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The Orpheus and Eurydice paintings of Camille Corot: Lyrical reflections of contemporary society

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Rice University, 1992

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THE ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE PAINTINGS OF CAMILLE COROT:
LYRICAL REFLECTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
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Abstract

The Orpheus and Eurydice Paintings of Camille Corot: Lyrical Reflections of Contemporary Society

Marcia Kay Stein

Traditionally, commentators of Corot's late historical landscapes dismissed the subject matter of these works as irrelevant accessories added merely to increase their popularity and marketability. It is entirely possible, however, that Corot consciously chose the subject matter of these late historical landscapes, particularly the six paintings incorporating Orpheus and Eurydice, to reflect his feelings about life in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, the role of the artist in society, and the effect of change on the artist. A critical examination of Corot's artistic background, of the commentaries on his work, and of the multifaceted Orpheus myth provides insight into the role subject matter played in these reflections.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter One

Introduction

Over the past one hundred years, much has been written about the painter Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot. In that time a romantic and somewhat fictional story of Corot as a naïve but revolutionary artist has developed. This traditional story can be reviewed briefly: Corot learned relatively little from his neoclassical teachers Achille-Etna Michallon and Jean-Victor Bertin. Instead, he went out into the countryside to paint the actual landscape full of all of the imperfections of nature and suffused with bright, clear light. These "realistic" views of the French and Italian countryside exerted great influence upon the Impressionists in their rejection of neoclassical "artificiality" and its dependence on narrative subject matter. To gain acceptance with critics, Corot painted in the neoclassical tradition for the Salon, exhibiting works composed in the studio following the rules of the academic tradition, complete with elevated subjects set in a "idealized" landscape. In a standard art history survey text, H. W. Janson described Corot's works this way:

Today his finest work seems not his late landscapes, misty and poetic; it is the early ones that establish his importance for the development of modern landscape painting. In 1825 he went to Italy for two years and explored the countryside around Rome, like a latter-day Claude. But Corot did not transform his sketches into idealized pastoral visions; what Claude recorded only in his drawings -- quality of a particular place at a particular time -- Corot made into paintings, small canvases done on the spot in an hour or two.\(^1\)

Renewed interest in the art of Camille Corot in recent years has led to new interpretations of Corot's works and his relationship to the history of French landscape painting, including the influence of neoclassical training. The scope and form of these publications are varied, but each attempts to take a scholarly approach to a subject that has been dominated in the past by connoisseurship. Peter Galassi, in his dissertation and subsequent book, *Corot in Italy: Open-

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Air Painting and the Classical Landscape Tradition, looks at Corot's artistic training and his first trip to Italy. This trip signalled the end of his artistic training and the beginning of his professional career. Galassi stresses the importance placed on the practice of open-air painting by generations of artists in Italy to illustrate Corot's allegiance to neoclassicism. By seeing open-air painting as a part of the traditional working method of the artists, Galassi re-interprets Corot's plein-air works and their effect on the development of Impressionism:

... the key to the French tradition is precisely that outdoor painting was not isolated from the grand ideals of the studio. Impressionism is inaccurately described as a triumph of outdoor painting over studio routine, of empiricism over stale convention. Rather the triumph consisted in investing the fresh opportunity of open-air work with the venerable ambitions of the studio.

Corot's chief contribution to that triumph was not the perfection of his achievement in Italy but his willingness to leave it behind -- to outgrow the certainties of Neoclassicism and, especially, to engage the empirical challenge beyond the narrow autonomy of the Italian study after nature. This is the most important reason why it is wrong to regard Corot's Italian work as the harbinger of Impressionism and his Salon compositions as a regrettable capitulation to official taste.2

Fronia Wissman, in her dissertation, Corot's Salon Paintings: Sources from French Classicism to French Theater Design, identifies artistic, theatrical and Romantic influences on Corot's Salon paintings. These works have been regarded in the past as a way for Corot to gain critical acceptance and not as significant to either Corot or the history of nineteenth-century painting. Wissman seeks to show that Corot, who was strongly attached to the practice of historical landscape, did not merely copy academic formulas for these works but saw them as a way to prove himself as an artist in the tradition of Claude and Poussin:

Corot's continuing execution of the historical landscape demonstrates his conviction that figures and landscape are intimately allied, that a figure in a landscape signifies something definite and is not there merely for color or as a space-maker.... Corot's pictures say that man's place is in nature, surrounded by her, for there he reaps the greatest rewards.3

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In addition, two recent exhibitions trace the history of French landscape painting from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, placing Corot in a pivotal position in the transition years of the mid-nineteenth century. The first exhibition, *Claude to Corot: The Development of Landscape Painting in France*, looks at the ascent of the neoclassical landscape tradition from its beginning as a minor genre (even though practiced by major artists such as Annibale Carracci and Nicolas Poussin) to an important academic category. Here Corot is not only seen continuing in this style, but also as the last major landscape painter to be trained in the neoclassical manner. In an essay in the exhibition catalogue, Peter Galassi states: "... all of Corot's immediate contemporaries ... remained mired in the proud certainties of Neoclassical doctrine. Those, such as Rousseau, who joined Corot in creating a new spirit in French landscape, were young enough to have escaped the full weight of Valenciennes' teaching. Corot alone provides a bridge from the world of Valenciennes and Bidauld to the world of Pissarro and Monet." The second exhibition, *The Rise of Landscape Painting in France: Corot to Monet*, the first major exhibition of Barbizon painting since the 1963 exhibition *Barbizon Revisited*, seeks to re-evaluate the character of Barbizon painting and how it both continued and changed the course of landscape painting in France. Corot plays a major part in this movement, tied to the past through his Salon works but leading the way with his *plein-air* landscapes. In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Marilyn Friedman Hoffman states one of the aims of the exhibition:

> A special goal of the exhibition is to help revive Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's reputation in America. Corot was one of the most popular painters in the United States at the turn of the century and one of the most highly regarded painters in nineteenth-century Europe before his influence waned. The moment is right to look at Corot anew -- viewers today can appreciate the sentiment and poetry of Corot's major Salon paintings, just as a previous Modernist generation admired the freshness and directness of his sketches.

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The conclusions drawn in these recent works recognize Corot's debt to the neoclassical tradition and his desire to continue to work within its boundaries. These newer interpretations emphasize an integrated perspective of Corot's art, acknowledging his conformist as well as his revolutionary nature and focusing on the continuity of his artistic career rather than on specific, selected periods. These interpretations suggest that, counter to conventional opinions, the Salon works were not just a way for Corot to achieve commercial success, but were as important to him as his more revolutionary works.

Unfortunately, many paintings dating from Corot's later career have been dismissed by critics and historians as the sentimentality and commercialism of an aging artist. At the time they were painted, these hazy pictures of nymphs and shepherds called to mind an idyllic past that appealed to the tastes of bourgeois city-dwellers who bought them in great quantities because they served the function of pleasant images of a time before the complexities of modern life. The great demand for these prompted Corot to paint what seemed to be an almost inexhaustible supply for the market, leading to complaints that Corot was selling his talent in order to make a profit. The paintings may indeed be sentimental, but this charge is also raised in discussions of such diverse nineteenth-century artists as the academic painter Adolph Bouguereau and the ground-breaking Jean-François Millet. Bouguereau's sentimentality is almost too obvious for modern viewers who see his highly finished, sweet paintings of young women and peasants as corrupt images of youth and purity (fig. 1). Millet, on the other hand, has on occasion been labeled sentimental for his heroic images of farmers and laborers who nostalgically continue their manual labor at a time when people were moving away from the countryside and machinery was being developed to perform many of their difficult tasks (fig. 2).  

For the twentieth century viewer, sentimentality has become a very negative quality in art. Robert C. Solomon, in an article, "On Kitsch and Sentimentality," examines how the favorable

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6For more about sentimental imagery in Millet's works, see Robert L. Herbert, "City versus Country: the rural image in French painting from Millet to Gauguin," Artforum (February 1970), p. 50.
perception of sentiment has changed during the past century to make "sentimental" a term of derision:

The sentiments have had a bad time in philosophy as well as aesthetics and "sentimentality" has become, in ethics as well as in art, a term of harsh abuse. . . . By the end of the [nineteenth] century, "sentimentalist" was clearly a term of ridicule and abuse, connoting superficiality, saccharine sweetness, and the manipulation of mawkish emotion.\(^7\)

With this change in the meaning, works of art that express sentimental emotions have been associated with the even harsher term of 'kitsch':

Sentimentality and kitsch reveal not only woefully inadequate aesthetic sense but a deep moral flaw of character. . . . Underlying all of these charges, is the suspicion that kitsch and sentimentality are modes of distraction and self-deception, shifting our attention away from the world as it is and soothing us instead with objects that are uncompromisingly comforting and utterly unthreatening.\(^8\)

The use of images to soothe and comfort can, in Solomon's view, therefore lead to an insidious form of propaganda. "The objection to sentimentality in both art and ethics, in other words, is not just its lack of sophistication and bad taste. Kitsch is dangerous."\(^9\) With this in mind, an earlier generation of critics were suspicious of the motives behind the sentimentality of many of Corot's works, seeing them as an easy way for Corot to gain popularity and success. If the viewer can overcome the negative associations that sentimentality and marketability have acquired in this century and look anew at Corot's use of classical and pastoral subject matter, these paintings may lead to an understanding of the place his later works have in the painter's entire œuvre.

Corot exhibited pictures with classical and pastoral subject matter at a time of great personal and professional popularity, in spite of some rather negative comments by critics who

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\(^{8}\) Solomon, p. 5.

\(^{9}\) Solomon, p. 3.
felt this later style to be weak. Corot's popularity, however, continued to grow so that by the late-nineteenth century, his historical landscapes were not only purchased by collectors but were also held in high esteem by many artists and critics who saw Corot as the precursor of Impressionism and modern painting.

In the early years of this century, however, critical attention shifted from Corot's idyllic landscapes to his early *plein-air* studies of Italy and single-figure paintings. To eyes accustomed to the developments of modern art, the iconography and loose style of the later historical landscapes seemed unimportant and old-fashioned. These viewers were impressed instead by the structure and tonality of his open-air landscapes and figure paintings that appeared to have many similarities to works by artists such as Picasso and Cézanne. These early works were felt to reveal Corot's talent and importance for the development of modernism better than the later historical landscapes, which were thought to be intended merely to win approval at the Salon and were, therefore, just banal exercises. In this light, Corot's Salon works were perceived as mere decorations whose subject matter did not possess any relevant meaning beyond that of providing justification for an academic landscape.

But the *plein-air* landscapes and figural paintings are only two aspects of Corot's artistic production and do not explain Corot's persistent return to classical and biblical subject matter.

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12 Julius Meier-Graefe, "The Survival of the Personal Corot," *International Studio* (December 1930), p. 53. "None but the pictures manufactured for the Salon display the traces of the cloven hoof. There are two Corot's which succeed each other in each year with the regularity of the seasons. The untrammelled artist developed into the greatest landscape painter of the ages and yet side by side continued the man of compromises even when Corot had become famous and was himself a member of the jury of the Salon."

13 Alfred Barr, introduction to *Corot - Daumier* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1930), p. 15. "In the two great paintings which epitomize his late period, *La Gitana* and *Interrupted Reading*, he experimented boldly with the geometric compositions of arms, head and torso such as Degas, Cézanne, and Seurat were to study years later. 'The former is more sumptuous in color, but the latter as powerful and angular in design as Cézanne's Boy with a Skull. . . ."
In spite of critical neglect of his historical landscapes, these paintings may not be artistic trifles. If they are not trifles, an iconographic study of his historical landscapes could help explain the existence of his two very different but contemporaneous styles and his adherence to a traditional iconographic repertoire at a time when the current inclination was to explore new subjects and techniques.

While recent interpretations are important contributions to a new understanding of Corot's works, there are still other issues that have not been addressed, such as the use of classical and biblical subject matter in all phases of his career. There has been little study of the meaning of his subject matter, and I would like to suggest that there is a conscious iconography to be found in his works that relates to the changes affecting the cultural and political environment during his lifetime. In the past, Corot has been portrayed as a conservative but non-political artist, unconcerned with current affairs. A typical account of this is by Denys Sutton: "Corot had benefitted from the Revolution of 1848 when for the first time, a considerable number of his pictures were included in the Salon. But unlike many of the avant garde painters of the era, his interest in politics was relatively limited..."\(^{14}\) It is possible, however, that the subject matter of his works was consciously chosen to express Corot's opinion about current changes, such as the new trends in art and the rapid urbanization of France. While Corot left little written information about his feelings on these matters, there are a few accounts of how he responded to the stylistic innovations of younger artists:

\begin{quote}
C'est pour moi un monde nouveau, disait-il à Sensier, vers 1857, à propos des Glaneuses; je ne m'y reconnais plus; je suis trop attaché à l'ancien. Je vois bien là une grande science de l'air, de la profondeur; mais cela m'effraie. Je suis assez long à me faire à l'art nouveau. C'est depuis peu seulement, et après en avoir été longtemps éloigné, que j'ai enfin compris Eugène Delacroix, que maintenant je regarde comme un fameux homme.\(^{15}\)
\end{quote}

Statements such as this indicate that Corot was affected by artistic changes, seeing himself outside the circle of the "monde nouveau", clinging to the ways of his artistic predecessors.

\(^{15}\text{Corot par lui-même, p. 111.}\)
This reaction to change may be behind a number of works relating to the role of the artist, the artist's effect on society and how society itself was changing.

An iconography centering on the artist may be seen in many of Corot's historical and figural works throughout his career, but especially in the years after 1848 when Corot had already reached middle age and major cultural changes were taking place. The mythological story of Orpheus and Eurydice appears in many of Corot's paintings and graphic works at this time and may have been chosen because of the associations to the artist and the artist's muse that can be found in the story. One of the purposes of this paper is to suggest the meanings to be found in Corot's later historical landscapes and how they may be seen as representing a personal symbolism.

In the Salon of 1861, Camille Corot exhibited a large painting depicting Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld (fig. 3), now at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. This was the first of a group of public and private works by Corot to deal with the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, but these works were not created as a series in the sense of the later Impressionist series such as Claude Monet's Grain Stack and Rouen Cathedral paintings. Monet used the same pictoral motifs for several works in order "to observe methodically and with almost scientific exactness the uninterrupted changes of light on various motifs."

By contrast, Corot's repeated use of pictoral motifs may be explained in almost musical terms. Moreau-Nélaton says that, like a musician, Corot "connait . . . le secret des variations multiples et, sous sa bagnette de magicien, un même paysage se pare tour à tour des brillantes couleurs de l'allégresse ou bien des voiles obscurs de la mélancolie." The use of variations enabled Corot to explore the different aspects of the subject that would not be possible in just one

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17In a discussion of Corot's appreciation of music, Moreau-Nélaton states that "Il analyse une symphonie comme un tableau. Il vaute l'art qui tire d'un même motif les effets les plus divers, à l'imitation de la nature dont la face, en appareille immuable, se transforme complètement par un sourire du soleil ou une colère du vent. Il loue Beethoven ou Mozart, Gluck ou Haydn; mais, sans qu'il y prenne garde, c'est son propre éloge qui sort de sa bouche. Car Corot connaît aussi le secret des variations multiples et, sous sa bagnette de magicien, un même paysage se pare tour à tour des brillantes couleurs de l'allégresse ou bien des voiles obscurs de la mélancolie." Alfred Robaut, L'Œuvre de Corot (Paris: Leonce Laget, 1965), pp. 196.
painting, allowing Corot to introduce the many variations in meaning found in the mythological story of Orpheus and Eurydice.18

In the Houston variation, *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld*, Corot shows the couple on their way out of the Underworld. Orpheus has successfully pleaded with the rulers of Hades to allow Eurydice to return to the world above. Allowed only to hold her hand, Orpheus leads his wife out of darkness. He holds his lyre in his left hand, using it as a kind of shield, his left arm stretched out in front of him toward the bright light indicating that their journey is nearly over. Eurydice follows without seeming to be aware of her actions; as one of the dead, she is not conscious of the condition prohibiting Orpheus from looking at her until they have successfully reached the sunlight of the world. She gazes straight ahead, her only movement seems to be to hold up her skirt with her right hand as she walks along.

Behind them, a body of water, presumably the River Styx, separates them from the Underworld and its inhabitants. Concealed behind a blue mist which Corot creates to envelope the Underworld, the gods and shades are separated into two groups. The first group stands on the banks of the Styx in the middle ground while another group stands farther back on the left among the trees and mist. These are the shades of the Underworld, dematerialized beings silently watching through the haze and unidentified as individual characters.19

The Houston painting is an example of Corot's later style which was characterized by a looseness of touch and a less naturalistic image of the landscape. The blue tones and misty atmosphere are very similar to more famous works of this period such as the *Souvenir de

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18Wissman, pp. 184-5. "He returned again and again to the same landscape configurations, trying out all the nuances possible, searching for more and different emotional expressions, changing perhaps a silhouette, more frequently the light effects and color scheme. ... Of course he had always made artistic choices and decisions, but by turning away from models and plumbing the depths of his own work and emotions for material, he allied himself spiritually and intellectually with a sensibility that was romantic and modern. The pictures Corot painted from the late 1850s onward, including those sent to the Salon, increasingly represent a state of mind made visible."

19In representations of Orpheus in the Underworld by other artists, the shades are sometimes identified as individual characters participating in their own particular punishment or afterlife. The figures in the background of Corot's painting, however, are not singled out and stand as a group to watch the progress of Orpheus and Eurydice. Corot may have intended to suggest possible identities for the first group. I will discuss later in this paper, the role a revival of Gluck's opera *Orphée* would have in the genesis of this painting. In the opera, Pluto, Persephone and the Furies have significant roles and the first group may represent these characters.
Mortefontaine (fig. 4). The rather flat space recalls the space of stage sets, with parallel bands of figures and overlapping landscape elements resulting in a shallow stage of space rather than a deep perspective space. Throughout the painting, delicate trees anchor the figures within the space but small specs of red, pink and yellow paint are dotted in the foreground emphasizing the painted surface, calling attention to the work as a painting rather than an actual space.

