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MONET AND IMPRESSIONISM:

BOATS AND BOATING

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MONET AND IMPRESSIONISM: BOATS AND BOATING

By

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ABSTRACT

MONET AND IMPRESSIONISM:
BOATS AND BOATING

By

Lisa Kim Lipinski

The following narrative traces the development of ship painting from the seventeenth century Dutch to the nineteenth century French Impressionists, in particular, Monet. Using a sample of Dutch and English paintings I point out connections and differences between Monet's boating pictures and those of the earlier artists.

While Monet's early harbor or coastal scenes reflect his awareness of the Dutch and English Romantic artists, his later pleasure boat paintings at Argenteuil reflect a new vision. Monet takes the viewpoint of a tourist and that of an isolated artist/observer of modern, suburban leisure activity. Monet's contemporaries, Manet, Caillebotte and Renoir, paint pleasure boats in which people are the focus. Within the social context of mid-nineteenth century France, Monet and the Impressionists live and produce their classic boating pictures that reflect the rise of leisure time and activity of boating and bathing. Their pictures also represent a shift in point of view from the Romantic conception of nature over man to the Impressionist, modern vision of man in control of nature.

For My Grandmother. . .

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to be able to thank the many people who have assisted me in the writing of this thesis, directly and indirectly. My greatest and most treasured debt is to Eldon VanLiere. It was on his recommendation that I pursued this topic, and with his guidance and inspiration that it was brought to a finish as a thesis.

I would like to recognize my professors at Michigan State, Webster Smith and Linda Stanford, who read my thesis, offering insightful comments on it, as well as my previous work in their respective classes.

I owe a special debt of thanks to Michael Steinberg, who taught me how to write, and for his trust and encouragement.

My deepest gratitude goes to my parents, my father for his advice, my mother for her support and patience. I reserve my final thanks for my grandmother, for her infinite love and acceptance through all my endeavors. It is with pleasure and admiration, therefore, that I dedicate this book to her.

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INTRODUCTION

There are no articles or books that focus exclusively on Monet's or the Impressionist's boating scenes. Several catalogs included a sampling of boat pictures from the nineteenth and twentieth century. The exhibition catalog Shock of Recognition suggested the connection between the seventeenth century Dutch and English Romantic painters. Several other exhibition catalogs focused on marine paintings of Degas, Manet, Monet, and Caillebotte. There has been no exhaustive study of the boats or boating pictures of Impressionism from 1860 to 1875. This thesis serves as a preliminary investigation of the connections between the Dutch and British marines and Monet and Impressionist boating pictures.

The port scenes of Impressionism are quite conventional, relying on Dutch and English models, whereas their river boating pictures of the sport of yachting are of a new type, without compositional precedent. These sailboats of Impressionism are vastly different from those of the English Romantics. To the Romantic artist, the boat served as a symbol of the voyage, often for commercial purposes. Their ships represent danger, promise adventure or uncertain mastery over the natural elements at sea. For the English, as they had for the Dutch, ships represented power in the form of her navy--

imperial power over distant lands. Also, the ship is protection, albeit fragile, in the face of relentless nature.

The Impressionists, especially Monet, chose to paint pleasure craft, and sailing, a new phenomenon in mid-century France. Sailing for pleasure was increasingly popular among the middle classes. Monet depicted sailboats as symbols of the modern, prosperous life at Argenteuil and elsewhere. These boats represent all he strove to achieve materialistically. Sailing was a bourgeois activity in nature. If the Barbizon paintings in the 1840s and 1850s reflected a desire to escape the urban world, the Impressionists, painting in the 1860s and 1870s, depict that urban sprawl that becomes on its edges a suburban life, one seeking a balance between the artificial urban and the natural. Monet reflects this vision in his garden pictures and his views of boating on the Seine.

Both Romantic boats and Impressionistic boats represent an escape. For the Romantic the boat embarked on a long voyage. With the sailboats of Impressionism, the voyage is different. These latter pleasure craft have a different romantic connotation. One goes sailing or rowing to leave the city behind, even if only for an afternoon. One gets closer to nature without actually being in it. Sailing is an organized leisure activity that tests one's skill and offers competition. Everyone can participate in sailing or rowing. Boats were cheap to rent. Regattas were a social event.

Sailing puts one in touch with the elements of wind and water, things of flux. Monet and the Impressionists were involved in depicting these elements, light included in new ways. These boats contribute to that effect of natural flux for they suggest breezes and the resulting movement. Their broken touches of pure color articulate the broken, rippled areas of water. There is a poetic dimension in the boat pictures by Monet. The cheerful, bright colors of the blue water, gently rocking boat, and sunlight playing upon the whole scene beckons the wearied city dweller. One can sail to the center of the Seine and beyond for a couple of hours, returning refreshed and revitalized from his momentary escape. These visions are idyllic--no pollution, noise, labor, conflict are present.

