872).


Ibid.

Uylenspiegel, no. 16 (May 18, 1856), p. 3.

De Villebelle, p. 7.

Députation des travailleurs auprès de l'Autorité communale (Antwerp Salon of 1852, no. 242); Les dégusteurs (Brussels Salon of 1854, no. 475).

Hütt, p. 100.

See Max Dellis, "Contribution à la connaissance de l'oeuvre lithographié de Félicien Rops," Le livre et l'estampe, XXI (1975), 7-24 and XXII (1976), 7-30, 154-65. See also Sandra Haller-Olsen,

75 Uylenspiegel, no. 35 (September 28, 1856), p. 5.


77 Uylenspiegel, no. 19 (June 7, 1857), p. 5.

78 My dating is based on a letter written by Rops in which he discussed the lithograph, reprinted in L'Art Libre (April 15, 1872); the letter is excerpted in Roelandts, Société Libre, p. 67.

79 Ibid.

80 Most of Rops' paintings are freely brushed landscapes and seascape studies. See M. Exteens, Félicien Rops, peintre (Brussels, 1933).


82 A Buveuse d'Absinthe, probably the lithograph in question, was exhibited in the Brussels Salon of 1869 (no. 1465), whence my dating, but since Rops did several versions of this subject, the attributed date is not certain.

83 On De Braekeller, see G. Van Zype, Henri De Braekeleer (Antwerp, 1923).

84 See Gorges Marlier, Jan Stobbaerts, 1838–1914 (Brussels, 1944).

85 Brigands partageant leur butin (Antwerp Salon of 1861 [no. 739], location unknown).

86 On Linnig, see Paul André, Le peintre Willem Linnig, Junior (Brussels, 1907).

87 Roelandts, Société Libre, p. 81.

88 Le Conteur (Brussels Salon of 1866); Moines à l'enterrement, Moines jouant aux boules (Antwerp Salon of 1867); Moines à la promenade (Ghent Salon of 1868); Scène d'intérieur--le Réfectoire (Brussels Salon of 1869), locations unknown.

89 On De Groux's scenes of priests and clergymen, see Ch. III, n. 9. Dubois and Meunier also painted scenes of priests, monks and nuns in the 1860s.


Solvay, 50.

"Oui, le tableau est d'un tonalité grise désespérante et d'aucuns très nombreux se diraient combien cette toile serait harmonieuse et si belle si cette tonalité pouvait tout d'une pièce hausser un peu de force. Malgré cela, si l'auteur ne le peut, si son tempérament est ainsi fait, acceptons-le, de peur de gâter en le désirant autrement." Siret, p. 139.

Ibid.


Van Soust, L'école belge, pp. 99-100.

De Taeye, p. 396.

An early example of such debauchery scenes is Quentin Metsys' Ill-Assorted Lovers (c. 1485-1530, collection Poultales, Paris).

On Dannhauser's genre scenes, see Immel, pp. 207-12.

Certain members of the Société Libre, like Verwée, Baron C. Meunier and Artan, joined the Chrysalide as well. See Roelandts, Société Libre, p. 83.

Solvay, p. 65.
EPILOGUE:

THE LEGACY OF DE GROUX IN BELGIAN PAINTING

After 1875, Belgian painters turned again and again to images of the lower classes that bear the unmistakable imprint of De Groux's canvases of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Styles varied, usually according to the influence of foreign avant-garde movements, but focus on the hard life of the Belgian peasantry and proletariat remained constant. Often, reminiscences of specific paintings by De Groux recur, but in general, works of virtually all of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century artists in question retained vestiges of De Groux's monumentalizing stylizations of his figures and, more often than not, infusions of the deep-rooted Christian spirituality and pathos with which he imbued his depictions of the poor.