The second variation dealing with Orpheus and Eurydice, Orpheus Greeting the Dawn (fig. 5) now in the collection of the Elvehjem Museum, is a very large picture commissioned by Prince Paul Demidoff as one of a pair of decorative panels for his Parisian home. Representing the times of the day, Corot chose Orpheus to be the subject of the Day panel and The Sleep of Diana (fig. 6) as the subject for the Night panel. The compositions of both of these paintings are different from Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld. Each of the panels has a large vertical format with a dark foreground placed in front of a large area of light. Orpheus stands in the foreground of the Day panel facing the light with his arms raised. His lyre and classical dress indicate that the figure is part of another time; Corot titled the painting himself so there is no question that the figure is meant to be understood as Orpheus. The position of the figure and the motif of greeting the dawn can be found in a number of other works by Corot of this period (fig. 7), but the Elvehjem painting is the only one with this kind of composition in which the figure is identified specifically as Orpheus.

The large trees on the right side of the canvas dominate the composition more than the figure. This and the importance given to the large area of light appear to be of more interest than the figure, but Orpheus is not merely a stock figure. By identifying the figure as Orpheus, Corot moves beyond creating an allegory of the beginning of the day, introducing the melancholic and romantic associations of the artist with the story of Orpheus.

21 This light is considered to be true subject of the paintings by at least one critic. Fromia Wissman, "Corot's Hymn to the Sun," p. 9, "Orpheus and Diana were subjects favored by the artist who depicted them several times in the course of his career. When he did so, however, he chose critical moments in their respective stories, such as Dianas and Actaeon (1836)...Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld...The Demidoff canvasses break from these narrative works to concentrate on the nature of light itself."
The third variation is a much smaller painting of *Orpheus Singing his Lament for Eurydice* (fig. 8) from the Kimbell Art Museum. Here Corot employs a more Claudian formula for the composition of the landscape but there are again indications that stage scenery has influenced the construction of the space. Orpheus stands in the foreground playing his lyre, singing to three seated figures. Behind them, a calm lake separates the foreground from the hills and classical buildings of the background. The left-hand side of the canvas is dominated by a massive, twisted tree with delicate foliage like those found in many of Corot's later landscapes. For this painting Corot places the horizon line relatively low, silhouetting the figures against the warm sky which seems to oppose the tragic events of the story. The mist is still present, but this is the mist of a forest glade and not the heavy atmosphere of Hades.

The Kimbell painting can be regarded as a dual "souvenir," as it not only repeats this favorite [Orpheus] theme but also a visual motif from a slightly earlier painting, *Souvenir of Italy, Castel Gandolfo, 1865* [R. 1626], in which the same buildings on a hillside appear in the middle ground. Corot had actually painted studies from nature of the Castel Gandolfo on Lake Albano, Italy in 1826-27 in which these geometric architectural forms on a hill first appear. In the Kimbell work, they are employed to evoke the imaginary appearance of an idyllic setting.22

The last variation dealing with this story is a set of almost identical compositions representing Eurydice after she has been fatally bitten by the snake, all titled *Eurydice Blessée* (or *The Wounded Eurydice*). These three paintings, now in The Art Institute of Chicago (fig. 10), The Minneapolis Institute of Art (fig. 11) and a private collection in London (fig. 12), are figure studies rather than landscapes since their focus is the single figure relatively isolated within the setting. Eurydice is shown in near profile, sitting with her right leg crossed over the left. There is a certain ambiguity, though, about the pose. The way Eurydice supports her right leg and looks at her foot seems to indicate that she has already been bitten and is about to die. But she does not slouch or need any support. Instead, her posture is very upright and sturdy, suggesting that she has merely been hurt and not mortally wounded.

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The overall composition of each of the three paintings is very similar with only minor changes in landscape elements and figure execution. In the Minneapolis *Wounded Eurydice*, Corot places Eurydice in a forest glade that opens up behind her to reveal the corner of a classical temple. In the London *Eurydice Blessée*, the figure appears larger and the background opens up to reveal a lake. The space of the Chicago *Wounded Eurydice* is limited to the foreground area in which the figure sits by the screen of dense foliage behind her.

The similarities in composition of the Eurydice paintings raise the question of why Corot returned to this composition for three different works. Corot frequently returned to the same motif for several paintings but it is unclear for this group whether he was trying to perfect the composition or whether the two later paintings were simply commissioned by patrons who had seen the original and wanted copies.23 There may also be a third possibility: Corot used each of the canvases to explore different aspects of the Eurydice character. Unfortunately, there is little documentation at all about these paintings so it is difficult to determine at this time the circumstances under which they were made. The third possibility, however, may help explain why Corot was drawn to the story of Orpheus and Eurydice for several works.

Although there has not been an iconographic study of Corot's historical paintings, there have been observations about their inspiration including remarks that identify the figures and possible sources. The theater and opera have often been cited as sources of inspiration for the subject matter of many of his later landscapes. Fronia Wissman's dissertation details and explains the sources of Corot's works, yet she still sees the theater's influence more in terms of the formal properties of Corot's paintings rather than in terms of subject matter. Both *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld* and *Orpheus Singing his Lament* have been identified as works influenced by the opera *Orphée* by Christoph Gluck, one of Corot's favorite composers. As a frequent visitor to the theater and opera, Corot attended at least one of the

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23Millet's biographer, Alfred Sensier, owned two of the paintings in this group: the *Eurydice Blessée* and *Orpheus Singing his Lament*. It is not known whether Sensier commissioned these works or whether he purchased them from Corot after their execution. I cannot find any indication that Sensier might have commissioned them, indicating that Corot repeatedly used these figures for his own reasons.
performances of *Orphée*, revived at the *Théâtre Lyrique* in 1859, but these two pictures may not be the only ones in this group to be directly related to this opera. A drawing (fig. 13) of a performer in *Orphée* made in a sketchbook that Corot often took to the theater is seated in a pose similar to that of the *Eurydice Blessée* paintings.

The characters of Orpheus and Eurydice that appear in Corot's paintings have a long and complex history. They had been important symbolic figures since antiquity and appeared frequently in areas ranging from music to historiography during the nineteenth century. In a rapidly changing world, Orpheus was seen as a link to the classical past as the perfect representation of the artist-creator with Eurydice as his inspiration. In this role Orpheus becomes a timeless symbol of the struggle of the artist to fulfill his creative destiny as a civilizing force. The mid- to late-nineteenth century saw numerous works centering around the Orpheus myth including Jacques Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers*, which had its premier in 1858, a year before the revival of Gluck's *Orphée*. Orpheus was prominently placed in the decorative cycles of Eugène Delacroix's murals in the Library of the Deputies at the Palais Bourbon and Paul Chenevard's decoration of the Panthéon. In literature, Gérard de Nerval, a poet and friend of Corot's, patterned characters in his two major works on Orpheus and Eurydice. This is but a short list of works from the nineteenth century to which Corot was exposed and it is not unusual that he too, would have been drawn to the subject.

The popularity of the subject as well as the number of works by Corot in which these figures appear indicate that these pictures were more than just souvenirs of a production that he had seen. The connection to the theater and music are very important, but I believe that there are other associations to be found in these works that refer to a personal symbolism of an idyllic, uncorrupted world and the role of the artist in recreating this world in his artistic works. The choice of subject in Corot's historical landscapes, either from classical mythology or the

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24Wissman, *Corot's Salon Paintings*, pp. 149-150.
25Wissman, *Corot's Salon Paintings*, p. 157. "Corot's late landscapes, modeled as they were on the physical settings of these public adventures, represented and opportunity for private reflection and retreat."
Christian tradition, has as its purpose the reference to the idyllic past and the artist-poet as representing that Golden Age. Nymphs, shepherds, gods and heroes call to mind an arcanian world mythically representing a more innocent time before civilization took man away from nature. Dante, Virgil and Homer are among the many subjects that share a meaning found in the Orpheus and Eurydice myth: the voyage of the artist and the importance of inspiration in the creation of a work of art. All these figures, however, are characters far removed from the life of the city. The artist in these works is closely linked to nature and has the power to recreate it in the painted image, the written word or music.

In this paper I will attempt to show how Corot's later historical landscapes, and the Orpheus and Eurydice works in particular, can be understood in the context of his entire œuvre. My aim is to show how Corot's works can be seen to be more than just representations of the neoclassical and/or realistic landscape formulas. Through a study of his subject matter, I will try to show that these subjects are more than just pretext; they may indeed be personal statements that reflect his thoughts about artistic creativity and life in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century.

A short biography of the artist and a brief description of the French landscape tradition will be the focus of Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, I will provide a summary of the critical approaches taken to Corot's work in order to explain why the Orpheus and Eurydice works have been studied only rarely in the past. In Chapter Four, I will trace the history of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as well as introduce its impact on the art and literature of the nineteenth century, an impact important for understanding the status of the myth in western culture in general and in Corot's work specifically. My final chapter will deal with interpretations of the works in relation to both Corot's œuvre and developments being made in French painting at the time.

\[26\] These issues of the idyllic past and the artist-poet will be presented in greater detail later in this paper.
Chapter Two

Artistic Training and the Landscape Tradition

Corot would become a part of the neoclassical landscape tradition, which had its roots in Renaissance history painting and began to take shape in the landscapes of Annibale Carracci in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Annibale's historical landscapes, such as his *Flight into Egypt* (fig. 14), place narrative subjects within a landscape setting, instead of posing figures in front of a background like actors in front of stage-scenery. As landscape painting continued to evolve, different types of pictures were developed to represent two different ideas of nature. Historical landscapes, especially those of Nicolas Poussin, followed Annibale's model of depicting elevated narratives in landscape settings. Pastoral landscapes, either with or without narrative elements, depicted a peaceful, idyllic nature and was best typified by the paintings of Claude Lorraine. Dutch landscape artists were drawn to more topographical or dramatic approaches, but French artists tended to follow the lead of Poussin and Claude which developed into the neoclassical tradition later in the seventeenth century. Building on this foundation, Claude-Joseph Vernet's landscapes and marine paintings found acceptance at the Salon, leading to more critical approval for landscape. Vernet's artistic successor, Pierre-Henri Valenciennes further promoted the field of landscape in France through his teaching and Salon works.

Adding to this artistic legacy were the theoretical writings of André Félibien, Roger de Piles, Denis Diderot and Valenciennes. The critical response to landscape in these writings follows a course from generally low opinion of the genre to almost unlimited praise. In the *Conférences* (1667), Félibien "described landscape painters as inferior to all those who represented animate nature, including birds and beasts, and superior only to painters of fruits, flowers and shells."²⁷ By 1800 opinions had changed enough that Valenciennes's *Elémens de

Perspective pratique à l’usage des Artistes, suivis de Reflexions et conseils à un Elève sur la Peinture, et particulièrement sur le genre du Paysage was devoted almost entirely to landscape and to its advancement as an academic category. When Corot entered Michallon’s studio in 1822, this landscape tradition was a well-codified discipline with established methods for every step in the creation of a painting worthy of being presented at the Salon.

In the hierarchy of subjects that had developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, historical and religious subjects, referred to collectively as history painting, were considered the highest forms of painting. Portraiture was regarded as a little less dignified, with landscape, still-life and genre following as the lowest forms of painting. This hierarchical grouping had its origins in Renaissance theory, especially that of Leon Battista Alberti who, in his Ten Books on Architecture and On Painting, suggested the proper course of study for painter as well as the proper subjects of paintings. He declared that the artist should be a man of high morals and good education, knowledgeable in literature, philosophy, history, mathematics and science. The study of literature, philosophy and history was particularly important because Alberti believed that only stories of the deeds of great men could serve to inspire the artist to grand images and ideal representations of men in action. Portraiture, landscape and still-life, being more literal descriptions of everyday people and objects, did not allow this kind of grand inspiration. The descending order of prestige was determined by the

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28Lochhead, p. 2. “The attempt to raise the status of landscape by linking it with the attributes of history was pushed even further both in theory and in practice during the last decades of the century by Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes. Valenciennes’ Elémens de Perspective Pratique . . . published in 1799, is a work of major importance in the history of landscape’s rise to the level of a major genre. It was one of the first treatises in the history of art theory to be devoted primarily to landscape painting and it revealed a conception of landscape which was both serious and ambitious.”

29Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 89 “. . . I would be delighted if the painter, in order to remember all these things well, should be a good man and learned in liberal arts. Everyone knows how much more the goodness of a man is worth than all his industry or art in acquiring the benevolence of the citizens.” p. 91 “Therefore I advise that each painter should make himself familiar with poets, rhetoricians and others equally well learned in letters. They will give new inventions or at least aid in beautifully composing the storia through which the painter will surely acquire much praise and renown in his painting.”

30Leon Battista Alberti, The Ten Books of Architecture: The 1775 Leoni Edition (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1986), p. 192. “And as the subjects of poetry and painting are various, some expressing the memorable actions of great men; others representing the manners of private persons; other describing the life of rustics: the formers, as the most majestic, should be applied to public works and the buildings of princes; and the latter, as the more cheerful, should be set apart for pleasure houses and gardens.”
object of depiction: human figures, the natural world, and then inanimate objects. Finally, the lack of significant subject matter doomed genre to its low position. Although landscape was considered a fairly inferior type of painting, the landscapes of Poussin were seen as its highest achievement, blending landscape with history painting, providing an example for future landscape painters to follow. They were imbued with a sense of dignity and the procedure of a rational order that brought landscape as close as possible to the grand manner of history painting. Claude's works, on the other hand, were not as highly thought of by academicians, but provided an important example of the idyllic, pastoral landscape for artists. Though they lacked Poussin's elevated subject matter, they provided a view of nature in an ideal state. The landscapes of Poussin and Claude, however, were not "pure" landscapes since they were either historical landscapes that appropriated some of the "elevated" subjects of history painting or were idealized visions of a pastoral past illustrating nature as a harmonious retreat from contemporary life.

Nicolas Poussin (1594? - 1665), hero of the French Neoclassicists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was surpassed only by Raphael and Annibale Carracci as the most important model for young painters to follow within the teaching structure of the Academy. His history paintings display a rational dignity and decorum, which were intended to intellectually affect the viewer rather than just visually. Decorum, an aesthetic concept of great importance since antiquity, was a quality that was found in a work of art when pictorial elements were appropriate to each other and to the objects which they represented. This allowed the painted image to be accepted by the viewer as a proper reflection of a narrative or an idea. "Painting . . . deals with human action, and above all with the most noble and serious human actions. It must present these according to the principles of reason; that is to say, it must show them in a logical and orderly manner, as nature would produce them if she were perfect. The artist must seek the typical, and the general."31 The concept of decorum is a major

component of Poussin's theory of the modes which he based on the musical Modes of the Greeks, each having an emotional connotation. Poussin theorized that a desired mood could be attained in a painting by utilizing a certain mode during its execution. Anthony Blunt comments that:

the idea of applying the principles of the modes to painting is highly original, because, according to the earlier writers on the arts, the means of conveying a mood or an emotion had been by gesture, whereas Poussin maintains that it can be done by the actual style of the painting, that is, by almost abstract means. Delacroix was to put forward much the same idea in the nineteenth century, and since that time it had become a common place; but in the mid-seventeenth century it was a rarity, though it had once been hinted at just before the end of the sixteenth century in a lecture given by Giovanni Balducci and printed in Romano Alberti's *Origine e progresso dell'Accademia del disegno*. Balducci says, "Just as the musician seeks a harmony which is grave, or gay, or melancholy, to suit the works, so the painter follows the story that he has to represent."

This same idea can be found in Corot's works, especially his later ones, where a desired mood is created by formal means such as his use of muted colors and delicate brush strokes to create mythical and rather fragile images of an idyllic world.

Paintings such as Poussin's *The Landscape with the Orpheus and Eurydice* (figure 15) continued the tradition of the historical landscape that evolved during the Renaissance and furthered developed into a Baroque pictorial form by Annibale Carracci. In these paintings, landscape becomes the setting for a narrative event while the naturalistic description of a recognizable site is not a goal. Poussin used landscape to provide a suitable background for the elevated historical and biblical subjects that are seen in an outdoor setting. These subjects, like those of history painting proper, were required to express high ideals, lending them believability by placing such events in "natural" surroundings. These qualities can be seen in the Orpheus and Eurydice painting where the figures do not dominate the pictorial setting but are shown in proportion to the setting. Orpheus sits on a rock playing his lyre as two young women sit at his feet, listening to his song. There is a standing figure immediately behind them who is also listening to Orpheus' song, but it is not clear whether this figure is male or female.

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The inclusion of this deliberately androgenous figure may point to Orpheus' later homosexuality, associated with later episodes of the Orpheus myth. Next to this unidentified figure, a frightened young woman turns away from a small snake on the ground. Although there is some dispute about this woman's identity, it would be natural to see this figure as Eurydice. These five figures are shown in bright sunlight in the foreground which is very different from the atmosphere of the rest of the painting. A large body of water occupies the middle ground and many other unidentified figures stand on the bank reaching toward a boat filled with still more figures. Beyond the lake or river, the landscape slowly rises to a town and distant hills. In the left background a building modeled on the Castel Sant'Angelo is wreathed in heavy smoke. The sky is filled with dark clouds on the right which clear only in parts of the upper-left-corner. The progression from foreground to background is also a journey from the Upperworld to the Underworld: the sunny foreground represents the Upperworld, the journey of the dead is shown in the middle ground, and the Underworld is indicated by the city on fire in the background.

The same bright light that illuminates the foreground figures also highlights the large trees behind Orpheus on the right. These trees, along with others on the left that are in the shadows, act as a coulisse to frame the landscape and the central action.\textsuperscript{33} The use of the coulisse is just one example of the care that Poussin took to ensure that the meaning of the landscape is clear. It indicates that his working method was not only rather precise, but that it had a particular goal that Anthony Blunt describes in a comparison of Poussin and Corneille:

"Both aim at perfect clarity, at an exposition which states everything incidental. . . . Each, we are led to feel, could have explained exactly why he used a particular phrase or selected a particular pose. . . . both lead the spectator by an infallibly calculated series of steps to the exact point at which they aim."\textsuperscript{34} This calculated structure indicates that the artist can control,

\textsuperscript{33} The coulisse was a common devise found in many classical landscapes to direct the viewer's progress through the picture.