The Impressionist pictures of yachting or moored pleasure craft have an amount of idealism. At the same time they serve as pictorial records of the effect of travel and tourism in the environs of Paris. Tourism, in the form of travel, organized sport and recreation, was an important, new aspect of modern living in the nineteenth century. As modern painters, the Impressionists chose to depict the recent phenomenon of leisure in and around Paris. Seabathing and sailing were only two forms of recreation the Impressionists and Monet painted often. The tourist landscape of Impressionism has a populist iconography that only Boudin exploited previously. The Impressionist painter takes the viewpoint of the tourist, an important distinction between himself and the Dutch or

Barbizon painter. The latter did not paint leisure activities. The tourist view, if one thinks about the experience, is a new and fresh one. There would be an interest in the sweeping panorama; but the experience of the tourist is direct too. Often Monet and the Impressionists paint intimate close up views, snapshot effects--like Manet and Caillebotte. That is the tourist experience as well: the distant panorama and the intimate, close up and cropped viewpoint. "On occasion the coincidence between a descriptive text in a guidebook and an Impressionist painting is so close that one can scarcely believe that the painter had not read the guide."[1]

For Sisley, Caillebotte, Renoir and Manet painting scenes of recreation usually include people. Their figurative works that depict sailing or rowing craft are scenes of conviviality. Whereas, Monet's view, especially those painted at Argenteuil, are devoid of people, almost lonely visions of anchored sailboats along the empty shoreline. When Renoir visits, he and Monet paint side by side. Then Monet includes figures. Monet paints the whole environment, not just the people or the sailboats.

The Impressionists were not marine painters in the same sense as the Dutch, who viewed this subject as its own specialized genre, and whose many scenes are of large ships on the open sea. The Impressionists were more inclined to paint landscapes. It seems that a fair number of their river

paintings could be mistaken for landscapes that happen to include rivers with boats, especially pleasure boats, floating on them. The boats in many cases are almost incidental items whose vertical masts, it could be argued, are mainly a compositional device used to offset the horizontality of the shoreline or horizon. In any case, pleasure craft on the Seine were hard to overlook, especially at Argenteuil.

CHAPTER ONE:

Early Marines of the Dutch, British and French

The Dutch artists of the seventeenth century are to be admired for their original contribution to the history of marine painting. They were the first to create a separate genre devoted entirely to representing ships at sea or in port. Naturally they were proud of the ships that had been a means of liberation, defense and trade. Their tall-masted, stalwart ships reflect their nationalism and commercial prowess of the high seas.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the marine artist faced a demanding task of painting ever changing sea and sky and moving ships. David Cordingly writes:

> "Before the inventions of the Industrial Revolution, the fully-rigged three masted sailing ship was the most complicated piece of machinery known to man. . . While it was possible for a competent artist to portray the ship with some degree of accuracy as she lay at anchor, the situation changed entirely when she got underway. As the ship heeled before the wind, hundreds of ropes came into play."[1]

The exceptional marine artist mastered these universal representational problems: the rendering of light, and the uniting of different elements into a satisfying composition. The seamen and shipowners who commissioned these pictures wanted them well composed, and to be accurate depictions of their ships at the same time. The Dutch painted three categories of marines: naval battles, coastal and harbor scenes. The naval battles done before 1650 were done considerably after the fact, according to witness accounts. After 1650,

the artist sometimes witnessed the scene himself. Willem van de Velde the Elder traveled with the fleet to record firsthand its experiences.

Within these various scenes certain devices were used to achieve an effect. For example, the Dutch masters used a strongly shadowed foreground which added drama to the distant, sunlit sails. If they wanted to bring attention to the foreground, a small boat might be placed there for interest, perhaps with a fisherman and his net. A large floating buoy or wreckage could also be used as a foreground element. The artist would sometimes employ the formula of the horizon line broken by distant ships, viewed broadside so that the silhouettes of the masts would all count as vertical accents. The nineteenth-century English painter, J.M.W. Turner later used this device, following the example of the younger van de Velde.

The sky provided the artist with an opportunity to experiment and create as he pleased. Cordingly observes:

> "Since the disposition of dark and light clouds provided a foil to the sails, and was conveniently flexible means of altering the balance of the composition, it is common to find clouds used to good effect in seascapes and rare to find a marine painting with a clear blue sky. As the sky also set the mood for the entire picture and was the chief means of introducing a sense of atmosphere we find that the greatest painters of the sea from van de Velde to Monet were also masters at the art of painting skies."[2]

In Figure 1-1, by Jan van de Capelle (1626-1679), a miscellaneous collection of vessels occupy a stilled expanse of water. This typifies the achievement of one of the masters of the Dutch school. The details of the seafaring life are visible in the patched sails that are hung to dry. Capelle is adept at rendering a perceptible atmosphere of light and moisture.