Of the Belgian artists who painted the poor after 1875, the one who was most closely related to De Groux biographically was Constantin Meunier, a student, like De Groux, of Navez, a fellow member of the Société Libre and, at one time, a collaborator with De Groux on stained-glass window designs. ¹ Beginning in the 1850s, Meunier exhibited paintings of monks and nuns in convents and hospitals not unlike Hermans' Sunday Visit and scenes of the clergy by De Groux, but it was not until 1881, upon visiting mines in the Borinage region
and factories in Cockerill that he turned to the imagery for which he is best known, scenes of miners and factory workers, a theme introduced by Hermans in *At Dawn*. Subject matter involving industrial labor is notably absent in the oeuvre of De Groux and the social realists of his generation and reflects the ever-growing expansion of large-scale industry in Belgium during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Meunier’s tendency to depict figures in a heroic manner, muscular and monumentally posed in both painting and sculpture, the latter medium for which he is perhaps best remembered, is a portent of the growing militancy of Belgian workers, who finally organized to form the socialist **Parti Ouvrier Belge** in 1886 after a series of violent strikes. A painting like the **Mining Triptych** (Pl. 169; n.d., location unknown), painted with the open brushwork and open-air lighting effects of impressionism, nevertheless maintains De Groux’s tendency to outline figures and encase subject matter in compositions recalling religious prototypes—Meunier uses a triptych format here. Nevertheless, Meunier’s proud, hulking miners have become objects of strength and resistance, a far cry from De Groux’s weak, submissive paupers.

**Emile Claus** (1849-1924), the painter in Belgium who comes closest to French impressionism in style and technique, exhibits, in his **Weeders in Flanders** (Pl. 170; 1887, K.M.S.K., Antwerp), affinities with the academic impressionism of French painters like Léon L’Hermitte or Bastien-Lepage, who also specialized in peasant scenes with a more meticulous, traditionally modelled style than Monet or Renoir. Claus’ painting nevertheless diverges, in its remote
viewpoint, objectivity and open-air sweep, from De Groux's close-up views and sorrow-ridden expressions. On the other hand, Frans van Leemputten (1850-1914) comes very close to De Groux's flattened and strongly contoured figures style, saddened, introspective countenances, grey overcast skies and earthy palette even while working within an impressionistic idiom (Pl. 171). His concentration on peasants in the Campine region also includes the theme of religious processions so dear to De Groux.

The early works of James Ensor (1860-1949) executed in a loosely-brushed modified impressionism, preceding his expressionistic distortions of later years, include paintings and drawings of social realist figures such as lamp-cleaners, chimney sweeps, ragpickers and ragamuffins. One work in particular, The Drinkers (Pl. 172; 1908-10, collection André Cuvelier) descends directly from De Groux's Cabaret Scene of 1868 (Pl. 104), with the man slumped over the table in a drunken stupor on the right common to both works. Ensor's poster in the rear, announcing a public sale of a farm ("Verkooping—Hofstede to Steen") echoes De Groux's posters in the rear of the Coffee Mill also advertising real estate sales and providing an ironic counterpoint to the hopeless poverty of the foreground figures. In his Drinkers, Ensor drops De Groux's pathetic, anecdotal element of mother and daughter summoning the drunkard back home, letting the slice-of-life stupor of the two figures speak for itself. De Groux's expressively sombre shadows are also replaced by bright sunlight entering through the window, but the broken brushwork, which served as the French impressionists' vehicle for rendering the optical break-up of light
and color, is used by Ensor to suggest a climate of creeping decay, both physical and moral.