\textsuperscript{34} Blunt, \textit{Art and Architecture in France 1500 to 1700}, p. 166.
not only his perception of nature, but nature itself by enforcing his will on an environment that may be dangerous and inhospitable.  

The strict orderly control of landscape in its depiction gave way on occasion when Poussin chose to portray nature in its primordial aspects. The Four Seasons: Winter (The Flood) (fig. 16), was executed late in his career and differs from his orderly and dignified historical landscapes such as the Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice by offering a dramatic and chaotic vision of the natural elements. Here a nightmarish depiction is created without the academic tools of ordered perspective and decorous assemblage, and the human figures are shown fighting for their survival. In The Flood, a raging storm and flood endanger two boats full of people. Some are climbing onto a rocky bank on the right, another boat is falling down a waterfall in the middleground and other figures are shown in the water in the foreground. Without an easy transition from foreground to background, the space is treated very differently from that in the Orpheus and Eurydice painting. The two rocky outcroppings compress the view to the background so that the space sweeps quickly back to what appears to be a town struck by lightning in the distance. In portraying nature in this turbulent state, Poussin experiments with an idea that Vernet will develop further: violent nature inducing an emotional response of empathy in the viewer similar to the noble response that history painting sought to inspire. For Poussin and later Vernet, however, these images continued to be studio compositions based on preliminary outdoor studies and were not the result of direct observation of an actual event. With their emphasis on turbulent atmospheric effects, paintings such as this are the predecessors of plein-air painting, with which Corot is strongly associated. One of the developments of the nineteenth century is the unification of the desire to create an emotional response in the viewer with a naturalistic and instantaneous view of nature.

In contrast to these paintings composed in the studio, Poussin also produced drawings made out of doors in front of the motif, as studies for other works. He considered these nature

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35 The idea that the painter can, in a sense, control nature through his perception of it, is not unique to Poussin. For a further discussion of this idea, see section below on Claude.
studies, such as a *Study of Trees*, c. 1630-35 (fig. 17), primarily as preparatory studies and did not think that they had any artistic merit of their own. Because they were quick responses to the motif and were not meant to be exhibited, Poussin used an informal technique of pen and wash to give a fresh impression of what he saw. In this, too, he helped establish a tradition that would continue down to Corot's time that was even codified by the Salon.36 Students were given instructions to copy the nature studies of earlier masters and as they became more accomplished, they were encouraged to go out-of-doors and study nature on their own. Corot participated in these exercises and, although he saw them as practice studies, many of his early *plein-air* sketches are now considered to be among his finest works.37 While he may never have seen this particular *Study of Trees* by Poussin, Corot's *Study of trees, Civita Castellana*, 1827 (figure 18) shares the same interest in natural phenomena and is rendered with close observation of the motif. The Corot study looks more stark and linear because it does not employ Poussin's subtle wash, but the same spirit of observation appears to be present in this rather straight-forward pen and ink drawing.

The other founder of the French school of landscape was Claude Lorrain (1600 or 1602/3 - 1682). Like Poussin, Claude also lived most of his life in Rome; but unlike Poussin, Claude was known mainly as a landscape painter and not a history painter. Although he did execute a number of history paintings, his pastoral landscapes and luminous seascapes were more influential for later artists. Anthony Blunt described the difference between the paintings of Poussin and Claude in this way: "We may say . . . that the content of Claude's paintings is a poetic rendering of the atmosphere of the Roman countryside, with its changing lights and its complex associations. This is as different as could be from the context of Poussin's heroic landscapes, which are built up round a stoical theme according to a series of logical

36 Peter Galassi, "Corot in Italy" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1986), p. 88. "In the early nineteenth century artists and critics generally assumed that Gaspard, Claude, Poussin and others had worked directly from nature in and near Rome."

37 Mary Delahoyd, "Corot: Classic Romantic" *Art News* 68:7 (November 1963), p. 39. "Although Corot acknowledged the Establishment by his compositions worked up in the studio and intended for the official Salons, one feels that his drawings and oil sketches before the motif represented his natural choice."
calculations. In spite of the differences in tone, there are similarities in the compositional formulas of Poussin and Claude that can be seen by comparing Poussin's *Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice* with Claude's *View of Delphi with a Procession (Sacrifice to Apollo)* (fig. 19). For both artists, there is a fixed manner of spatial recession that guides the viewer through the experience of the landscape. Their landscapes also idealize the haphazard natural elements of nature since the actual appearance of objects in nature was not felt to be appropriate images for painted subjects.

Claude's formula allowed him to create the feeling of an "ideal" and more lyrical landscape than Poussin's. In the *View of Delphi with a Procession (Sacrifice to Apollo)*, Claude creates a spacious, pastoral space that could actually be considered the subject of the painting. Comparing this picture with Poussin's *Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice*, the viewer is at first struck by the difference in the pictorial space. The space in the *Orpheus* recedes into the relatively distant landscape and is then stopped by the hills. Claude's space, on the other hand, seems to sweep quickly to the horizon and has its focus in the setting sun. John Barrell describes the experience of a Claudian landscape in this way:

...the traveller decides on his goal in the first place by looking straight at it, into the distance and across the fore- and middle-grounds; and only then does he begin to work out how he can get there. We look at the horizon before we become aware of the painting as "a world designed for the imagination to enter and wander about it"; and the discovery we make then, that the objects are deliberately arranged to lead the eye from foreground to horizon, is the discovery of how the eye was immediately attracted to the horizon, of how an effect already experienced was achieved.  

In other respects, however, elements in each of the paintings are rather similar. Claude delineates the boundaries of the painting on the left and right through the use of *coulisse* elements such as the placement of the trees on the left and the arcaded building on the right. The seated figures in the left foreground and groups of other figures in the middle ground are

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39 John Barrell, *The idea of landscape and the sense of place, 1730-1840; an approach to the poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 8
used by Claude to define the space similar in manner to Poussin's placement of figures in the
Orpheus. Another important similarity between these two pictures is the control that each of
the artists has over the description of nature. As stated earlier regarding Poussin, the control of
nature allowed the artist to impose his will on an unpredictable and uncontrollable world. In a
passage describing the attitudes of Claude and the English poet James Thomson about
landscape, Barrell states:

It is clear ... that the attitude to landscape Claude and Thomson share -- that, for
example, it must keep its distance, and the features within it be kept in subjection
to our sense of the general composition -- is part of a very different attitude to
nature from, say, Ruskin's who, a century later, advised whoever wanted to look
at or to paint a landscape to lie down and start with the blades of grass in front of
his face. ... Thomson instead feels he must control nature in order not to be
controlled by it, and it is in this respect that the, so to speak, moral significance of
his insistence on describing landscape from a high viewpoint is best understood.40

The difference in mood of the landscapes of Poussin and Claude was invoked by Roger
de Piles to characterize the two divisions of landscape in his Cours de Peinture par Principes
(1708). De Piles, a supporter of the Rubénistes, did not share Félibien's rigid critical opinions
and began leading French theorists away from some of the strict notions of subject hierarchy.
One of the ways he did this was to argue at length about landscape painting and the many
forms it could take. He described landscape as:

... un genre de Peinture qui représente les campagnes et tous les objets qui s'y
rencontrent. Entre tous les plaisirs que les differens talens de la Peinture procurent
to ceux qui les exercent, celui de faire du Paysage me paraît le plus sensible, et le
plus commode; car dans la grande varieté [sic] dont il est susceptible, le Peintre a
plus d'occasions que dans tous les autres genres de cet Art, de se contenter dans
le choix des objets; la solitude des rochers; la fraîcheur des forêts; la limpidité des
eaux, leur murmure apparent, l'étendue des Plaines et des Lointains, le mélange
des Arbres, la fermenté du Gazon, et les Sites tels que le Paysagiste les veut
représenter dans ses Tableaux, sont que tantôt il y chasse, que tantôt il y prend le
frais, qu'il s'y promene, qu'il s'y repose, ou qu'il y rêve agréablement. Enfin il
est le Maître de disposer de tout ce qui se voit sur la terre, sur les eaux, et dans les
airs: parce que de toutes les productions de l'Art et de la Nature, il n'y en a
aucune qui ne puisse entrer dans la composition de ses Tableaux. Ainsi la
Peinture, qui est une espece [sic] de création, l'est encore plus particulièrement à
l'égard au Paysage.41

40Barrell, p. 24.
41Roger de Piles, Cours de Peinture par Principes (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), pp. 200-201.
In the *Cours de Peinture*, de Piles categorized two "styles" of landscape painting: the 'heroic' landscape exemplified by Poussin and the 'pastoral' landscape exemplified by Claude.

Le style *Heroïque* est une composition d'objets qui dans leur genre tirent de l'Art et de la Nature tout ce que l'un et l'autre peuvent produire de grand et d'extraordinaire. Les sites en font tout agréables et tout surprenants: les fabriques n'y sont que temples, que piramides, que sepultures [sic] antiques, qu'autels consacrés aux divinités, que maisons de plaisance d'une reguilière [sic] architecture; et si la Nature n'y est pas exprimée comme le hazard nous la fait voir tous les jours, elle y est du moins représentée comme on s'imagine qu'elle devroit être. Ce style est une agréable [sic] illusion, et une espèce d'enchantement quand il part d'un beau genie [sic] et d'un bon esprit, comme étroit celui du Poussin: lui qui s'y est si bien exprimé. Mais ceux qui voudront suivre ce genre de Peinture, et qui n'auront pas le talent de soutenir le sublime qu'il demande, courent souvent le risque de tomber dans le puerile.

Le style champêtre est une représentation [sic] des Pays qui paraissent bien moins cultivés qu'abandonnés à la bizarrie de la seule Nature. Elle s'y fait voir toute simple, sans fard, et sans artifice; mais avec tous les ornemens dont elle fait bien mieux se parer, l'orsqu'on la laisse dans sa liberté, que quand l'Art lui fait violence.

Dans ce style les sites souffrent toutes fortes de varietés [sic]: ils y sont quelquefois assez étendus, pour y attirer les troupeaux des Bergers, et quelquefois assez sauvages, pour servir de retraite aux Solitaires, et de sûreté [sic] aux animaux sauvages.42

Later in the eighteenth century, Denis Diderot's Salon reviews of paintings by Claude-Joseph Vernet helped to raise the prestige of landscape to a level just below history painting. Diderot saw in Vernet's landscapes and seascapes some of the same qualities that he believed elevated history painting above the other genres. In scenes like *The Shipwreck* of 1759 (figure 20), Diderot felt that the dramatic events were able to arouse powerful emotional responses in the viewer. By placing figures in a dramatic situations, Vernet gave his landscapes a moral purpose. The viewer looking upon these scenes was struck by the plight of another human being and made aware of some of the basic questions of human existence.43 In his *Salon of 1767*, Diderot gives an account of Vernet's method:

Une scène plus douce et plus pathétique succéda à celle-là. Un vaisseau avait été battu d'une affreuse tempête; je n'en pouvais douter à ses mâts brisés, à ses voiles déchirées, à ses flancs enfoncés, à la manœuvre des matelots qui ne cessaient de travailler à la pompe. Ils étaient incertains, malgré leurs efforts, s'ils ne

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42 de Piles, pp. 201-203.
43 Lochhead, pp. 10-11. "As Diderot was soon to realize, landscapes could also have a moral significance, and it is surely no accident that his most developed statement on the interdependance of art and morality comes in the long article on Vernet in the *Salon of 1767*."
This statement does not refer specifically to the sublime but reflects the attitude about the sublime that arose after the publication of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757. The sublime, as generally understood, was a quality in art that described the great, surprising or terrible in a work of art as opposed to those elements that described the beautiful.

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure... When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible, but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.

Vernet's land- and seascapes grew out of the tradition of Claude and Poussin, but he introduces more energy and suggestions of a specific, identifiable location into the formula. Vernet's figures are not merely actors posed for a performance, they are shown in action. It is the more descriptive aspect of an actual location that was to prove important for Corot in the nineteenth century. This does not mean, however, that what is being portrayed in Vernet is an actual event. Vernet still composed these compositions within his studio, inventing the dramatic action represented, employing a dramatic style, similar to Poussin's concept of modes, to create a mood of danger and tragedy. The many "souvenirs" of Italy that Corot produced, such as the *Souvenir de Mortfontaine* may be seen, in this way, as like Vernet's views. They are

44Denis Diderot, *Salons*, ed. Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 163-4. Lochhead, p. 57. "Not only did their shipwrecks depict ordinary men and women suffering under extreme adversity, they also showed the heroism of which these same people were capable. The immediacy of such events was even more compelling because of the relative commonness of disasters at sea and because shipwrecks could affect the lives of people from every station in life."

suggestions of actual sites, not actual portraits of a location, creating the feeling of remembrance through Corot's loose technique and muted tones.

Still later in the eighteenth century Valenciennes furthered the cause of landscape painting at the École and the Salon with his paintings and teaching. His hope was to elevate landscapes to the level of history and religious painting in terms of prestige, and this was the goal of his treatise *Eléments de Perspective Practique* . . . 46 By increasing the aesthetic and technical standards for landscape painters, Valenciennes thought he might raise the prestige of his chosen field. His aim, therefore, was not to dismantle the academic traditions that existed, but to provide a way for landscape to be seen as an intellectual and aesthetic equal to history painting. Valenciennes was a practicing painter as well as a teacher and his Salon works, such as *Landscape of Ancient Greece* (1786) (fig. 21), illustrate the kind of grand style of painting that he hoped would raise the prestige of landscape. There had been an established method which history painters had to follow at the École and in the competitions at the Salon; Valenciennes urged something similar for landscapes painters:

Nicolas Poussin, Annibal Carrache, le Titien, le Dominiquin et quelques autres, ont fait ce qu'Homère, Virgile, Théocrite et tous les poètes fameux eussent fait s'ils avoient peint avec des couleurs. Ces Peintres se sont pénétres de la lecture de ces poètes sublimes; ils les ont médités; et en fermant les yeux, ils ont vu cette Nature idéale, cette Nature parée des richesses de l'imagination, et que le seul génie peut concevoir et représenter. . . .

Quelle différence du tableau représentant une vache et quelques moutons paissans dans la prairie, à celui des funérailles de Phocion; d'un paysage des bords de la Meuse, à celui des bergers de l'Arcadie; d'un temps pluvieux de Ruisdael, au déluge du Poussin! Les premiers sont peints avec le sentiment de la couleur, et les autres avec la couleur du sentiment. . . .

Nous nous dispenserons de parler du Beau idéal en général, Winckelman [sic] et d'autres écrivains célèbres en ont donné la définition et l'ont analysé dans toutes ses parties; nous tâcherons seulement de prouver qu'il existe aussi un Beau idéal dans le paysage historique, et que les grands maitres qui l'ont senti ont fait des ouvrages qui n'ont à craindre que les outrages du temps, mais qui, tant qu'ils existeront, feront l'admiration de tout ce qu'il y aura d'hommes sensibles et d'un goût sûr.47


47 Valenciennes, pp. 377-8 and 382-384
As Alberti's writings had instructed the history painter to be the master of many skills, Valenciennes also expected the landscape painter to be extremely knowledgeable in areas ranging from architecture and music to mathematics and the sciences.

Cette façon de voir et d'étudier la Nature, est certainement bien plus difficile que la première. Il faut être né avec du génie, avoir beaucoup voyagez et encore plus réfléchi sur ses voyages; ils faut s'être nourri de la lecture des anciens et des modernes; s'être familiarisé avec les productions des grands Peintres; s'étres, en un mot, donné les facultés créatrices pour enfanter ces chef-d'œuvres de l'art qui intéressent le philosophe et l'homme instruit. C'est alors qui l'on produit successivement, par ses ouvrages, toutes les sensations dont on a été soi-même affecté en inspirant à l'ame des Spectateurs la frayer ou la mélancolie, le calme ou le fréissement, la tristesse ou la gaité; mais toujours l'admiration et l'enthousiasme. L'Artiste ne fait pas alors le froid portrait de la Nature insignifiante et inanimée; il la peint parlant à l'ame, ayant une action sentimentale, une expression déterminée qui se communique facilement à tout homme sensible.\(^{48}\)

Through a series of preparatory works, the history painter would gain experience in good draftsmanship, proper coloration, natural settings, perspective, and control of the human figure. Landscape painters were also expected to excel in these areas to be able to create a well-balanced work in which all elements were ideal representations of their actual appearance without any confusing passages or unrecognizable meanings. Controlling the human figure and its expressions allowed the painter to depict the most important elements of the picture appropriately. The figure should also be rendered with the proper dignity and idealization since the figure was the most important element of the work of art. In addition the artist's knowledge of perspective gave him control over the placement of pictorial elements and a systematic means of measurement of the space. The artist then had to combine all this so that the painting followed rules of decorum, or appropriateness of form to subject matter that had been standard since the Renaissance. In short, the painter of religious and historical pictures had to be the master of all the skills and tools of painting, including landscape, still-life, genre and portraiture. For Valenciennes, the landscape painter also had to be capable of a comparable rational, ordered process in order to achieve an status equal with that of the history painter.

\(^{48}\)Valenciennes, pp. 381-382
Like the history painter, the landscape painter would have to make frequent and accurate studies from nature. In addition, the *paysagiste* was expected to follow the Academy's procedures for painting a "proper" work. This included the preparatory steps *étude, esquisse* and *ébauche*. *Études* were small painted or drawn studies of "individual details, such as drapery details or hands." An *esquisse* was a preliminary sketch of a picture "to design the basic composition of the work." An *ébauche* was a quickly painted underpainting that defined the colors of the finished painting, but also helped the artist "sustain the spontaneous characteristics of his sketch until the final retouching."49 Through these preparatory works, the artist brought nature under control, bringing clarity to the image. None of the accidents or idiosyncrasies found in the real world should find their way into the finished painting and these preparatory sketches gave the artist the opportunity to work them out. Finally, after a long and thorough preparation, the finished painting was produced. With all the preparation and thought behind it, the painting should now be complete enough to show in the Salon. It was Valenciennes's idea that landscape painters be trained in and uphold this tradition.

Whether it was history painting or landscape, the finished painting should be dignified and have a pleasing aspect without any of the accidental flaws found in nature. To correspond to this rigid form of training, Valenciennes suggested that the École should award a prize similar to the highest honor given to history painters, the *Grand Prix de Rome*. In 1817, the École established the *Prix de Rome* for landscape and awarded its first prize to Michallon. The painting Michallon executed for the competition, *Democritus and the Abderitans* (fig. 22), embodies Valenciennes' instructions to create a grand image of the literary past. With a subject taken from antiquity, the wildness of the forest in the foreground is regularized and tamed for public consumption. The narrative action takes place in the middle ground and is portrayed with clear gestures and a sense of decorum.

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49Boime, p. 81.
Michallon's most famous student, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot was born in Paris on July 16, 1796 the son of a linen merchant and a fashionable milliner. As the son of an aspiring businessman, Camille was raised to take his father's place in business. When he was eight years old, Camille was sent away to school, first in Rouen and then Poissy, where he remained until he was eighteen. He received an education that introduced him to poetry, philosophy, and history. He also began to draw and think of becoming an artist. In Rouen, he became close to the Sennegon family, especially M. Sennegon who acted as Camille's guardian taking him for long walks in the country and introducing him to the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's *Emile*, among other writings expressed the advantages of unspoiled nature in a time of urbanization and industrialization. "Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses, tout dégénéré entre les mains de l'homme." Corot's early exposure to Rousseau's works may have been an important introduction to his study of nature that made him sensitive to the teachings of his neoclassical teachers.

In 1814, Camille was sent to apprentice in the drapery business of a M. Ratier and later with M. Delalain where he remained until 1822, although he had very little interest in the drapery business. Corot never wanted to become a businessman and had spoken to his father about becoming a painter soon after leaving school. His father refused but Corot began his artistic training on his own by attending open drawing sessions at the Académie

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50 Corot had two sisters: Annette-Octavie married one of Corot's close friends and remained close to him throughout his life; Victoire-Anne died as a young woman.
51 Madeleine Hours, *Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1973), p. 13. He may not have excelled in school but he "acquired a culture that is more thorough, more literary, more poetic and profound than might be inferred from his outward behavior."
52 Jean Leymarie, *Corot: Biographical and Critical Study*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), pp. 17-18. Corot's close ties to the Sennegon family continued long after he left school and his sister Annette-Octavie married one of M. Sennegon's sons. Throughout his life, Corot spent a great deal of time with the family at Rouen and with his sister's family at Ville d'Avray.
54 There is a well-known story about this period of Corot's life that he was so inept that he could not keep a job for long, but this appears to be part of the Corot myth that evolved after the artist's death.
Stissse, an independent studio where artists and students could sketch from life. Corot met several other young artists here and it is possible that this is where he met Achille-Etna Michallon, who would become his first teacher. He persisted in seeking his father's permission and, more importantly, financial support to become an artist, but with little success. Corot continued to receive a modest allowance from his father while working for M. Delalain which allowed him to study painting on his free time. When his sister Victoire-Anne died in 1822, her allowance was given to Corot along with his father's permission to become an artist.

At the age of twenty-six, Corot could now quit his job, and he entered Michallon's studio as a student. Michallon had recently returned from Rome and was the same age as Corot but was considered a precocious talent having exhibited at the Salon at fifteen and having won the Prix de Rome for landscape when he was 22. As a student, Michallon had studied with Jean-Victor Bertin, a follower of Pierre-Henri Valenciennes. Corot's choice of Michallon as a teacher indicates his desire to be affiliated with the academically approved style of landscape painting rather than venturing out as an independent artist.

Corot was introduced to the practice of landscape painting in Michallon's studio. In the short time that the two spent together, Michallon stressed the importance of the preparatory drawings made from nature above other student exercises. In 1822, Michallon took Corot into the countryside to paint and there he instructed Corot to look intently at his subject to record what he saw without thinking about anything else but what was in front of him.

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57 Hours, p. 13.
58 Galassi, *Claude to Corot*, p. 236. "The precocious Michallon first exhibited at the Salon in 1812, at the age of fifteen, and soon won the attention of prominent patrons."
59 Moreau-Nelaton, I, p. 10. "Il courut tout de suite chez Michallon. Il était déjà son camarade; amis un camarade plein de déférence pour le travail d'un artiste en route pour la gloire... Il y avait fait de sérieuse études et, tout en demeurant embarrassé dans les formules conventionnelles de l'école, il relevait autant que possible l'arbitraire du genre historique par une étude attentive de la nature. Il recommanda à Corot de regarder avec soin et d'exprimer naïvement sa vision. Le conseil était bon, et l'on sait s'il a profité."
When Michallon suddenly died in September 1822, Corot went to study with Michallon's own teacher, Jean-Victor Bertin, one of the leading academic landscape painters at the time. In Bertin's studio, Corot became more familiar with the working procedure of a landscape painter, such as copying prints and paintings in the Louvre and learning what kinds of images would be considered suitable for Salon exhibition. Where Michallon's training would guide him in the area of *plein-air* sketches, Bertin's would instruct him on how to compose landscapes from the sketches into proper and academically acceptable paintings such as Bertin's *View of a town in the Sabine Mountains* (fig. 23). Although no subject is identified in this painting, the figures and buildings have a aura of antiquity that separates them from the contemporary world.

In 1825 Corot received an increase in his allowance from his father which enabled him to travel to Italy, a journey that artists had traditionally taken to complete their artistic education. Italy was seen as the environment which had produced the masters of the Renaissance and provided excellent conditions for artistic study, including great works of art dating from antiquity and a wide-range of out-door settings from which to draw inspiration. Corot set out with Johan Karl Bachr, a fellow student from Bertin's studio, travelling through Switzerland and making frequent stops to paint along the way. When Corot arrived in Rome, he became acquainted with a group of young international artists also taking advantage of the artistic treasures of Rome. These artists would go to museums or work out-of-doors during the day, meeting at cafes and theaters in the evening. Corot was a popular member of this group, spending most of his time out-of-doors in and around Rome, sketching a group of pre-determined sites to which all painters were drawn. Spending a great deal of his time in this way, Corot did not have much time, or inclination, to visit galleries or churches. He was not totally unaware of the art of the past, however, as some critics have stated. He had studied

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60 For a discussion of the popular sites for landscape painters, see Galassi, *Corot in Italy*, pp. 83-129.
the works of other artists as a student in Bertin's studio, making copies of many paintings in
his sketchbooks. It would appear, though, that during his stay in Italy, he spent most of his
time painting the Italian landscapes. Paintings such as The Island of San Bartolommeo (fig.
24) follow in the tradition started by Claude and Poussin and are very similar in composition to
paintings by Vernet and Valenciennes. But the compositional similarity of these works
however, may not be the result of direct influence, resulting instead from the observation of the
same motif. Corot's sketches would later serve as models for paintings he would show in the
Salon, but he did not consider them worthy of exhibition.

A comparison of Corot's unexhibited study of The Augustan bridge at Narni (fig. 25)
and The View at Narni (fig. 26), which was exhibited at the Salon of 1827, shows the
evolution from étude to finished painting. The study was made on a high bank of the river
looking down on the ruined bridge and the mountains beyond. The path on which the artist
stood, covered with vegetation, is rendered in broad areas of color in a palette limited to a
narrow range from ochre to dark green. The effect is one of direct observation of the site
which is very different from the finished work where all of the roughness is removed. What
was given in the oil sketch as directly observed impressions is now regularized in the finished
picture to present a precise and detailed vision of an ideal landscape. In the View at Narni, the
landscape is relatively flat and the sandy path is widened into a band across the foreground of
the picture with a little rocky outcropping in the lower right-hand corner. A figure is placed in
the center foreground turned away from the viewer. In the left hand corner, three figures are
grouped together and a path leads back to the left middleground where it disappears into a
dense stand of trees. A flock of sheep is shown on the path and a single sheep stands on the
grassy bank to the left of the river. This bank is slightly raised from the level of the river and
fragments of the ruined bridge leads the viewer from this bank to the rocky hill on the right.
Beyond the bridge, there is a strip of land leading to the low mountains in the distance. The

62Leymarie, p. 24. "In 1775 ... Vernet painted ... his Ponte Rotto and Castello Sant'Angelo ... Corot may
well have seen them in the Louvre in his youth."

sky, which had been a rather narrow strip of yellowish-blue in the study, now takes up the upper half quadrant of the canvas, but is broken into by the stand of trees and ranges in color from yellow at the horizon to a rich blue at the top of the canvas. Although these are major changes, the finished picture retains elements of the original study but is reworked in a definitely Claudian manner.

In Italy, Corot began to paint small single-figure studies that he would continue throughout his career, but of which the public knew almost nothing. Corot had probably started to paint these as studies of costumes and poses for his studio landscapes. A small work from his first visit to Italy, *Papigno, Seated Italian* (fig. 27) is one of these. The procedure of painting used to depict the seated young man is that used in the *Augustan Bridge at Narni*: there is little fine detail; instead Corot gives a quick and general description of the figure and his costume. The impression of the work is that of a study and there does not seem to be any meaning to be read into it. Later Corot looked on the single-figure works as more than mere studies and developed some of them into fully-realized paintings. The *Eurydice Blessée* canvases are some of these, in which the lone figure is no longer only a model, but a subject rich with meaning.

After his return from Rome in 1828, Corot set up his studio and continued to prepare paintings to be shown at the Salon. Corot also made several trips into the countryside to work on his sketches. He was an early visitor to the Forest of Fontainebleau and Barbizon, but his favorite spot was his family's country home at Ville d'Avray outside of Paris. Corot started a life-long habit of going there in the summer to work out-of-doors, returning to his Paris studio for the fall and winter to work on his entries to the Salon. Throughout his career, he travelled extensively in France and Switzerland, in addition to making two more trips to Italy.

His major Salon work of this period was a monumental painting depicting *Hagar in the Wilderness* (fig. 28) of 1835. Here Corot's allegiance to neoclassicism is evident in his choice of subject matter, but a new vision of landscape can be seen in his accurate observation of light and nature. The subject of Hagar with the Angel was a standard theme in the neoclassical
repertoire and had been painted by both Poussin (fig. 29) and Claude (fig. 30). Corot's version, however, is very different from Poussin's dense forest and Claude's pastoral landscape. Corot portrays Hagar kneeling over Ishmael just as the angel appears to save them. While there is nothing very unusual about these neoclassical figures, there is in respect to the landscape. The harsh sunlight and barren setting lead away from Neoclassicism toward a more direct approach to landscape painting. Corot received some critical recognition for works such as this during these years, but it was still not enough to make him independent from the allowance that his father continued to give him.

In the 1840s, Corot began to receive favorable recognition on a more regular basis from critics and collectors. Along with Théodore Rousseau, Corot was seen to be working toward a greater naturalism, but Rousseau was considered to be more radical while Corot was seen as working for change from within the academic system. He continued to submit historical landscapes to the Salon, but it was the naturalistic landscapes representing Fontainebleau Forest and the countryside around at Ville d'Avray that caught the attention of critics outside the circle of the Ecole and the Salon.63 One of these landscapes is the Ravine in the Morvan, near Lormes (fig. 31). Without stated narrative subject or figures of any kind, it is simply the view of the countryside that interested him and which he did not attempt to regularize or idealize.

About the same time, changes begin to appear in his figure paintings as well. A work from his last trip to Italy, Roman Odalisque, "Marietta" (fig. 32), is, on the surface, a study. The pose and the way that the figure directly engages the viewer, however, give the painting a sense of intimacy and mystery quite different from the earlier Italian study. Here, the figure is moving away from being the object of a dispassionate observer to a subject of intellectual interest. This model is identified as both "Marietta" and "Odalisque," so that the viewer, or

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63 Robert L. Herbert, Barbizon Revisited (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 1962), p. 29. "For Corot the years 1840-47 marked the general recognition of his talent and the development of several subjects and compositions which he followed for the rest of his life."
artist, is aware of several possible reasons for the title. Marietta may be the model's name, or the name of a fictional character. The additional title alludes to the many representations of the Odalisque in the history of art. No longer is the figure identified as a nameless model. Corot is beginning to see the iconographic possibilities that can be achieved by particularizing, or just identifying, the subject.

As Corot was gaining recognition as a member of the naturalistic Barbizon group, he began to paint works such as *Morning, Dance of the Nymphs* (fig. 33) which is now in the Louvre. Shown at the Salon of 1850-51, this is an idyllic image of a mythic place, that had nothing in common with the real world in the mid-nineteenth century. Corot shows a group of nymphs dancing in a forest glade to welcome the morning. The main group of figures is dancing in a circle in the foreground. In front of them is a narrow band of foliage and flowers similar to those in *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld*. Similar, too, is the shallow, stage-like definition of the space. Behind the dancing figures is a screen of trees that separates the viewer from the background. Unlike pictures such as *View at Narni* there is little attempt to define the distance between the trees and the horizon. There is an overall delicacy of touch and mood to these paintings that is seen even in the way Corot began to describe the foliage. The delicate, "feathery" foliage helps to create the feeling of a misty and idyllic place.

This idea of an idyllic world is also to be found in his *Souvenirs*, Corot's best known works of the 1850s through 1870s. He paints these while continuing to execute naturalistic pictures such as *Ville-d'Avray, the Path of Corot* (fig. 34) from 1850-1855, which seems to be a portrait of the landscape near his family's country home. The *Souvenir of Mortefontaine*, a romantic image of a remembered scene, is very different from this naturalistic picture. This may be an indication that current social and artistic conditions, such as rapid urban growth, political upheavals and the growing influence of the Realists, were causing Corot to reflect on the past and how alien the present was becoming. This idea will be further developed in Chapter Five.
These paintings are recollections of places he visited as a younger man, based on sketches but blurred through time. They are frequently peopled by nymphs and boatmen, who belong to a different time and are perfectly suited for life in a pleasant and uncomplicated world. At a time when Courbet was claiming that he could not paint an angel because he had never seen one, Corot deliberately turns to mythological characters and romantic images of workers. Subjects such as the nymphs and boatmen were entirely "unreal," without any place in the modern world. These idyllic works, however, won a large audience among the Second Empire bourgeois, including Napoleon III who purchased many of his works for provincial museums.\(^{64}\) Corot continued to paint more naturalistic views, but the public demand for his idyllic paintings, like *Souvenir de Mortefontaine*, was great. These idyllic visions appealed to the current taste, which was also experiencing a revival of rococo painting. With their soft modulation of color and tone, these paintings evoke a more innocent and less complicated time with its origins in classical mythology. Unfortunately, Corot had also produced a style that was relatively easy to imitate, causing others to paint similar works. Many of these made it to the market bearing his name, some through fraud and others signed by Corot himself to benefit his students.\(^{65}\) Consequently the considerable number of these fake "Corots" helped to bring down the favorable critical view of the works Corot actually produced.\(^{66}\) While some critics had never been very receptive to this new style which they thought unworthy of Corot, collectors, especially American ones, continued to admire and collect them.\(^{67}\) So many of the

\(^{64}\) Ian Barras Hill, "Jean Baptiste Camille Corot: A Centenary Appraisal," *Connoisseur* 189 (June 1975), p. 108. "They were attracted by his new Souvenir pictures, nostalgic distillations of 'time remembered' evoking a past world of consolation and regret -- one that appealed to the neo-Rococo taste of the Second Empire."

\(^{65}\) Sutton, p. 5.


\(^{67}\) *Second Empire 1852-1879: Art in France under Napoleon III* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978), p. 272. "Beside and Puisant, in the *Causeries à dix sur les le Salon de 1857*, called Corot a 'spoiled and unruly child of the naturalist school' and reproached him for this 'heavy, luminous, transparent fog that . . . spreads over nature like a veil of fine batiste. . . . His canvases are most carefully bathed in this colorless tint that is initially attractive, for a moment charming, and very soon tiresome to the point of distastefulness.' Despite repeated observations, he did not mend his ways, 'a nymph was a cupid' proving M. Corot has resolved to die impenitent."

"fakes" were purchased that it was said that Corot produced 3000 paintings and 5000 of them were in America.\textsuperscript{68}

Single figure paintings became much more important to Corot as he grew older and many are given mythological and allegorical titles. The \textit{Eurydice Blessée} paintings are examples of this, with the single female figure placed against a generalized landscape background. Another characteristic of these works is a rather melancholic mood which seems to emanate from these figures. As important as these works would later become, only Corot's friends and fellow artists knew of them. Corot exhibited only one of them during his lifetime and the public first saw a group of them at a memorial exhibition of Corot's works in 1875.

Because of his legendary humble and naïve manner, it is sometimes taken for granted that he was a 'naïve' painter who was unaffected by any traditional theories and followed only his intuition when painting.\textsuperscript{69} The characterization of Corot's naïveté grew from an assumption that he was a self-taught artist who lacked the sophistication of other progressive artists. This image may even have been promoted by Corot himself in some of his remarks about his education, artistic training and experiences. This lack of sophistication is contradicted by his interest in such diverse things as classical poetry and Parisian café society. Instead of a rather unworldly soul, his narrative and figure paintings show that he was well versed in literature and history as well as artistic models ranging from Titian to Delacroix. He even wrote a page in his sketchbook around 1825 to remind himself of what he needed to do to become a better skilled artist:

- Dessiner tous les soirs.
- Petites figures modernes.
- Calques d'animaux de Berghen, Paul Potter.
- Fabriques d'Italie.
- Arbres de différentes sortes.
- Quelques compositions d'après mes études.
- Mes donner des sujets de figures historiques. Faire des calques dans les \textit{Annales}.