Reminiscences of De Groux's *Grace Before the Meal* (Pl. 92) are found in the central position of the triptych *The Chalk Vendors* (Pl. 173; 1882-3, M.R.B.A., Brussels) by Léon Frédéric (1856-1940), whose paintings, executed in a tightly finished style which nevertheless adheres to impressionism's open-air tonalities, forms a transition to symbolism. *The Chalk Vendors* is a typical example of Frédéric's extensive series of Ardennes peasant scenes in which De Groux's emphasis on pious observance of religious ritual and continuity of family generations and customs is inflated to the life-size proportions and rendered with the *pleine-airisme* introduced in Hermans' *At Dawn.* The two wings of the triptych--emphasizing once again the artist's religious conception of his subject--show the family setting out in the morning from their village (left) and arriving toward Brussels by evening (right) in composition that recall De Groux's numerous scenes of returns from fairs or pilgrimages. The noon meal in the central section takes place on the outskirts of an industrial cityscape on the horizon, calling attention to a socioeconomic critical sense sharper than De Groux's. But besides Frédéric's grasp of the social injustices wrought by creeping industrialization and urbanization--he ironically pictures Brussels' colossal new Palais de Justice as a chimeric landmark toward which the destitute family is headed in the Evening panel--the overall conception of his triptych involves symbolist cosmology which far transcends mid-century social realism: morning, noon and night take on symbolic associations with ages of man,
stages of civilization and states of divine dispensation. During his later years, Frédéric drops his social realist content in favor of total fantasy imagery. His River (1890-9, M.R.B.A., Brussels) for example, while assuming the huge size and triptych format of the Chalk Vendors, consists of a crowded sea of nude children and vegetation.

Jakob Smits (1855-1928) was in the forefront of artists who reacted against the objectivity of impressionism in the interests of seeking the deeper spiritual truth and pictorial freedom found in symbolism. An early work like Father of the Condemned (Pl. 174; 1901, M.R.B.A., Brussels) shows its lower-class subject, emaciated, introspective and sorrowful à la De Groux, engulfed in dark, gloomy shadows. Smits lived as a recluse in the tiny village of Achterbos in the Campine region, where he observed and painted its peasants in a dark, heavily-encrusted style which came to involve the types of formal simplification and distortions which make Smits a precursor of the Flemish expressionists. In a typical work such as The Symbol of the Campine (Pl. 175; M.R.B.A., Brussels), Smits inserts a supernatural manifestation of the pity of peasants praying at the table as in De Groux's Grace, with a figure of Christ himself seated in their midst.7

While Smits worked in isolation, a group of Belgian symbolists in the late nineteenth century congregated in the small Flemish community of Laethem-Saint-Martin to work in harmony in simple rural surroundings. This first school of Laethem-Saint-Martin artists active from 1893-1903 and sometimes referred to as "the Belgian Pont-Aven," was the first of two waves of artists to inhabit the community, the second
settling after World War I in 1918 and composed of expressionists.\textsuperscript{8} The symbolist group, linked with the mysterious poetry of Maurice Maeterlinck, carried the formal stylizations introduced by De Groux almost forty years earlier to their ultimate extremes, still preserving the focus upon the peasant as a pious, spiritual being close to the soil. The style of the Laethem symbolist painters such as Gustave van de Woestyne (1881-1947) and Albert Servaes (1883-1966) resembles the early cloisonniste works of Gauguin. Volume and space are flattened until they are two-dimensional surface patterns and contours are schematized to the point of becoming abstract linear arabesques. 

De Woestyne's \textit{Sunday Afternoon} (Pl. 176; n.d., M.R.B.A., Brussels) reduces its figures and barnyard setting to flat patterns with iconic profiles, and like Smits, fuses the mystic and the mundane by means of the inclusion of a Virgin and Child in the foreground outside the pigsty. The incorporation of the Flemish primitives' union of the sacred and secular was a conscious device of De Woestyne, and traces of other Northern Renaissance characteristics permeate the works of De Woestyne's colleagues as well, who yearned, like De Groux, for means of expressing the naïve, mystical faith rooted in the Flemish past for centuries. Servaes, in \textit{Communicants Going to Church} (Pl. 177; 1920, K.M.S.K., Antwerp) enhances the mystic solemnity of De Groux's processional theme not only by the schematization and flattening of his figures but by their attenuation as well—another characteristic of his Flemish artistic forebears. The final step in figurial elongation and emaciation—a major feature of De Groux's "faux air gothique"—is found in the work of Georges Minne (1866-1941),
a Laethem sculptor whose groups of long, boney youths in rapt poses, absorbed in trance-like states (Pl. 178) are the the twentieth century descendants of De Groux's attenuated, introspective unfortunates.