\textsuperscript{69}Hours, p. 13.
Avoir une suite de costumes de différents siècles.
- Dessiner des chevaux et des chiens d'après Van den Meulen. Si je pouvias trouver des eaux-fortes bien dessinées, de chèvres, des plantes.
- Tâcher d'avoir à copier des figures de Le Prince.\textsuperscript{70}

With the figure paintings and early oil sketches unexhibited, Corot was known primarily for his Salon works. The impression that he chose to give to the public was one of naïvité and humility which gradually became a legendary description of his personality. Unlike many of his fellow artists, Corot had never been short of money and his new-found popularity made him relatively wealthy. His generosity and good nature became well-known, and he acquired a reputation as an artist whose kindness and generosity were as well-known to his contemporaries as his work. Stories of his giving a house to Daumier when the latter was evicted and his support of an orphanage are well-documented and often repeated.\textsuperscript{71} Although he found time for pleasurable activities such as frequenting the theater and cafés, he was referred to as "Papa Corot" and thought of as a kindly father-figure. Although he would travel extensively, including trips to the Netherlands and England which introduced him to new kinds of landscape and different artistic traditions, the legend grew that he was totally immune to outside artistic influences and remained totally true to his naive vision.

As he grew older, Corot had to curtail his travelling, and he spent more and more time in Paris and at Ville d'Avray. In 1874, Corot fell ill of stomach cancer. Although he had suffered from gout for a number of years, this was really the first time he had been forced to curtail all of his activities. He returned to his Paris studio and continued to paint until the summer of 1875 when he passed away at the age of seventy-nine. Later that same year, a memorial exhibition of his works provided the public's first glimpse at works from all phases of his career. An appreciation of Corot's early landscapes and late figure paintings began that would later dominate the appreciation of his studio landscapes.

\textsuperscript{70}Paul Cornu, \textit{Corot} (Paris: Louis-Midan Editeur, 1889), pp. 140-142.
\textsuperscript{71}Hours, p. 36.
Chapter Three
Critical Background

Le plus grand paysagiste de notre temps, selon moi, c'est Corot, et le plus bien paysage de 1850 était sa Danse de Nymphs. . . En vérité, ce bonhomme par l'ampleur et la tranquillité du talent, par l'insouciance du procédé stéréile, par le charme intime et la suavité du sentiment, est à nos autres fraiseurs de que Poussin et à Allegrain, ce que Claude est à Lantara.  

Ph. de Channevières
_Letres sur l'art français_,
1850

Will the silvery-gray landscapes with nymphs always retain their present popularity? It is probable that they will with the public, for they are the lightest wares of the master's treasure-house. But the true worshipper of Corot's music will perhaps some day prize the animation of the nymphs less than the animation of the brush in certain less monotonous pictures. The Matinée with the dancing nymphs is the example every visitor to the Louvre prefers at first, the picture is easy to grasp, the loose play of the technique captivates at a glance. But this same looseness is perhaps to blame, if the spectator is not kept in thrall, and if he feels a certain chill in his admiration, when he finds the same quality in many others of the famous pictures.

Julius Meier-Graefe
_Corot-Delacroix_
1906

In Corot's pictures, soft-semi-transparent veils of tone mingle in his painted trees, water surfaces, and reflections. There is almost nothing of substance besides differently brushed passages of close-valued tones. Only the spectator's eyes are given material with which to exercise pleasurably. Comprehension of all touch and substance in the paint layers, and all access to whatever seen or remembered space is represented, can only be achieved by the spectator's willing and durable complicity in retracing the processes of Corot's complex optical interweavings. Not until the very late works of Claude Monet, his Waterlily canvases in particular, will anything like the purely optical denseness of Corot's most refined imagings reappear. When it does, the pictorial feeling will again be ultimately musical in its direction, its character, its cadence, and its undisguised address to the most grandly edifying pleasures of sensation.

Kermit S. Champa

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74 Champa, p. 116.
The statements quoted above are an indication that the critical evaluations have undergone several profound changes even when the same image or images are under discussion. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art criticism, like art itself, has undergone many changes that can be seen in the varied critical responses to the work of Camille Corot. The quote by de Channevières reflects a current opinion around 1850 that Corot's charm and tranquility were similar to that of Poussin and Claude. Meier-Graefe in the early part of this century believes, however, that the charm and tranquility of these images were no longer enough to keep the attention of a sophisticated viewer. More recently, Champa's passage reflects the current re-evaluation of Corot's paintings that is similar to de Channevières'.

Unfortunately, much that has been said about Corot is based on an inherited account of the painter and his contributions to nineteenth century painting. This tradition is not entirely inaccurate but it does seem to rely more on legend and fond memory than on fact. For example, there is a group of commentaries that portrays Corot as a simple, almost saintly man who made important discoveries for the next generation of painters through his serene paintings of an idyllic world.

Corot's later landscapes are almost entirely the product of a poetic spirit, thoroughly imbued with all the varying tones of Nature, which, taking the general aspect of the scene in question, has based thereon a beautiful picture. No idea of a portrait of a place has been considered by the artist, no topographical view has been even remotely desired, and therefore no attempt has been made to represent the more outward appearance of the situation. All the endeavor has been to create a lovely landscape, taking as a theme the recollection of all the charms of the locality and concentrating it, as in a beautiful vision, upon one single canvas.  

Another account, however, adopts a seemingly "psychoanalytic" approach which shows Corot as a repressed and bitter man who used his paintings to express personal and professional frustrations. In his article "Corot: Tradition and the Muse," Anthony Janson discusses the

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paintings *Sibylle* and *Harvester with a Sickle* in relation to his *Self-Portrait with a Palette* and draws this conclusion:

Corot's projection of his features onto the faces of all these women who are depicted as creatures of forbidden desire and associated with evil and sorcery must be interpreted psychologically, despite the obvious hazards inherent in any attempt to analyze the personality of a deceased artist. These paintings evince an extraordinary personal identification with the opposite sex. One implication of this fact is that Corot never developed a fully formed male sexuality. . . . Corot apparently formed his longings for women to be illegitimate on emotional, as well as religious, grounds. The consequence was self-imposed celibacy, which was rationalized through reaction formation as the necessity of devoting himself entirely to art.76

These two accounts represent widely differing views but they do have something in common. While Janson acknowledges the symbolic implications of the figures, an identification of the subject matter and an interpretation of these specific literary or historical characters are not usually important parts of these account. In order to understand why the meaning of Corot's subject matter, especially that of the Orpheus and Eurydice paintings, is rarely discussed by scholars and critics, it is necessary to review some of the ways in which his work has been studied in the past and how it is being studied today.

The reviewers of the Salon were Corot's first critics. His first entries into the Salon in 1828 were reviewed favorably. Delécluze, for instance, in 1822 wrote "*Une vue prise de Narni* et une *Campagne de Rome* par M. Corot rappellent bien ce mélange de grâce et de sévérité dont le terre d'Italie offre tant d'exemples."77 This favorable criticism continues from 1830 to the 1850s with occasional negative comments about a lack of finish. L. Peisse commented in *Le Constitutionnel* on July 26, 1853:

> En dépit d'une certaine insuffisance ou nonchalance de travail, qui laisse les détails à l'état de simple indication, il triomphe par le décision de caractère général, qui est toujours énergiquement accusé et par la force pénétrante de l'exposition . . . M. Corot est le plus expressif de nos paysagistes. On voit que M Corot prend aisément des ton divers. Il n'est pas moins inventif dans ses compositions et, s'il répète un motif, c'est toujours avec des variantes qui en modifient l'expression et lui donnent un accent nouveau. La manière, quoique

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77E. Delécluze, "Salon," in *Journal des Débats* (April 4, 1827); quoted in Miquel, p. 15.
très originale, est si simple, si sincère si exempte de ces rubiques de métier qu'on appelle des ficelles, qu'elle a tenté peu d'imitateurs.  

This loose technique, however, could not disguise Corot's skill for composition for many viewers. Baudelaire, writing in the *Salon of 1859*, praised Corot for his construction and harmony while admitting that he does not dazzle the viewer:

Il étonne lentement, je le veux bien, il enchante peu à peu, mais il faut savoir pénétrer dans sa science, car, chez lui, il n'y a pas de papillotage, mais partout une infaillible rigueur d'harmonie. De plus, il est un des rares, le seul peut-être, qui ait gardé un profond sentiment de la construction, qui observe la valeur proportionnelle de chaque détail dans l'ensemble, et, s'il permis de comparer la composition d'un paysage à la structure humaine, qui sache toujours où placer les ossements et quelle dimension il leur faut donner.  

Along with Théodore Rousseau and Charles-François Daubigny, critics considered Corot as a leader of the naturalistic school of landscape which was seen as a counterpart to the progressive movement centering around Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Millet and the Realists. After the Revolution of 1848, the Realists began to explore new subjects and ideas centering around the worker and contemporary life. The naturalistic views of the forest and the peasant were now acceptable to the avant-garde, but, as Castagnary writes in 1857, the gods and heroes of classical and Christian imagery were not:

La peinture religieuse et la peinture historique ou héroïque se sont graduellement affaiblies, à mesure que s'affaiblissaient comme organismes sociaux, la théocratie et la monarchie auxquelles elles se réfèrent; leur élimination, à peu près complète aujourd'hui, amène la domination absolue du genre, du paysage, du portrait, qui relèvent de l'individualisme: dans l'art comme dans la société, l'homme devient de plus en plus homme.  

As history painting and historical landscape painting fell out of favor, the relatively new *Prix de Rome* for historical landscape was discontinued in 1863, indicating that the era of the historical landscape was drawing to a close.

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78 L. Peisse, *Le Constitutionnel* (July 26, 1853); quoted in Miquel, p. 36.
81 Castagnary, p. 3.
82 Albert Boime, p. 143.
In reviewing the Salon of 1861, Castagnary's lengthy comments on Corot point out the artist's accomplishments as well as his deficiencies.

Deux manières successives et opposées se partagent la vie et l'œuvre de Corot. La première, énergique, accentuée, s'attachant aux lignes précises et aux contours arrêtés, cherchant enfin le rendu de la nature beaucoup plus que l'impression du peintre; c'est la manière de ces études. La seconde, vague, indécise, cherchant l'harmonie des tons beaucoup plus que les formes des choses, poursuivant l'expression du sentiment intérieur beaucoup plus que le vérité objective, et s'arrêtant quand ce sentiment est exprimé, sans souci que la forme ne soit pas atteinte; c'est le manière actuelle, celle qui a fait connaître et illustré Corot.83

He states that the four paintings exhibited at the 1861 Salon are examples of his second type of landscape and that Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld is the best of the four. "On y retrouve l'ensemble des qualités et des défauts qui contiennent l'originalité de l'artiste; une sentiment exquis, une haute entente de la composition, une irréprochable harmonie, et, mêlée à tout cela, une exécution molle et perpétuellement lâchée."84

While Castagnary comments upon Corot's painterly execution, other critics like P. de Saint-Victor focused upon the apparent repetition of motifs: "Les tableaux de M. Corot sont toujours de la même farine. . . . La répétition constante des mêmes procédés et des mêmes effets ferait douter, à la longue, de la naïveté de l'artiste."85 Théophile Gautier commented on the poses and dispositions of the figures: " . . . Cette silhouette bizarre, suivie d'une Eurydice roide comme une poupée, exciterait le rire si l'on pouvait rire de cette excellent Corot, si amoureux de son art et si convaincu."86

Those critics supporting the Impressionist movement saw Corot's loose execution and his observation of landscape as not only an antecedent of Impressionism but also a legitimization of their goals. As early as 1868, Thoré began to praise Corot's sketchy execution and the effect it produced:

Do not look too closely at Corot's figures. . . . His half-finished manner has at least the merit of producing a harmonious ensemble and a striking impression.

84Castagnary, Les Artistes au XIXe siècle, p. 3.
85P. de Saint-Victor, La Presse (August 2, 1861); quoted in Miquel, p. 42.
86Moreau-Nélaton, I, p. 129.
Instead of analyzing a feature, one feels an impression. ... The quality of the composition is so essential that it comes first -- even in landscape. ... When you look at a vast horizon or any sort of landscape, what you have before you is not a ready-made picture but the elements of one. The painter's talent consists of encompassing the accessory features with a dominant effect. The old classical school spoke of a 'composed' landscape and the simplest motif will assume its importance thanks to a felicitous composition.  

Even Castagnary who had earlier criticized Corot's painting technique saw this loose manner of painting as a positive factor in 1868:

Quand on arrive devant un Corot, il ne faut pas s'approcher de trop près. Rien n'est fait, rien n'es exécuté. En vain vous chercheriez un terrain, du feuillage; votre œil n'aperçoit que quelques grandes branches, minces et déliées, qui traînent le long du ciel, et puis ça et là des masses verdâtres qui s'estompent vaguement dans la nuée d'un brouillard. Tenez-vous à distance. Evoquez lentement en vous la pensée du peintre et laissez-vous aller au sentiment qu'il a voulu exprimer. Ce sentiment est exquis, et bientôt vous en aurez reconnu la justesse. Cette vapeur légère qui flotte sur les eaux, ces fonds indistincts qui reculent dans la brume, ce ciel aérien et tout frissonnant de lumière nouvelle, n'est-ce pas le matin frais et reposé, tel que vous l'avez vu dans nos vallées en fouland l'herbe humide encore, et tel que votre esprit en a gardé l'image simplifiée par l'éloignement? Si l'œuvre est réussie, si la vision qu'elle évoque est vraie, n'insistez pas et éloignez-vous. L'artiste a produit ce qu'il voulait.  

Corot's popularity continued throughout the late nineteenth century, but it was not until 1905 that a catalogue raisonné of his works appeared. Alfred Robaut, a student and friend of the artist, began the catalogue in the 1860s, gathering images, letters and statements by the artist and people who knew him. After Robaut's death, Étienne Moreau-Nélaton continued the catalogue and compiled Robaut's notes into an extensive biography of Corot. The result is a monumental four-volume work that has remained the foundation of Corot studies since its publication in 1905. Although there are differing opinions of its merits today, it continues to be the most extensive source of information about the artist and all phases of his career.  

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87Boime, p.96.
88Castagnary, Salons, p. 276.
89Since its initial publication, there have been four supplements written by André Schoeller and Jean Dieterle. A catalogue of his graphic works was compiled by Loys Delteil as Volume Five of his Le Peintre-Graveur Illustré série.
90The differing opinions about the catalogue raisonné can be illustrated in two 1991 quotes: Galassi, p. 5, "Robaut and Moreau-Nélaton did not depart from the overall interpretation of Corot's career but their work created a rich resource for the study of Corot, which ... encouraged subsequent reinterpretations." Richard R. Brettel, introduction to The Rise of Landscape Paintings in France: Corot to Monet, pp. 17-18, "An immensely prolific artist, his paintings were summarily catalogued shortly after his death by his student Alfred Robaut. ... the existing catalogue of paintings is so out-of-date that it is no longer useful for a current-day scholar."
was a necessity since Robaut and Moreau-Nélaton were compiling a *catalogue raisonné*, which by its nature seeks to bring together as much information as possible about the artist's work. Critical studies, in contrast, tend to treat the different styles and types of Corot's painting as separate entities, usually stressing one type to be superior to the others.

During the early years of the twentieth century, Corot's late landscapes continued to receive favorable criticism, but his early Italian studies and late figure paintings were becoming more well-known. The re-evaluation that these caused completely changed opinions about his idyllic landscapes. When confronted with the early studies, the late figure works and the lyrical landscapes, the early twentieth-century viewer was struck by the novelty of the studies and figures, discovering the "artificiality" and sentimentality of the idyllic landscapes.

In the following years, the prestige of the idyllic landscapes continued to fall, while his other works impressed artists and critics with their structure and direct observation of the model and the landscape.\(^{91}\) The passage by Julius Meier-Graefe, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, illustrates the depth to which the mythological landscapes had fallen. Another passage by the same critic shows that the *manières* that Castagnary described in 1861 had, by the 1920s and 1930s, become rigid divisions of Corot's works that determined artistic merit. Meier-Graefe writes:

None but the pictures manufactured for the Salon display the traces of the cloven hoof. There are two Corot's which succeed each other... with the regularity of the seasons. The untrammeled artist developed into the greatest landscape painter of the ages and yet side by side continued the man of compromises even when Corot had become famous and was himself a member of the jury of the Salon.\(^{92}\)

The early decades of the twentieth century also saw another change in the critical reactions to Corot and the Barbizon artists in general. Beginning shortly after the end of the

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\(^{91}\) Galassi, (diss.), pp. 22-23

First World War, Barbizon artists were thought of as too sentimental for modern viewers.93 This view prevailed until the ground-breaking exhibition *Barbizon Revisited* of 1963, the first major exhibition of Barbizon painters since 1889.94 Robert L. Herbert, who organized the exhibition and wrote the catalogue, sought to re-introduce the Barbizon artists to American audiences and to prove that Impressionism evolved logically from the accomplishments of the Barbizon artists of the mid-nineteenth century.

Barbizon art is the result of a dialectic between the artist and nature, and will only live if we establish another, between ourselves and the paintings. We must study the paintings with at least a portion of the love with which they were created, and clear our minds of two things: a bogus historical reading, and a simplistic interpretation of nature.95 Herbert was one of the first art historians to acknowledge the influence of Corot's Neoclassical training without finding fault with the neoclassical style.96 Herbert, however, still considers the paintings done from nature to be more interesting for the modern viewer, but he notes the social commentary present in Barbizon paintings in their response to what he calls the "Urban-Industrial Revolution." 97 Herbert may have hoped to inspire a new generation of art historians to take up the questions of Barbizon painting, but the exhibition did almost the opposite. Herbert's catalogue was considered so complete that further studies were considered redundant. During the 1960s and 1970s, several books about Corot appeared that were geared for an audience more general than one of art historians. Three monographs by Jean Leymarie, Yvon Taillandier and Madeleine Hours are examples of these and, although they did attempt to provide new

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93Herbert, *Barbizon Revisited*, p. 15. "We rejected Barbizon art because we no longer appreciated the feelings of our grandparents, and therefore of the art they loved. . . ."
94Herbert, *Barbizon Revisited*, p. 10. The last major exhibition took place in 1899 and had been organized by the Barye Monument Society in New York.
95Herbert, *Barbizon Revisited*, p. 67.
96For over a century, Valenciennes had been held in disrepute because only some of his Salon landscapes were known. In the 1930s a private collection of his *plein-air* landscapes that had not been seen since the artist's death in 1819 was bequeathed to the Louvre and a new idea of Valenciennes began to be formed. Herbert's acceptance of Corot's Neoclassical background may be the result of the new attitude about Valenciennes and the Neoclassical tradition.
97Herbert, *Barbizon Revisited*, p. 30. "Infinitely more modern to our eyes are his unpretentious paintings of smaller scale, usually done from nature."
interpretations of Corot, they continued to rely on inherited representations of the painter. In each, there was an attempt at a psychoanalytic reading of Corot, but they were not very critical analyses and not serious works of psychoanalytic study. Of them, Leymarie’s book is the most serious, seeking to re-introduce Corot to a popular audience. Issues mentioned in earlier studies to support the idea that Corot was a kind-hearted artist, married to his career, were now cited as symptoms of his emotional conflict. Taillandier recounts several passages of this kind in his monograph, and he tries to show that earlier statements were not always accurate. One instance of this was related in a story about Corot and his father. After being rebuked by his father for coming to dinner in his work clothes, a fifty year old Corot said: “I said nothing. For a long time I had been modelling myself on Christ.” Taillandier then goes on to analyze this incident:

... but however pious was the man they called the St. Francis of Assisi of painting, he probably only seemed to forgive those who offended him and subconsciously continued to hate the offender. From there to wanting to castrate his father — to use the language of the psychoanalyst -- is no great distance, and we find an illustration of this desire, which needs a sharp instrument for its realization, in the Reaper Holding Her Sickle, whose face, according to Jean Leymarie, resembled that of Corot.98

Psychoanalytic readings such as this can be problematic because they are rather superficial attempts to analyze Corot by relying on the traditional accounts of his life.

Although more popular rather than critical, the works by Leymarie, Taillandier and Hours re-examine some of the standard conceptions about Corot. Questions of his personality, artistic training and artistic goals that had been so emphatically stated in the past were now questioned. Was Corot a simple, angelic soul with a generous heart? Was he really a self-taught artist who ignored the lessons of his teachers? Was his only aim to record nature as he saw and remembered it from the past?

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98Yvon Taillandier, Corot (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., n.d.), pp. 70-72. The passage goes on to identify several images of castration that Taillandier sees in Corot’s work. These images include fallen trees, broken columns and piles of rubble.
These are very legitimate questions that needed to be asked, yet most commentators of the 1960s and 1970s still sought to answer them by looking solely at style. Another writer, Ian Barras Hill proposed that Corot's choice of landscape painting might have been psychologically motivated, drawing on Freud's consideration of landscape as a maternal symbol: Corot was deeply attached to his mother. In this way he accounts for Corot's choice of landscape subjects but does not mention his choice of other subjects, such as those in his figure paintings.99

Along with these comments, however, a new appreciation of the importance of the late, misty landscapes begins to emerge. These critics see the later style as symbolic of self-investigation that earlier commentators saw as merely the nostalgia of an aging artist. Anthony Janson sees these paintings as important personal works as well as significant for the next generation of painters.

The heightened sensitivity of Corot's new approach to landscape culminates in *Remembrance of Mortefontaine* (1864) and the long line of its successors, personal reminiscences based not on the actual appearance of a site but on the artist's feelings for the place. They are dream worlds which anticipate the paintings of Puvis and other Symbolists. In their expression of the artist's state of mind through a personal code of stylized forms and ritual gestures.100

This appreciation of the late landscapes, however, was not universal and many critics still saw them only for their technical advances toward Impressionism and not statements of a personal symbolism.101

Recently, there have been several studies which have signaled a renewed interest in Corot and have led to new interpretations. An article by Fronia Wissman focuses specifically on *Orpheus Greeting the Dawn* (fig. 7) and the relevance of the title to the painting. Wissman cites Corot's love of music and literature as influences upon his work, but she does not

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99 Hill, p. 102. "Perhaps, as psychoanalysts think, Corot's practice of landscape painting was a regressive psychological act, a return to the womb, for (so Freud had it in his "Introduction to Psychoanalysis") it is a maternal symbol signifying a wishful reversion to the childlike embryonic state."

100 Janson, p. 303.

101 Hill, p. 107. "The real advance Corot made in landscape art was achieved by giving greater emphasis to immediate pictorial effects superimposing them on the framework of a classical composition."
consider the meaning of Orpheus as a mythological character. Wissman proposes that, although Corot titled the two paintings for Prince Demidoff, Orpheus and Diana, they were merely stock figures. "Traditional titles for the pair of works identify the figures as the mythological persona, Orpheus and Diana. Upon study of the pictures and their evolution, it becomes clear, however, that Corot's real subject was the depiction of light and that he only used the figures as metaphors of the intangible."\textsuperscript{102}

Wissman's dissertation traces the development of Corot's Salon paintings through an investigation of specific influences. She identifies the influence of seventeenth-century Dutch painters, Claude, Poussin, contemporary theater and the nineteenth-century Romantic movement on his work. She argues that Corot was not immune to outside sources, but consciously accepted inspiration from many different areas. Wissman's study also helps dispell much of the legend about Corot's personality and his role as a revolutionary. Wissman writes: "I have tried to argue that Corot consciously and conscientiously looked to past art in order to legitimize his own participation in the tradition of historical landscape painting, a practice that suggests his innate conservatism."\textsuperscript{103}

Peter Galassi's \textit{Corot in Italy: Open-Air Painting and the Classical-Landscape Tradition}, is the first in-depth study devoted to Corot's first journey to Italy and to the importance of open-air oil sketches in the development of Corot's mature style. Galassi describes the history of open-air painting and its place in the training of artists from the seventeenth century. This account characterizes the practice as an accepted academic practice and not something "discovered" by the artists of the "generation of 1830." Galassi also accounts for the academic milieu of Valenciennes, Bertin and Michallon that Corot entered. This invalidates the stories that Corot was completely self-taught and immune to the theories of the Ecole. The majority of this study, however, is devoted to Italy's important position for young artists in general and for Corot in particular. Galassi outlines the history of artists travelling to Italy to finish their

\textsuperscript{103}Wissman, p. 192.
training and identifies the important sites that all artists had to see to get the most out of their journey. Corot's time in Italy from 1825 to 1828 is then described in detail, from an account of his itinerary to critical analyses of many of his oil sketches. Galassi describes Corot's achievement in Italy as the culmination of one tradition and the beginning of another:

Although Corot's work contains many innovations, his distinction lies not so much in any new quality that he brought to outdoor painting as in the completeness with which he embraced the tradition. Arriving near the end of its vital period of growth and invention, Corot gave it its fullest and most lasting expression. In individual landscapes and in his whole pattern of work, Corot brought to splendid fruition the opportunity that others had prepared. How much this accomplishment owes to Corot's personal talent and how much to the collective tradition is an unresolvable question.104

Introducing Corot to a contemporary popular audience has been the aim of Michael Clark's *Corot and the Art of Landscape*.105 Its purpose is the same as that of the studies from the 1960s and 1970s of Leymarie and Taillandier; however, Clarke does not rely as heavily on the inherited view of Corot or on a misconceived psychanalytic approach. While not the scholarly investigation of Galassi, it seems to be more objective than other popular monographs.

What all these studies of Corot have in common is an interest in the formal properties of Corot's paintings over his use of subject matter. This is not necessarily a negative situation, but it does leave out one factor in an understanding of Corot works. The inattention to subject matter is found even in reviews of the Salons in which Corot participated. When *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld* was shown at the Salon of 1861, none of the critics attempted to interpret why Corot chose this subject, even though it was the only one of Corot's five paintings that year to be given a definite literary title. From the beginning, Corot's subject matter is not seen as an integral part of the interpretation of works such as these. His subjects are seen as a continuation of academic practices, indicating that these were meant as peaceful diversions for the bourgeois collector.

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104 Galassi, p. 131.
This view continues during the twentieth century. For example, Herbert does not investigate the meaning of Corot's iconography but continues to see them as part of his academic background, necessary for works exhibited at the Salon.

His Salon entries included a few landscape studies, but he maintained his allegiance to tradition in his more typical exhibition pictures: *Christ in the Garden of Olives, Saint Sebastian, Macbeth*, and a great many *Souvenirs, Matinées, Soirs*, and dancing nymphs. In these especially the more robust compositions like *Sodom*, Corot remains a member of the older Romantic generation. This does not gainsay the fact that his splendid Claudesque landscapes had much to offer the Impressionists, but they preferred, as do we, his plein-air paintings.106

Later writers like Leymarie and Taillardier again did not emphasize subject matter in their interpretations, but relied on personal events and artistic execution. They did not question the choice of characters such as Orpheus, Hagar or even Christ, because the identification of the figures was not as important as the way Corot depicted the figures. For example, Taillardier makes a connection between Corot and Orpheus but does not mention any of the paintings that deal with the Orpheus and Eurydice myth.107

The newer commentaries continue the long history of seeing Corot's subject matter as peripheral rather than as central parts of the work.

... Corot was interested in issues such as the relationship of the figure to the landscape and how stories could be told using the landscape vocabulary, issues that had been explored by Claude and Poussin. Corot's success at the Salon demonstrates that his devotion to the academic concept of historical landscape painting was appreciated and acknowledged.108

Because of the novelty of his early studies and late figures and the lyricism of the later landscapes, his subject matter has been understood as a remnant of the painter's neoclassical training, not as more personal statements. The personal symbolism of the Orpheus and Eurydice works illustrates, however, that the choice of subject matter was important to Corot, representing his interest in characters that had been inspiring Western artists for centuries.

106Barbizon Revisited, p. 53.
107Taillardier, p. 72. "The Orpheus with no Eurydice, and even less blessed than the Son of Calliope and the King of Thrace, because he had no wife, this celebrate excluded by his father's continual scorn from the place he might have occupied in formal society, dreamed perpetually of marriage."
108Wissman, p. 190.
Chapter Four
Orpheus and Eurydice: Variations and Themes

In November 1859, the Théâtre Lyrique premiered Orphée, a new revision of Christoph Gluck's Orfeo ed Euridice by Hector Berlioz. It was a tremendous success with Pauline Viardot, a famous contralto performing the role of Orpheus.\textsuperscript{109} When Corot's Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld appeared at the next Salon in 1861, it was acknowledged that the performance of Orphée had provided the inspiration for the painting. The opera did play a major role in the painting's inspiration, but critical accounts do not take into account the enormous interest shown by mid-nineteenth century writers, artists and musicians for the Orpheus myth in general. This interest was not exclusive to the nineteenth century but dates back to antiquity.

The figure of Orpheus is one of the oldest and most influential in Greek mythology.\textsuperscript{110} The mythological story can be divided into three separate iconographic themes: Orpheus the musician-poet who charms the animate and inanimate worlds with his song; Orpheus the lover who braves a descent into the Underworld to bring Eurydice back from the dead; and Orpheus the priest and martyr who continued to sing even in death. There are many variations to the story of Orpheus, but most versions seem to follow a basic scenario.\textsuperscript{111} Orpheus was a lyre-playing poet from Thrace, the son of the Muse, Calliope, and Oeagus, the King of Thrace.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} Emmet Robbins, "Famous Orpheus," in Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth, ed. John Warden (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 3. As early as the sixth century B.C. Orpheus is already considered "famous" by the poet Ibycus. There is a tradition that Orpheus was a historic figure who composed the Orphic Hymns on which the Orphic religion was founded but there is evidence that some of the Hymns were composed as late as the second century A.D., so it is probable that Orpheus was a legendary figure to whom credit was given as the Hymns author. (Robbins, p. 10.)
\textsuperscript{111} For detailed accounts of these variations of the Orpheus myth see Dorothy Kosinski, Orpheus in Nineteenth Century Symbolism (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1989) and John Warden, ed., Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth.
\textsuperscript{112} In several versions Apollo is identified as Orpheus' father to help account for the magical powers of his music.
Orpheus was a travelling singer with magical powers who could charm both man and animal with his song. As he sang, wild animals would gather around him to listen, birds would stop their singing and fly down to be near him, and rocks and trees would move in order to provide him with shelter. With this magical power, Orpheus became a sort of shamanistic figure whose divine power could control the elements and could enable him to know the proper ways of worshipping the gods of Olympus.\footnote{Kosinski, p. 2. "Invariably Orpheus is presented as the lyre player, the eitharede, bound by the power of his music to the god Apollo. Apollonius of Rhodes, in the Argonautica, emphasizes Orpheus' alliance with Apollo, his crucial priestly function, leading sacrifices to the god throughout the arduous journey of the ship Argo." He was called upon to perform both of these roles as a member of Jason's crew aboard the Argo. While searching for the Golden Fleece, the Argo was caught in a violent storm. As Orpheus began to play his lyre and sing, the winds and sea were calm and the ship was able to proceed in safety. To thank the gods for their salvation, Orpheus instructed the crew on the proper sacrifices and ceremonies.}

In the most well-known part of the story, Orpheus fell in love and married the wood nymph Eurydice. Soon after, Eurydice was attacked in the forest by Aristaeus and was bitten by a snake during her flight. Orpheus and several others went to search for her, but were unable to find her before she died. When Orpheus found Eurydice, his lament was so poignant that Zeus sent Hermes with the message that he would be allowed to travel into the Underworld to try to persuade Pluto to allow Eurydice to return to life. With Hermes as his guide, Orpheus set out on his journey, passing Cerberus and crossing the Styx in Charon's boat. Once in Hades, Orpheus went to Pluto and Persephone and began to play his lyre and sing a lament of his lost love. His sad song affected all of the inhabitants of the Underworld, moving even the Furies with his grief. When he finished, Pluto had Eurydice brought to him and told Orpheus that he could take Eurydice back to the Upperworld on the condition that he would not turn to look upon her until they were safely out of Hades. Orpheus accepted this condition and they set out on their journey. He was resolute in his determination not to turn around as they ascended toward the Gates of Hades but nearing them, Orpheus could no longer wait. As he turned to look at Eurydice, she was taken from him for the second time. Lamenting what seemed to be a greater loss, Orpheus continued his journey alone.
After his return, Orpheus became a reclusive poet, avoiding women but gathering a group of young men around him. This situation enraged Dionysus so much that he sent the Maenads to kill him. As they beat him and tore apart his body, his head and lyre continued their song but these were thrown into the river Hebros which carried them down to the Island of Lesbos. Apollo was so moved by this song that he took pity on Orpheus' spirit placing his lyre in the sky as the constellation Lira. Orpheus' head was taken to the Temple of Apollo at Antissa.

The rich tradition which surrounds the Orpheus myth created several different ways of interpreting the story. It is these various traditions that, I believe, interested Corot in the characters. I want to argue that at least five of the different ways of imaging the Orpheus myth can be found in Corot's works; an outline of each may be helpful in understanding Corot's iconography.

One interpretation stems from the early Greek stories of Orpheus and Eurydice. Greek writers usually treated the myth as three separate accounts of Orpheus the priest, the poet and the lover without forming an account that incorporates all three stories. The Greek versions, however, differ from later versions in that Orpheus is able to rescue Eurydice from death. "The Greeks, in a period before interest in Romantic love demanded the unhappy ending, seem to have known Orpheus... as one who was successful in bringing his wife back from the underworld."¹¹⁴ The unhappy ending appears to be a later version and would be the formula taken up by the Roman poets Ovid and Virgil.¹¹⁵

For Corot, there was another group of works that shared the optimistic story of the Greeks: a group of operas that ended happily instead of tragically, which include Gluck's Orphée and, in an odd way, Offenbach's Orphée aux Enfers. The appearance of Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld at the Salon of 1861 indicates that Corot was directly

¹¹⁴Robbins, p. 15-16.
¹¹⁵Robbins, pp. 15-16. "Romantic love was of little interest to the early Greeks. It was essentially a creation of the Alexandrian Age and forms part of its legacy to Rome."
inspired by the revival of Gluck's *Orphée* in 1859. It would appear that *Orphée* caused Corot to think about a subject that was currently popular and timelessly evocative.

Gluck's *Orphée* is a rather short opera that deals mainly with Orpheus' quest for Eurydice. It opens with Orpheus and a group of shepherds attending Eurydice's funeral. When Orpheus is alone, he sings a lament which is so moving that the gods send Cupid to him with the news that he may try to win her back.

Orpheus begins his journey and reaches the first region of the Underworld. There he must confront the Furies, who, at first, scorn his attempt to rescue his love. Soon, however, they fall under the spell of his sad song and let him pass. He crosses over the River Lethe and enters the Elysian Fields. Eurydice is brought to him, but she does not recognize him because all memories of her former life have been forgotten.

Orpheus takes her hand and, resolutely looking ahead, leads her out of the Underworld. At first, Eurydice does not understand what is happening, but soon she recognizes Orpheus and asks why he will not look at her. As he cannot answer she begins to feel that he no longer loves her. She begs him to turn and, impulsively, Orpheus looks at Eurydice. She immediately disappears and his grief is so great that Orpheus tries to kill himself. At that moment, Cupid again appears, telling Orpheus that the gods will restore Eurydice to him. Eurydice is again brought to life and the three travel into the light where celebrations are held.116

A very different opera about Orpheus and Eurydice premiered in 1858. Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers* could not be more different from Gluck's melodramatic romance. Offenbach's is a political satire of the government of Napoleon III. Orpheus is a hack-musician in love with a shepherdess while Eurydice is engaged in an affair with Pluto disguised as Aristaeus. Pluto lures Eurydice to the Underworld; Orpheus is happy to be rid of her so he can be with his shepherdess. A character named Public Opinion, however,

approaches Orpheus, telling him that he must petition the gods for her return if he wants to keep up appearances.