Art produced by the second expressionist generation of Laethem-Saint-Martin artists after the war contrasts with that of their symbolist predecessors in its robust assertiveness, but in the work of at least one member, Constant Permeke (1886-1952), the iconographic focus on the Flemish peasant remains constant even though a different kind of stylistic treatment is involved. Permeke's Woman Cutting Bread (Pl. 179; n.d., collection Watson, New York) shows the obvious influence of cubism in the fragmentation and geometricizing of form, but the massive strength exuded by the figure betrays the legacy not of De Groux's figures but rather the Jordaensian stalwarts of Stobbaerts.

It is the art of an earlier expressionist, however, which, more than any other painter treated, carries on De Groux's legacy most extensively. Eugène Laermans (1864-1940), deaf from childhood, devoted his art almost exclusively to scenes of the Flemish poor beginning in the 1890s. Certain of such themes seem to be direct descendants of specific De Groux paintings. Laermans' Drunkard (Pl. 180; 1898, M.R.B.A., Brussels) for example, stems from De Groux's Drunkard of 1853 (Pl. 45), and The Beggars (Pl. 181; 1900, formerly collection Hottat), a mass of peasants huddled around a church, their backs turned toward the spectator, recalls such works as the Paupers' Bench (Pl. 52) and the Antwerp Pilgrimage (Pl. 181). Both works show Laermans' expressively angular distortion of form and archaizing flatness, qualities
seen to a less exaggerated extent in De Groux, whose style was of less immediate importance to Laermans than that of Bruegel—although an awareness of De Groux's Gothicizing tendencies may very well have prompted Laermans to seek his own archaic mentor. While Laermans painted many scenes of religious ritual, like De Groux, as well as encasing secular themes dealing with the lower classes in triptychs, Laermans, unlike most of his earlier nineteenth century predecessors, was a committed socialist. Many of his paintings are consequently devoted to proletarian masses discussing politics, striking (Pl. 182), leaving the factory or emigrating. Laermans' depictions of isolated figures in village settings form a marked contrast to his huge crowd scenes which reflect the continuing upheaval of lower-class life brought about by increasing industrialization and urbanization at the end of the century. But whether the poor of Belgium are shown isolated in private crises or prayers in the canvases of De Groux or are subsumed in the anonymous masses of Laermans, the governing emotional keynote in both cases was consistently--and unfortunately--misery.

Viewed in relation to the consistent current in Belgian (or Flemish, Walloon and Burgundian) painting in which the focus falls on contemporary society--particularly its lower classes--De Groux's paintings indeed occupy an important chapter. The immediate purpose of this study, however, has been to examine De Groux's central position in that particular phase of Belgian social realism initiated by the decisive Salon of 1848 containing Joseph Stevens' *Morning in Brussels*, at which time De Groux's social vision had not yet been realized, and concluded, appropriately, with another daybreak scene, Hermans' At
Dawn, exhibited five years after De Groux's death. Between that time, De Groux succeeded in satisfying the need of the young political entity of Belgium for an art which recalled the glorious, centuries-old artistic tradition of her native cities and regions but also acknowledged the advanced avant-garde currents emanating from Europe's cultural capital, Paris.

This was a delicate problem, for Belgian artists realized that a rejection of the most advanced French artistic currents implied provincialism, but they were also wary of surrendering their national cultural identity. De Groux's paintings of the lower classes of his own land and time period were born after a decisive exposure to the art of yet another country, Germany, in a city where paintings of social and political abuses of the poor were perhaps more highly concentrated than anywhere else, but which was also the home of a monumental artistic style to which we know De Groux was receptive and which was academic, idealistic and stylistically archaic. De Groux's subsequent paintings of the poor in Belgium succeeded in calling attention to the indigenous realist current of his own country's art—bowing to the seventeenth century little masters in his paintings before 1857 and to the Flemish primitives afterward—while simultaneously producing the types of unembellished depictions of contemporary lower-class life, eventually on a monumental scale, of a quality which allowed Belgian painting to hold its own in relation to the avant-garde programatic realists of France.

But just as De Groux's realist canvases make only certain concessions to French realism in the formal sense, so too does he pull
the reigns on the governing principle of French realism, especially as it makes the transition to impressionism: objectivity. De Groux's paintings never abandon that sadness, fatalism and spiritualizing, mystic introspective quality which was rooted both in the romantic movement in which he grew up and which was engrained in his country's culture, from the art of the Flemish primitives to socially conscious Flemish literature of the 1840s. After passing through De Groux, this pessimistic current continues in the works of the Belgian exponents of one of the most objective of all movements, impressionism, resulting in canvases laden with a pessimism (Van Leemputten, Ensor), cosmologic fatalism (Frédéric) or simply moralistic sermonizing (Hermans) which radically diverges from the aims of true impressionism as practiced in France. When symbolism and expressionism again reasserted primacy of the subjective, internal, nonempiric world, once more, a generation of Belgian artists turned to De Groux as mentor, discovering, like him, that the recourse to the art of Belgium's collective past provided the means for the most personal individual expression, of which the compassionate, sensitive depiction of another centuries-old, unchanging remnant of Belgium's past—the pious poor—was also an integral part.
NOTES

1Walther Gensler, Constantin Meunier (Bielefeld and Leipzig, 1907).

2On Claus, see A. Sauton, Un prince du luminisme, Emile Claus (Brussels, 1946).


4See, e.g., NGBK, Arbeit und Alltag, p. 94.

5This is a replica of a painting originally done in 1883.

6Cf. Frédéric's Meal after the Funeral (1886, M.S.K., Ghent), The Sower (1887, collection Legrand), Ages of the Peasants series (1887, M.R.B.A., Brussels) and Ages of the Workers triptyc (1893-7, Jeu de Paum, Paris), all reproduced in NGBK, Arbeit und Alltag, pp. 248-57; on Frédéric, see L. Jottrand, Léon Frédéric (Antwerp, 1950).

7On Smits, see G. Marlier, Jakob Smits (Brussels, 1931); M.R.B.A., Brussels, Jakob Smits (exhibition catalogue), (Brussels, 1971) and W. Vanbeselaere, Jakob Smits (Kasterlee, 1976).

8See Paul Haesaerts, L'Ecole de Laethem Saint-Martin (Brussels, 1945) and André de Ridder, Laethem Saint-Martin: Colonie d'Artistes (Brussels and Paris, 1945).

9See François Maret, Eugène Laermans (Antwerp, 1959).

10See, e.g., The Emigrants (1894, K.M.S.K., Antwerp).

11The Village Politicians (1890, private collection).
APPENDIX A

Works of Charles de Groux exhibited in Belgian Salons and international expositions

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| Brussels Salon of 1854 | no. 195. Les fainéants  
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| Exposition Universelle, Brussels, 1855 | no. 284. Le dernier adieu  
no. 285. L'enfant malade  
no. 286. La promenade |
| Ghent Salon of 1856 | no. 137. Colin-maillard |
| Brussels Salon of 1857 | no. 238. Pèlerinage à saint Guidon  
no. 239. Scène d'hiver  
no. 240. Pèlerinage à Dieghem |
| Brussels Salon of 1860 | Mort de Charles-Quint  
Le Sermon de François Junius  
Le retour du conscrit |
| Antwerp Salon of 1861 | no. 295. Le bénédicité |
| Universal Exposition, London, 1862 | no. 10. Charles-Quint recevant le viatique ...  
no. 11. La séparation |
| Brussels Salon of 1866 | no. 197. Le mercredi des cendres |
| Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1867 | L'aumône (L'hospitalité)  
La visite du médecin  
Mort de Charles-Quint  
Les bourgeois de Calais devant Edouard III |
| Ghent Salon of 1868 | no. 246. Le mercredi des cendres  
no. 247. Scène de cabaret |
| Brussels Salon of 1869 | no. 331. Le pèlerinage  
no. 332. La séparation |
| Ghent Salon of 1871 | no. 294. Les bourgeois de Calais devant Edouard III |
Ghent Salon of 1871