Public Opinion finally convinces Orpheus to journey to Olympus where he tells his story. Jupiter and the other gods journey to the Underworld with Orpheus to determine if Pluto is guilty. Once there, Jupiter chastises Pluto for "abducting" Eurydice and then seduces her himself. He then tells her to return with Orpheus to the Upperworld. In a satiric twist of the traditional story, Orpheus and Eurydice are reunited, but they have no desire to be together.\footnote{117}

While Gluck's opera is a romance of the triumph of love, Offenbach twists the myth into a comedy to symbolize the corruption of the Second Empire government. Both Gluck and Offenbach, however, use the myth to comment on different aspects of the human condition, illustrating the versatility of the story towards different ends. Corot was drawn to Orphée because Gluck was one of his favorite composers and it fit his rather nostalgic view of the classical past. Corot and Offenbach share a common bond, however, since, for both artists, Orpheus is a way of commenting on modern conditions. Offenbach uses classical myths to criticize the Imperial court of Napoleon III, while it is possible that Corot uses the classical myths to allude to an idyllic past lost to modern man.\footnote{118} Offenbach's Orpheus is a commentary of the corruption of power and tradition during the Second Empire; Corot's Orpheus is a symbol of the artist who lives during a time of change but longs for a Golden Age.

A second interpretation includes the most widely known versions of the Orpheus myth found in Ovid's \textit{Metamorphoses}, Book 10, 1-85 and Book 11, 1-66, and Virgil's \textit{Georgics}, Book 4, 453-427. These are works that Corot enjoyed reading, stressing the romantic story of Orpheus' unsuccessful quest and its aftermath. Ovid's account provides a detailed description


\footnote{118 Although Corot was drawn more to Gluck, he did not avoid productions such as Offenbach's, attending all sorts of theatrical productions and would not have been scandalized by Offenbach's caustic wit.}
of Orpheus' power to enchant with his music, a theme which would influence paintings of the
subject for centuries.

On the top of a certain hill was a level stretch of open ground, covered with green
turf. There was no shelter from the sun, but when the divinely-born poet seated
himself there and struck his melodious strings, shady trees moved to the spot.
The oak tree of Chaonia and poplars, Pheathan's sisters, crowded round, along
with Jupiter's great oak, with its lofty branches, and soft lime trees and beeches,
and the virgin laurel, brittle hazels, and ash trees, that are used for spear shafts,
smooth firs and the holm oak, bowed down with acorns, the genial sycamore,
and the variegated maple, willows that grow by the rivers and the water-loving
lotus, evergreen box, slender tamarisks, myrtles double-hued, and viburnum with
its dark blue berries. . . Such was the grove which Orpheus had drawn around
him, and now he sat in the midst of a gathering of wild creatures, and a host of
birds. 119

The love story of Orpheus and Eurydice takes precedence in Virgil's account. There
seems to be, however, a harsher attitude toward women, such as Eurydice's angry reproach
after Orpheus' fatal glance.

. . . He turned, he looked, he broke
The harsh condition; in that moment his labour was lost.
Three dry clashes of thunder rolled across Averanus
And she spoke to him, "Your thoughtlessness in love,
Orpheus, has wrecked us both. The current of fate
Catches me, it pulls me backward, my blurred eyes swim.
Goodbye, goodbye! I am lost in a huge darkness.
My hands have no strength, no substance, to catch at yours." 120

For Virgil, even Orpheus' death was the result of his love of Eurydice. The Maenads are
driven mad because he is not interested in any woman other than his lost love.

No love, no marriage-rite could waylay his mind.
Over mountains, rivers, plains, he wandered northward
Lost in a world never widowed of its snows
- Eurydice's absence and the empty gift of Dis -
Till one night of orgy the women of the Cicones,
Furious that he stood apart from their holy lust,
Tore his young body and scattered it through the fields.
They flung his wrenched-off head in the River Hebros;
The current rolled it through the land where he was born.
"Eurydice", he shouted - nothing remained but a voice -
"Eurydice", her name still alive on his cold tongue. 121

228.
121 The Georgics, p. 94.
Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque paintings of this subject are usually based on a compositional tradition dating back to Roman landscapes.\textsuperscript{122} An example is Poussin's *Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice* which suggests that Orpheus' control over nature was an important theme for landscape artists, who through their art could also re-form nature to suit their wishes.

A third interpretation which may have influenced Corot was the Christian Orpheus who became fused with Christ in both written accounts and the pictorial arts. This practice had begun when the Early Christians found in Orpheus an evocative pictorial model that could be made to fit into the iconology of their nacent religion. Roman representations of Orpheus depicted him as a musician in the wilderness casting his spell over the animals and inanimate objects around him. This representation was easily adapted to fit representations of both Christ and David.\textsuperscript{123} Kosinsky argues: "the basis for this association of Orpheus and Christ is, of course, the similarity between the image of Orpheus surrounded by animals tranquilized by his music and Christ, and the Good Shepherd, as presented in John 10:11-15, and 27-28; Matthew 18:12-13; and Luke 15:5-6."\textsuperscript{124} There are several other similarities between Orpheus and Christ: they both undertake journeys into the Underworld to redeem lost souls; their religions stress a belief in an individualized soul and the responsibility of the individual to follow a strict moral code; and both were martyred in order for resurrection and salvation to occur.\textsuperscript{125}

As the Early Christian era passed into the Middle Ages, Orpheus continued to be an important pictorial and symbolic character. Orpheus was used by writers whose aim was to show the connections between pagan mythology and Christianity as well as by those who

\textsuperscript{122}Kosinski, p. 6. A fresco from the catacomb of Domitilla is an early example of the conflation of Christ with Orpheus from the third century.

\textsuperscript{123}It is not known whether Jewish or Christian artists used the image first, but it is known that representations of Orpheus provided an appropriate image for both David and Christ. "The conflation of Orpheus, David, and Christ depends upon the magical quality of Orpheus' song, its calming and inspiring effect." Kosinski, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{124}Kosinski, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{125}Jewish and Christian apologists could also draw upon The Testament of Orpheus which appeared in the late antique era and related how Orpheus was introduced to the God of Moses while in Egypt. In the Testament, Orpheus relates to his Musaios, his journey to Egypt where he met Moses. There he realized the 'errors' of his polytheistic theology. He did not convert because he felt he would be failing his followers, but he believed in his heart and wanted his son to know the true path to salvation.
wanted to show the danger of pagan religions. Other writers found a Christian connotation for Orpheus' journey to the Underworld. In these Eurydice symbolizes the human soul which Orpheus must lead to salvation, but he does not have the resources to reclaim her. Christ, in his Harrowing of Hell, had the power of God's Word to release the dead from their graves. Orpheus, unfortunately, had only his music, which did not have the power to charm Death.\footnote{Irwin, pp. 55-56. "In most, but not all, versions of the myth, Orpheus failed to bring his wife back to the upper world; this feature is contrasted with Christ's success, as in a fourth-century hymn by Ephraim of Syria. In it Death scornfully denies the power of music to charm him: "as for the wise that are able to charm wild beasts, their charms enter not into my ears . . . the voice of our Lord sounded in Hell and he cried aloud and cursed the grave one by one."} \footnote{Kosinski, p. 10.}

A fourth tradition which, I believe, interested Corot goes back to the earliest versions of the story, becoming very important during the Renaissance which continued even in the nineteenth century. This is Orpheus the magical poet who brings harmony and civilization to mankind. Although this element had been present in many interpretations, it was during the Renaissance that artists began to see Orpheus as their own counterpart and his magical song as the ideal representation of their art. For Renaissance artists and philosophers Orpheus was "initiate and teacher, civilizing poet and ideal artist. He is a symbol of harmony and excellence; his muse is the power of love over the universe, his art an expression of the harmony of the spheres."\footnote{Lee Johnson, The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A Critical Catalogue, vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 34-36. "Orpheus civilizes the Greeks quietly opens the era of ancient civilization, Attila and his Hordes overrun Italy and the Arts brings it to a violent close; bracketed between these epochal events and displayed for the edification of those politicians who care to look up is an array of exemplars of civilized}
civilize the Greeks in their wild state (figure 36) in the southern apse, begins the cycle that describes "the life and death of classical civilization." Its opposite is represented in the northern apse in *Attila followed by his hordes crushes out the life of classical civilization* (figure 37). Whereas the setting for the Orpheus is an idyllic landscape showing the harmony civilization can bring, the setting for the Attila is one of confusion and brutality. "These contrasts in the context of the two hemicycles suggest contrasts in meaning, between attraction and dispersal, civilization and barbarism, the teaching hero Orpheus, and Attila, personification of the mob."  

Another current project was to have placed special emphasis on the figure of Orpheus. Paul Chenevard had proposed an extensive cycle to decorate the interior of the Pantheon with works showing the evolution of history as a cyclical development. The central work was to have been a densely populated mural called *Social Palingenesys* (figure 38). Based on Pierre Simon Ballanche's epic poem "Orpheus", this painting would have shown the role of Orpheus in the theory of religious syncretism, "a degenerative cyclical history, and a system of analogies between stages of mankind's development and the growth of the individual."  

For Chenevard, Orpheus is one of the great teachers before Christ who helped bring enlightenment to the world in a period before the decline of civilization.

The last of the traditions that, to my mind, Corot took as inspiration dealt with the idea of Orpheus, the poet, who loses his love and undertakes a journey into the Underworld to regain her. This idea has close links to the Christian story of Christ's Harrowing of Hell, but for the artist, it is not only salvation which is achieved on this journey, but also inspiration. Dante, another favorite character for Corot, has many similarities with Orpheus. After the death of Beatrice, Dante wanders for a time filled with grief. He undertakes a journey into the after-life.

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130 Hersey, p. 389.
131 Kosinski, p. 58.
to find Beatrice but finds salvation and inspiration instead. He realizes that his goal must be more than just Beatrice, it must be to gain entrance into paradise. There are many examples of this theme, but one that Corot surely would have been aware of is that of his friend, the Romantic poet, Germain de Nerval.132

The Romantic poet Gérard de Nerval was also influenced by religious syncretism, a philosophical movement that also influenced Chenevard, believing that Western civilization was in a period of decline -- that there was a need for spiritual regeneration. According to Strauss "the essential question for Gérard de Nerval becomes the task of rebuilding upon the ruins of skepticism, a task which necessitates the closing of the 'doors of nothingness.'"133 He saw Orpheus' journey to the Underworld as a journey to renew the "self." In his poem "Aurelia," Nerval undertakes a journey of renewal in order to retrieve his lost love, Aurelia. She is the symbol of inspiration, like Eurydice and Beatrice, who leads the poet away from the world of man to the world of the spirit. By undertaking this journey, the poet transcends mere poetry and becomes a prophet.

"Since Nerval saw in his religious syncretism not only an intellectual structure but an attempt to reconstruct his personal life in harmonious relation to an ordered cosmos -- that is to say, as renewal of self through a renewal of vision -- the figure of Orpheus becomes increasingly the model to which he relates his experience. But, it must be added, not merely Orpheus is to be included here, but all the heroes of myth and literature who have descended into the underworld." 134

Redemption, however, cannot take place without proper motivation and this motivation for Nerval is the ideal woman who has many similarities to Dante's Beatrice and Orpheus' Eurydice. Redemption, even with the proper motivation is not always possible for Nerval, like Orpheus he must sing his lament:

132 In the early nineteenth century, Georg Friedrich Creuzer claimed that Orpheus was the link between the mystical Eastern religions and the rise of civilization in the West. Believing that India was the origin of later religions, Creuzer saw the history of civilization as a process of growth until the time of Christ, after which, it began a decline that continued until the present day. For more information about religious syncretism, see Kosinski, pp. 50-54.
133 W. A. Strauss, Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 53. "The essential question for Gérard de Nerval becomes the task of rebuilding upon the ruins of skepticism, a task which necessitates the closing of the 'doors of nothingness.'"
134 Strauss, pp. 53-54.
I am the dark man, the disconsolate widower,
The prince of Aquitania whose tower has been torn down:
My sole star is dead, --and my constellated lute
Bears the black sun of Melancolia.

In the darkness of my grave, you who have consoled me,
Give me back Posilipo and the Italian sea,
The flower so dear to my tormented heart,
And the arbor of vines where the rose twines the branch.

Am I Amor or Phoebus? . . . Lusignan or Biron?
My forehead is still red with the kiss of the queen;
In the grotto where the siren swims I have had a dream . . .

And twice I have crossed and conquered the Acheron:
On Orpheus' lyre in turn I have sent
The cries of faery and the sighs of a saint.135

Reviewed here are several ideas about Orpheus that, I believe, may have influenced Corot's representations of the theme. There are other versions of the Orpheus and Eurydice myths, however, that do not appear as strongly in the work of Corot.136 In this chapter, I have tried to account for the appearance of Orpheus in Corot's works by identifying several themes that appear to have interested the artist. For Corot, Orpheus and Eurydice were characters of rich symbolism that could represent his views about the desire to return to a more innocent time. In the next chapter, my aim is to show how Corot employed the myth to illustrate these concepts.

136These include a Medieval Christian account of Orpheus falling under the spell of a seductive Eurydice who has already been bitten by the snake. Here Orpheus is seen as a counterpart of Adam, led astray by the fallen Eve. Eurydice is no longer an inactiv character but becomes a highly charged figure who often symbolizes evil and the temptation of Orpheus to turn his back on goodness and his ordained tasks. For some Christian writers, Orpheus continues to be a dangerous pagan character whose miraculous song is an indication of his powers of black magic. His destruction at the hands of the Maenads ultimately proves the unworthiness of the pagan religion to which he belongs. An other tradition saw Orpheus as the first homosexual, which Medieval and Renaissance commentators used to illustrate the poet who does not follow the right path to creativity. An example of this is an image of Albrecht Dürer, The Death of Orpheus, which illustrates the poet "who turns away and loses his capacity for creating according to the laws of nature "(Scavizzi, p. 121).
Chapter Five
Corot's Orpheus and Eurydice: Images of the Artist
and his Muse in an Idyllic World

As described earlier, traditional interpretations of Corot's historical landscapes have treated his subject matter as if it were mere pretext. I believe, however, that his subjects were much more than accessories -- I believe that Corot consciously chose his subjects, especially Orpheus and Eurydice, to express his struggle with change and his views of the artist as creator. If the subjects were meaningless, Corot could have chosen not to put the kind of emphasis on the figures that he did. Instead, he returned again and again to subjects with a shared symbolism in the years between 1848 and 1875, as he repeatedly returned to variations on the Orpheus and Eurydice theme. In these variations, he explored the many roles of the artist: the magical poet, the lover who makes a journey to gain love (or enlightenment) and the lamenting lover who turns his grief into a creative force.

The appearance of these works after 1848, amidst the turmoil of the mid-nineteenth century, is probably not co-incidence. Corot saw himself living in a period of tremendous change. Artistically, he stated as much in his statement about Millet's Gleaners cited in Chapter Two. For a person as conservative as Corot, the social, political and artistic events he witnessed were profoundly disturbing, and he was to experience many more changes before his death in 1875. By 1848, he had lived through one major war, the War of 1812, and two bloody "revolutions" in 1830 and 1848. The seizure of power by Napoleon III marked the fourth major governmental change since 1800, with each government as totalitarian or more so than the one which preceded. At the same time, the French way of life was changing. Industrialization shifted the economic focus of life away from the countryside, causing an exodus of people from rural areas into major cities. To accommodate these people, whole
areas of Paris were razed and replaced with modern new private and public buildings. These changes were critical for Corot and many others, but the changes taking place in art were probably the most troubling for him. The academic system in which Corot had been trained, suddenly seemed to explode. He saw the conflict between Classicism and Romanticism, which had been waged in different forms since the conflict between the Rubenistes and Poussinistes in the seventeenth century, become less important. With the emergence of the Realists, conflicts arose between the traditional practices of the Academy and the new freedom of execution and iconography demanded by more independently minded artists. Still later, Corot also witnessed the birth of Impressionism and the radical changes accompanying it which he did not understand, but had ironically helped inspire.

Although change in art had been occurring all along, after the Revolution of 1848, artists seemed to become more aware of the ways they wanted to alter the character and content of their works. The old academic categories and their hierarchies could no longer be applied to the paintings of Realist artists such as Courbet, Millet and Daumier. Subjects that would have been considered mere genre in the past were now given heroic proportions, both in size and importance. An example is Gustave Courbet's The Burial at Ornans (fig. 39) in which an ordinary event such as a village funeral is portrayed with the scale and care usually given to images of royalty or history. Images like this angered critics and officials at the Ecole, but made Courbet the symbol of the "revolution" taking place in art.

It is clear, that for the Realists, the second mode of contemporaneity -- that is to say, confronting the concrete experiences and appearances of their own times with an earnest and serious attitude and a trash, appropriate imagery -- was the only valid approach to creating an art of and for their own epoch. They therefore rejected both the pompous rhetoric and grandiose subjects of the past, neither of which, they felt, had any relevance to modern life, and turned to such novel or hitherto neglected areas of modern experience as the lot of the labouring poor, both rural and urban, the daily life of the middle classes, modern woman and especially the fallen woman, the railroad and industry, and the modern life of the city itself, with its cafes, its theaters, its workers and

137 Herbert, "City vs. Country," p. 45-46, "... the pervasiveness of peasant motifs can be demonstrated to be not the political expression of one or of a few artists, but a social and artistic phenomenon of remarkable extent related to the Revolution of 1848 and its aftermath."
strollers, its parks and boulevards, and the life that was led in them. Of all these themes of contemporary life, none was felt to be so much the very epitome of modern experience, or was treated with such concreteness and urgency by mid century artists, not only in France but in England and throughout the Continent, as the theme of labour.\textsuperscript{138}

Thus the common man became the hero of Realist painting, replacing the gods, saints and heroes of the past.\textsuperscript{139} Past subjects no longer had any relevance because the social orders which supported them, the monarchy and the Church, had lost much of their earlier power and influence. The Second Empire nobility was more bourgeois than aristocratic, and their artistic tastes tended to reflect this. The Church, which had been a supporter of the Bourbon monarchy, had lost the respect of the French people and had even been banned for part of the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{140}

At the same time, life itself was changing for the French people. Beginning around 1850, the population of Paris rapidly increased as people began pouring into the city, looking for jobs in industry. Between 1831 and 1851, the population of Paris grew by one hundred percent with more than 400,000 industrial workers, making Paris the largest manufacturing city in the world.\textsuperscript{141} With the increase in population and in order to prevent any reoccurrence of the barricades of 1848, Napoleon III undertook a plan to change the face of the city.\textsuperscript{142} Old Paris was torn down and replaced by a modern, bustling city. The narrow, winding streets were turned into wide, tree-lines boulevards. Numerous old bridges and quais along the Seine were destroyed; new ones were constructed to offer an unobstructed view of the river and banks. These "improvements" did not come without a price as a vast number of inhabitants


\textsuperscript{139}Herbert, "City vs. Country," p. 50. "... in the generation of 1848, conventional religious subjects are largely discarded by major artists in France. ... mythological subjects also fell into relative disgrace among advanced artists after 1848, largely because of an ostensible inappropriateness to contemporary reality. ... In the mid-century generation, Corot alone continued to give overt classical themes any importance. ..."