no. 295. Id. (réduction)
no. 296. Le départ du conscrit
APPENDIX B

Works of Gustave Courbet exhibited in Belgian Salons

| Brussels Salon of 1851 | no. 238. Les casseurs de pierres |
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| Brussels Salon of 1860 | Les demoiselles de la Seine |
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| Brussels Salon of 1866 | no. 114. Femme au perroquet |
| Brussels Salon of 1866 | no. 115. Femme irlandaise |
| Ghent Salon of 1868 | no. 1022. Proudhon et sa famille |
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| Ghent Salon of 1868 | no. 1024. La source de la Loue |
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CHARLES DE GROUX AND SOCIAL REALISM
IN BELGIAN PAINTING, 1848-1875
VOLUME II
DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
David Stark, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1979

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Adviser
Department of the History of Art
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Plate 84

C. De Groux, La prière du matin

c. 1857-70

M.B.A., Tournai
Plate 85

C. De Groux, Procession des rameaux, XVIe siècle

c. 1870

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 86

C. De Groux (design) and J.-B. Capronnier (execution), Transportation sononelle des hosties miraculeuses

Tenth window, Cathédrale Saint-Michel, Brussels

completed 1864

Stained glass
Plate 87

C. De Groux, *Sainte Barbe*, study for window of Cathédrale Saint-Michel, Brussels

Pencil on paper

Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels
Plate 88

A. Dirks, Der zerbrochene Suppentopf

1836

Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Düsseldorf
Plate 89

Rembrandt van Rijn, Christ Preaching ("La Petite Tombe")

c. 1652

British Museum, London
Plate 90

C. De Groux, La mort de Charles Quint
1860

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 90a

C. De Groux, François Junius prêchant secrètement la Réforme à Anvers

1860

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 91

C. De Groux, *Les bourgeois de Calais devant Edouard III*

c. 1870

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 92

C. De Groux, Le Bénédicité

Antwerp Salon of 1861

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 93

C. De Groux (design) and J.-B. Capronnier (execution), Le juif Jonathas qui râille les saintes Hosties

Second window, Cathédrale Saint-Michel, Brussels
completed 1870
Stained glass
Plate 94

C. De Groux, Study for Le Bénédicité

c. 1861

Pencil on paper

M.R.B.A, Tournai
Plate 95

C. De Groux, Study for Le Bénédicité
c. 1861

Charcoal on paper

Formerly collection Delacre

(M. Delacre, "Le dessin dans l'oeuvre de Charles De Groux," Gand artistique, 3 [March, 1924], p. 59)
Plate 96

C. De Groux, Study for *Le Bénédicité*

c. 1861

M.S.K., Ghent
Plate 97

C. De Groux, Study for Le Bénédicité

c. 1861

Private collection, Brussels
Plate 98

C. De Groux, Study for Le Bénédicté

C. 1861

Pencil on paper

M.B.A., Tournai
Plate 99

J.-B. Lambrecht, Paysans attablés

before 1731

Location unknown

(P. Fierens, et al., L'art en Belgique du Moyen Âge à nos jours [Brussels, 1939], p. 396)
Plate 100

M. De Latour-Simons, *Ontbijt op de hoeve*

before 1834

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 101

V. Vervloet, Le Bénédicité

Lithograph after lost painting

(La Renaissance, 14 [1852], facing p. 174)
Plate 102

L. Le Nain (after), Un repas de famille

c. 1642

Musée municipal de Laon
Plate 103

J.-F. Millet, L'angélus

c. 1858-9

Louvre, Paris
Plate 104

C. De Groux, Scène de cabaret

Ghent Salon of 1868

Private collection, Brussels
Plate 105

C. De Groux, L'ivrogne

c. 1857-70

Watercolor

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 106

C. De Groux, Le retour de l'ivrogne

c. 1870

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 107

C. De Groux, Les enfants pauvres or L'aumône

c. 1857-70

Formerly collection Lequine

(I.R.P.A.)
that it reached almost to the ground

Plate 108

Anonymous, Winter dress

Fashion plate from Le Follet (1847)
Plate 109

C. De Groux, Visite au malade

c. 1857-70

Crédit communal belge, Brussels
Plate 110

C. De Groux, Study for *Visite du malade*

c. 1857-70

Charcoal and pencil on paper

M.B.A., Tournai
Plate 111

C. De Groux, La Charité

c. 1857-70

Formerly collection Clarembeaux, Brussels

(C. Lemonnier, L'école belge de peinture, 1830-1905 [Brussels, 1906])
Plate 112

E. Dujardin, Frontispiece from Zetternam's Mr. Luchtervelde

(Antwerp, 1848)
Plate 113

O. Tassaet, Pauvres enfants

1855

Etching after lost painting

(B. Prost, Octave Tassaert [Paris, 1886], p. 47)
Plate 114

C. De Groux, Les mendients

c. 1857-70

Formerly collection Clarembeaux, Brussels

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 115

C. Baugniet, Visite à la veuve

1881

Musée communal, Anderlecht
Plate 116

C. De Groux, L'Aumône

c. 1857-70

Collection Delporte, Brussels
Plate 117

C. De Groux, Les glaneuses

c. 1857-70

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 118

C. De Groux, Les glaneuses

c. 1857-70

Formerly collection De Craene

(I.B.P.A.)
Plate 119

J.-F. Millet, Les glaneuses

1857

Louvre, Paris
Plate 120

J. Breton, Le rappel des glaneuses (Artois)

1859

Musée d'Arras
Plate 121

C. De Groux, "Femme en prière"

c. 1854

M.B.A., Tournai
Plate 122

C. De Groux, *Dans l'église*

c. 1857-70

Location unknown

(P. Colin, *La peinture belge depuis 1830* [Brussels, 1930], p. 116)
Plate 123

C. De Groux, *Le baiser des reliques*

c. 1857-70

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 124

C. De Groux, *Le mercredi des cendres*

1866

Museum Wuyt-Van Campen en Baron Caroly, Lier
Plate 125

H. Leys, De mis is uit

1866

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 126

C. De Groux, De Bedevaart

c. 1853-6

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 127

C. De Groux, *La vente des cierges pendant le pèlerinage au pays de Caux*

c. 1857-70

Formerly collection Barella

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 128

G. De Groux, Les apprêts de la procession or Les marchands de rameaux

C. 1857-70

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 129

C. De Groux, Dimanche des rameaux

1857

Collection Van Zuylen, Liège
Plate 150

C. De Groux, *Le retour du pèlerinage*

c. 1853-4

M.R.B.A., Brussels, missing
Plate 131

C. De Groux, La famille

c. 1855-7

Watercolor

Musée d'Ixelles
Plate 132

C. De Groux, *Le départ du conscrit*

c. 1870

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 133

C. De Groux, Le départ du conscrit

c. 1870

Collection Metsers, Brussels
Plate 134

C. De Groux, Le retour du conscrit

Brussels Salon of 1860

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 135

Anonymous, *Départ et Retour du Conscrit*

c. 1815-48

Popular print

(G. Böhmer, *Die Welt des Biedermeier* [Munich, 1968], p. 131)
Plate 136

H. De Coene, Gebrekkige, Familieleden en Knap in Uniform

c. 1800-10

Lithograph

Museum Vleeshuis, Antwerp
Plate 137

J. Geirnaert, Officier rentrant dans ses foyers

c. 1810-31

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 138

E. Dujardin, Illustration from Conscience's *De Loteling*

(Antwerp, 1850)
Plate 139
C. De Croux, *La Séparation*
Brussels Salon of 1869
M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 140
C. De Groux, *La récolte perdue*
1870
M.B.A., Tournai
Plate 141