\textsuperscript{142}Second Empire in France, p. 13. "Napoleon III's greatest accomplishment was making the whole of Paris an imperial stage set. The Emperor and his prefect, Haussmann, used the existing city of Paris as raw material out of which to carve a network of avenues and squares, defined by uniform walls of newly built stone apartment houses."
were evicted and ancient buildings and cultural sites were destroyed.\textsuperscript{143} As a result, the character of the city changed forever. An American traveller, Henry Tuckerman remarked in 1867:

Baron Haussmann, the Prefect, has cut through streets, demolished whole quarters, made space and substituted modern elegance for old squalor. These parts of the city which are in a state of demolition, present enormous high walls with the irregular smoke-stacks of the dismantled chimneys, moving zigzag higher and higher, and looking ready to topple over as you slowly pass through a crush of vehicles and debris of mortar and stones. . . who, in the midst of the "improvements," like to recall the Paris of the time before the Empire; to turn from foreign clubs and cosmopolitan corso, from American gossip and Imperial receptions, from gas and glitter and the immense crowds . . ., and revive the memories of a favorite saloon, the talk of a cozy old cafe, the traditions of the first revolution - the spirit whereof yet gleams from the savage eyes of many a surly ouvrier, on his long walk from this work to the suburbs -- in a word, the characteristic and normal traits and triumphs of the French metropolis, when it was more exclusively the nursery of Gallic genius and character. . . .\textsuperscript{144}

This social environment had profound effects on both conservative and avant-garde artists, inspiring them to look for subjects and techniques to express their ideas. Artists such as Courbet and Millet found new subjects to symbolize this changing time. The peasant and worker were endowed with a dignity illustrating the pathos but also the worth of their common labors for modern times; these were proper and sympathetic heroes. These new subjects, however, were not exactly the common man that could be seen on the street or in the fields. Instead, they were rather nostalgic images of the timeless and mythic labors of man, commenting on a way of life that was dying. Millet's heroic images of country life were as nostalgic as Corot's misty \textit{Souvenirs}, but the nostalgia is not as obvious, as Millet did not clothe his figures in classical allegories or costume. With thousands of people leaving the country for the major French cities, Millet's \textit{Gleaners} (fig. 40) is a kind of 'souvenir' of a mythic past. These women become heroic figures representing nature, reaching down to gather the kernals of grain that have been missed by the harvesters. Occupations like this were

\textsuperscript{143}Robert L. Herbert, \textit{Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 3. "These and other alterations of Paris were done at great costs, of which the least significant was the monetary one. Many tens of thousands of people were evicted from old buildings to make way for new streets, quais, bridges, and buildings nearly 14,000 from the île de la Cité alone."

\textsuperscript{144}Herbert, \textit{Impressionism}, p. 1.
rapidly disappearing, but for Realist artists and critics such as Castagnary, images like this reflected a "real" or "natural" event that would vanish as more and more people moved away from the country:

A la vérité, la nature n'y est qu'un prétexte, qu'une occasion. Toute la pensée se concentre sur les trois personnages qui peuplent cette scène. Mais ces personnages sont des paysannes, ils accomplissent un acte de la vie des champs. Or, j'admets difficilement qu'on puisse séparer le paysan de la nature.  

Modern viewers see these paintings as accurate, although heroic, renderings of rural life in the nineteenth century, but they are more than that. They also represent a way of life that was simple and, yet, dying. They are images that reflect a yearning for a world lost to modern man, a concept also found in Corot's works after 1848.

Where Millet and Courbet turned to the common man for subject matter, Corot looked increasingly to mythology after 1848. Corot was, in many ways, conservative, in spite of his acknowledged contributions to modern painting. This was a time when new artistic movements appeared in quick succession. For Corot, each new movement brought radical changes which he found difficult to accept. It had taken him a very long time to appreciate Delacroix's painting, but the paintings of Courbet and, later, the Impressionists were too revolutionary for him to accept. When Corot was asked to help further the cause of the young Impressionists, he refused urging his students to refrain from exhibiting with them. This refusal embittered Monet so much that many years later, he still harbored ill-feelings for Corot:

The *good* Corot. I don't know about that, but what I do know is that he was very bad for us. The swine! He barred the door of the Salon to us. Oh, how he slashed at us, pursued us like criminals. And how all of us without exception admired him! I didn't know him. I knew none of the 1830 masters; they didn't want to know us.

. . .  

It is interesting that Corot began to paint in a new style in the late 1840s when so much was changing around him. Corot continued to paint in his naturalistic style at the same time as he seemed to regress into a style with similarities to Rococo landscapes. The reason why

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146 *Rise of Landscape Painting in France*, p. 74.
Corot began to work in two different styles during this period remains unclear, but several reasons have been suggested. The hazy atmosphere and delicate foliage are similar to Rousseau's darker images of the Barbizon woods (figure 41), but they also bring to mind the arcadian fantasies of the eighteenth century, such as Watteau's Pilgrimage to Cythera (figure 42). Although Corot's paintings lack the amorous nature of Watteau's fêtes galants, there are similarities between Corot's Souvenirs and these earlier works. Both artists created landscape settings enveloped in a heavy, misty atmosphere removed from the "real" landscape. In Watteau's fêtes galants and Corot's Souvenirs, this different world is a place of retreat from the modern world. There was a Rococo revival taking place during the reign of Napoleon III and many of Corot's works were purchased by members of the imperial court including Napoleon III himself.147

An interest in the Rococo, however, was not new for Corot. Soon after his return from Italy in 1828, Corot became one of the circle of young Romantics who frequented the Impasse de Doyenné. 148 The artists and writers who gravitated to this studio included Eugène Delacroix, Diaz, Alexandre Dumas, Theophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval. Not as famous as Victor Hugo's circle, the frequent visitors to the Impasse de Doyenné was particularly known for its admiration of Rococo art and society. In 1834 several of the artists, including Corot, painted the walls of Nerval's salon with fêtes galants in a rococo-inspired style. As Carol Duncan describes:

In 1834 a fête was given to celebrate the forthcoming production of La Reine de Saba, libretto by Gérard, score to be composed by Meyerbeer, and Gérard's mistress to play the leading role. The contract fell through, but the fête was a brilliant success. Instead of refreshments, which were beyond the means of the hosts, the residents of the Impasse and their friends decorated the salon. The

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148Carol Duncan, The Pursuit of Pleasure: The Rococo Revival in French Romantic Art (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1976), p. 36. "There, between 1833 and 1835, Camille Rogier, and illustrator, and the writers Gérard de Nerval and Arisne Houssaye shared a large apartment in an 18th-century house; across the hall, Théophile Gautier, who officially still lived at home, rented a room to receive friends. These four youths were the core of the Impasse du Doyenné, dubbed le petit cénacle by Gautier. . . . Scores of artists and writers visited there: Gavarni, Roqueplan, Delacroix, Corot, Diaz, Tassaert, the Devéria, Musset, Dumas and still others."
contributing artists, among them Corot and Chassériau, covered the walls with fêtes galants, nudes, landscapes and oriental subjects. . . 149

This rococo influence may also be seen in another way in Corot's paintings after 1850. Watteau's painting has often been described as set on stage with actor's playing their roles. In engravings like Pour garder l'honneur d'une belle (fig. 43), the stage-like space and posed figures are similar to the space and figure disposition of Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld. In both of these pictures, the principle figures are placed in a narrow band of space and the space recedes in parallel bands to the foreground space.

It has also been suggested, however, that experiments in landscape photography being carried out by early photographers may have influenced his new landscape style. 150 At the time of his death Corot had approximately three hundred photographs in his studio that probably had served as study models similar to his plein-air études. He also made several prints in the new photographic technique of cliché-verre (fig. 44). A landscape photograph that was probably by Corot's friend Adalbert Cuvelier (fig. 45), has the same hazy atmosphere effects and fuzzy, almost de-materialized outlines that Corot employed in his later works.

The relationship between painting and photography in the mid-nineteenth century is still not clear. Soon after the announcement of photography's discovery, critics and proponents closed ranks and engaged in a battle that, to some extent, still continues today. It is known, however, that many artists used photographs as models, collecting photographs in much the same way that they had kept their sketches from life. It is probable that this was the purpose of the photographs found in Corot's studio after his death. Corot, however, was one of a group of artists who visited Arras, a small village in Pas-de-Calais which was popular with early photographers and was associated with many who were experimenting with landscape photography. At a friend's urging, Corot experimented with cliché-verre, an etching technique using light-sensitive paper and photographic equipment. This technique involved etching the

149 Duncan, pp. 36-37.
design into an opaque medium, usually printer's ink or fogged collodion, on a glass plate that would then be exposed to the sun and printed onto photosensitive paper. Corot had experimented with the traditional etching process and lithography, but he was not pleased with the results. The cliché-verre seemed much more suited to his tastes, because this allowed a more painterly approach and result; the prints achieved a delicate and hazy appearance, as can be seen in Dante and Virgil (fig. 46). Like his paintings, Corot chose subjects of mythological, pastoral or remembered imagery for these works, leaving behind the naturalistic landscapes for a different, more physical approach. These fuzzy and fragile images portray times remembered or imagined, without the physical presence of reality.

Paintings in Corot's later style share characteristics of both a rococo-inspired style and that of photography-cliché-verre. Although Corot left very little written evidence about his reasons for developing this new style, his use of subject matter in these works may help explain part of the question. For example, the paintings of Orpheus and Eurydice, along with paintings of related subjects, all center on the artist and his muse. The Orpheus myth provided a subject that could express the varied roles of the artist, personally and creatively. In each of the paintings in which Orpheus appears, Corot portrays Orpheus with his lyre, the outward symbol of his creative powers.

One role of the artist is shown in Corot's Orpheus Singing his Lament for Eurydice, which was identified as Orpheus Enchanting the People by Robaut. If this is the proper title, the painting would be compositionally similar to Foussin's Landscape with Orpheus and Eurydice, representing one of the most common scenes in which Orpheus is shown. As Orpheus plays his lyre for the seated people, he performs his function as the magical singer. In this role, Orpheus has a civilizing power over animate and inanimate nature that is a power that

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152 Glassman, p. 39.
153 It was also titled this way when it appeared in an exhibition in 1944 at Wildenstein Gallery in New York, The Serene World of Corot.
also belongs to the artist. By identifying the figure as Orpheus, Corot suggests that the painter should be able to enchant through the painted image, the poet through the spoken word and the musician through the instrument.

Another role of the artist can be found in the Houston *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld*. Here Orpheus is shown leading his love from the Underworld, bringing his inspiration to light so that he will be able to continue his creative life. Eurydice as his muse is the reason for his journey into the darkness, but it required the artist to bring the inspiration back into the world. An indication that this is the meaning that Corot intended can be seen in Corot's painting over a tree that separated Orpheus and Eurydice in its initial exhibition (fig. 47). This tree seems to have indicated an ultimate separation, so it is possible that Corot removed the tree so that there would be no indication that Orpheus and Eurydice would not complete their journey. In this way, the artist would be free to draw upon his inspiration in the light of day.

Corot's third image of Orpheus, *Orpheus Greeting the Dawn*, represents the artist who finds his inspiration through grief, or major disappointment. The event depicted is not entirely clear. The viewer can see it as either Orpheus' first lament for Eurydice after her death, or as his second lament after he loses her to death for the second time. In either case, the artist must draw upon his creativity to sustain him during his grief, using it to comfort and to heal.

The three paintings of Eurydice symbolize Orpheus' inspiration and the object of his quest. Eurydice's death inspires some of Orpheus' most magical music; so magical that gods and spirits of the dead are moved to pity. These images also symbolize the creative force of the artist, illustrating that with the proper inspiration, the artist can be moved to create great works and that in turn these works have the power to move the audience. By suggesting that part of the creative impulse is subject to external forces, these paintings suggest that the inner talent of the artist needs inspiration from someone outside himself.

The artist and his many roles can also be found in the subjects of other works by Corot. A Salon work from the 1840s, *Homer and the Shepherds* (fig. 48) has been discussed by
Wissman as one of many works in which Corot painted a *Prix de Rome* landscape subject to prove to himself and critics that he was able to paint a picture in an acceptable academic manner.\textsuperscript{154} But more than this, this image of Homer illustrates the power of the poet to charm his audience similar to the painter's power to enchant with his painted images. In this way, it shares a meaning also found in *Orpheus Singing his Lament for Eurydice (Orpheus Enchanting the People)*.

An even earlier picture, Corot's *Self-Portrait at his Easel* (fig. 49) is about the creative aspect of the artist. What appears to be a self-portrait is another indication that the role of artist was important for him. By placing himself at his easel while capturing his own image, Corot identifies himself as a symbol of the artist, complete with the material instruments of his creative powers, his palette and brush. This is a common image found in self-portraits, implying that the painter is not only the creator of the painting, but also the creator of his own image, with the power to control both the painted surface and the viewer's image of "reality". A later cliché-verre self-portrait (fig. 50) makes the same statement, but now only the artist's face is shown emerging from the dark background. Although many other self-portraits omit the attributes of the artist while still making the viewer aware that the subject is the artist himself, there is a mysterious quality about the cliché-verre image. With his face and background as the only elements of the painting, the artist confronts his own image, with both its physical reality and creative personality.

The paintings of Eurydice were created during the same period as other figure paintings of classical muses (fig. 51). These figures are dressed like Eurydice in classical garments representing the ancient symbolic figures of inspiration. They provide the necessary motivation for the poet to write or the painter to paint. Their introspective aspect and melancholy demeanor are appropriate characteristics of divine inspiration.

\textsuperscript{154}Wissman, *Corot's Salon Paintings*, p. 102.
This theme is explored in another group of paintings. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, Corot painted a group of paintings representing *The Artist's Studio* (fig. 52). In these, the artist is not pictured but the viewer is given a view inside his studio. Calling to mind his earlier figure studies, a model in peasant costume poses in Corot's studio, this time sitting in front of an easel. There is a painting of a lyrical landscape on the easel away from which the model looks. She holds a mandolin loosely at her side next to the chair. In the background, finished paintings hang on the wall or lay on the floor. The figure is not portrayed in the painted landscape on the easel, implying that she is not a model but actually a symbolic muse for the painting's creation.

An abstract notion of the artist and his muse may be accompanied by a very personal parallel in Corot's life. In the literature on the artist, many writers comment on a love that was lost to Corot. As a young man, Corot considered marrying one of the young women working in his mother's shop. Either because of parental interference or because of the nomadic life of a landscape artist, Corot never married her. Instead he devoted his life to his artistic career and created a "family" in a close circle of family and friends.

It does appear, however, that the idea of a lost love and the metaphorical journey that it could inspire was very important to Corot. His association with the Romantic poet Gérard de Nerval and his many representations of *Dante and Virgil* (fig. 53) could indicate that he was aware of this journey, seeing his loss of love as an invitation to undertake a metaphysical journey into the Underworld where he could renew his soul. Both Dante and Nerval wrote about undertaking spiritual journeys into Hell after the deaths of their loves, but instead of regaining Beatrice and Aurelia, they gain self-awareness and self-renewal.

The images of Orpheus and Eurydice, along with many others dating after 1848, also symbolize a desire to return to the past. It is possible that the changes described in the beginning of this chapter reflect his feelings concerning life in Paris during the mid-nineteenth century.
The desire for the past, however, is full of difficulties since it is impossible to return to the past no matter how much a person may desire. Corot's *Destruction of Sodom* (fig. 54), a major Salon work, shares a dramatic element with the story of Orpheus and Eurydice: both contain a fatal look back that causes tragedy. For Orpheus looking back means the loss of his wife and for Lot and his family it means death. For Corot the idea of the fatal glance may be a reflection of the consequences and futility of looking back. No matter how much he may have wished, he could not turn back and yet paradoxically, many of the late works are about a longing desire for a mythic, idyllic past. This may be the cause of the melancholy seen in so many of Corot's later paintings.

These are just some of the ways Corot may have conceived of the Orpheus and Eurydice paintings. Keeping in mind the many different roles Orpheus and Eurydice have played throughout history, there are probably more. This argument, however, indicates that the later paintings of Corot could have had a significant meaning for the painter and were not narrative pretext for his Salon pictures. The related subjects and wide-spread use of the same subjects by others in the artistic community indicate that Corot was wrestling with questions of the artist and society in nineteenth century France.
List of Illustrations


34. Corot, *Ville-d'Avray, the Path of Corot*, 1850-5. Oil on canvas. Private collection.


41. Théodore Rousseau, *The Dagnieu Pond on the Plateau Belle-Croix (La mare à Dagneau)*, ca. 1858-60. Oil on canvas. The Taft Museum, Cincinnati.


45. Adalbert Cuvelier (?), Photograph taken in the environs of Arras (?), 1852.


47. Photograph of *Orpheus Leading Eurydice from the Underworld* at Salon of 1861.


Bibliography


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