J. Becker von Worms, Landleute vom Gewitter Überrascht

1840

Nationalgalerie, Berlin
Plate 142

C. De Groux, *L'expulsion*

c. 1870

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 143

C. De Groux, La visite du médecin

c. 1867

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 144

C. De Groux, De Weduwe (Bezoek aan het Kerkhof)

c. 1857-70

Crayon on paper

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 145

L. Gallait, De Angelukkige Moeder

1843

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 146

C. De Groux, *Consolation à la veuve*

1862

Watercolor

Private collection, Brussels
Plate 147

J.-B. Greuze, La veuve et son curé

c. 1784

Hermitage, Leningrad
Plate 147a
A. Stevens, *La consolation*
1857
Private collection
Plate 148

H. Bource, *Un triste retour*

Antwerp Salon of 1867

M.B.A., Liège

(Engraving in *Salon de Gand*, 1868 [Ghent, 1868])
Plate 149

H. Bource, *La fatale nouvelle*

1869

Musée communal, Anderlecht
Plate 150

A. Schroedter, Die Trauernden Lohgerber

1832

Städesches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main
Plate 151

R. Jordan, Der Tod des Lotsen

1836

Altonaer Museum, Hamburg
Plate 152

E. Lambrichs, Les Membres de la Société Libre des Beaux-Arts

c. 1871

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 153

L. Dubois, Coin d'une table de jeu or La roulette

1860

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 154

Gerlier, Les Casinos

Lithograph in Uylenspiegel (May 18, 1856)
Plate 155

J.P. Hasenclever, Das Lesekabinett

1843

Städisches Museum, Remscheid
Plate 156

F. Rops ("Vriel"), *Actualités*

Lithograph in *Uylenspiegel* (September 28, 1856)
Plate 157

F. Rops, *Menus Propos*

Aquatint in *Uylenspiegel* (June 7, 1857)
Plate 158

F. Rops, L'enterrement wallon

c. 1872

Lithograph

Collection Babut de Marès
Plate 159

F. Rops, L'usurier or Juif et chrétien

n.d.

Location unknown

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 160

F. Rops, La buveuse d'absinthe

c. 1869

Lithograph

Collection Pigneur, Namur
Plate 161

H. De Braekeleer, Les potiers

Brussels Salon of 1863

Formerly collection Brijs, Antwerp

(I.R.P.A.)
Plate 162

H. De Braekeleer, De Koperslager

1861

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 163

J. Stobbaerts, De slachterij

Antwerp Salon of 1873

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 164

W. Linnig, Jr., *Antwerpse bruiloft*

Brussels Salon of 1866

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 165

C. Hermans, _A l'aube_

1875

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 166

C. Hermans, *Visite du dimanche à la clinique des enfants, à l'hôpital Saint-Pierre*

*Brussels Salon of 1872*

*Musée de Termonde*
Plate 167

C. Hermans, *Study for A l'aube*

c. 1875

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 168

J. Dannhauser, *Der Prassar*

1836

Österreichische Galerie, Vienna
Plate 169

C. Meunier, *Triptyque des mineurs*

c. 1881-1905

Location unknown
Plate 170

E. Claus, Les sarcelles en Flandres

1887

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 171

F. Van Leemputten, Brooduitdeling op het dorp

1892

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 172

J. Ensor, Les ivroges

1908-10

Collection André Cuvelier
Plate 173

L. Frédéric, *Les marchands de craie* (center)

1882-3

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 174

J. Smits, *Le père du condamné*

1901

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 175

J. Smits, *Le symbole de la Campine*

n.d.

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 176

G. Van de Woestyne, Dimanche après-midi

c. 1893-1903

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 177

A. Sevraes, Gang van de communiekanten naar de kerk

1920

K.M.S.K., Antwerp
Plate 178

G. Minne, *Fountain with Kneeling Youths*

1898–1906

Folkwang-Museum, Essen
Plate 179
C. Permeke, *La Femme qui coupe le pain*

n.d.

Collection Watson, New York
Plate 180

E. Laermans, L'Ivrogne

1898

M.R.B.A., Brussels
Plate 181

E. Laermans, Les mendians

1900

Formerly collection Hottat
Plate 182

E. Laermans, Un soir de grève

1894

Location unknown