Another exceptional Dutch artist, Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691), depicts his birthplace in transparent golden tones in View of Dordrecht (Fig. 1-2). This shows the usual tendency of the Dutch to place their ships in calm harbors. Of all the Dutch artists, Cuyp possessed the greatest sensitivity to depth and misty atmosphere. The nineteenth century Dutch artist, J.B. Jongkind paints his harbor scenes in similar tones.

In Jacob van Ruisdael's later seascapes, a highly subjective mood prevails, as in Stormy Sea (Fig. 1-3). This appears proto-Romantic with the storm-tossed sailboat below a densely clouded sky. Here one finds that device of drawing light and shade in horizontal bands. The patch of light behind the boat heightens the drama of the scene, especially in contrast to the shadowy foreground.

One of the most venerated and influential of marine painters was Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633-1707). He rendered countless naval battles, being admired for the accuracy of his ship drawing as well as his facility with the

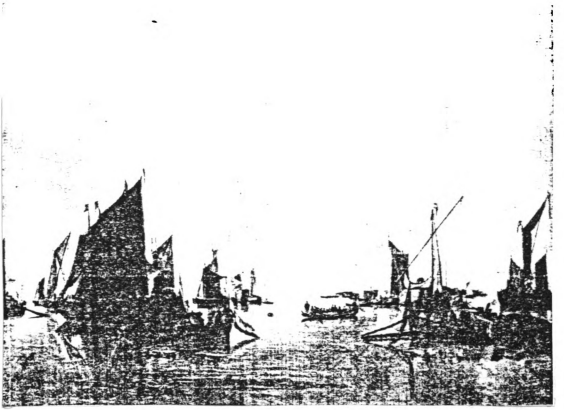

Figure 1-1: Jan van de Capelle, A river scene with many Dutch vessels becalmed, oil on canvas, 11.8 x 153.6 cm., National Gallery, London.

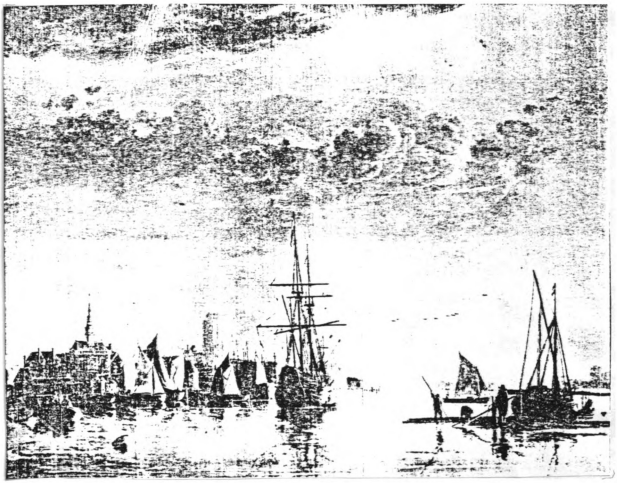

Figure 1-2: Aelbert Cuyp, View of Dordrecht, c. 1655, 97.8 x 137.8 cm., oil on canvas, Greater London Council as Trustee of the Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood.

Figure 1-3: Jacob van Ruisdael, Stormy Sea, c. 1649, 49 x 65 cm., panel, National Museum, Stockholm.

paintbrush. The English artists of the Romantic period were impressed with his depiction of seas and skies of all conditions, in fair weather or foul.[3] He could paint ships in a calm harbor (Fig. 1-4) as well as on a stormy sea (Fig. 1-5). In Shock of Recognition, A.G.H. Bachrach states:

> "The sea-painting of van de Velde excels in the great knowledge of seamanship that is apparent in them and an approach to nature which is based on careful observation. The notes on several of his sketches testify to his minute attention to weather conditions and the position of ships. He is considered the 'Father of all English marine painting,' and was widely followed and imitated."[4]

In his picture of a calm sea (Fig. 1-4), van de Velde displays his ability to capture the essence of nature and man in the atmosphere surrounding the ships. The classic Dutch features are the great expanse of sky that occupies three-quarters of the canvas, the calm water, and the accurately detailed ships. This precision is carried over in his picture of stormy weather on the high seas (Fig. 1-5). The delicacy of nuances in the clouds and churning waters provide a picturesque setting for the three-masted schooners. Van de Velde is adept at either type of seascape. Later he paints in England and leaves a legacy of work that will eventually have a great effect on Turner.

The French artist, Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), working in Italy at the same time, paints harbor scenes that compare favorably with the Dutch masters' works. However, Claude Lorrain adds a different dimension to his works; he imbues

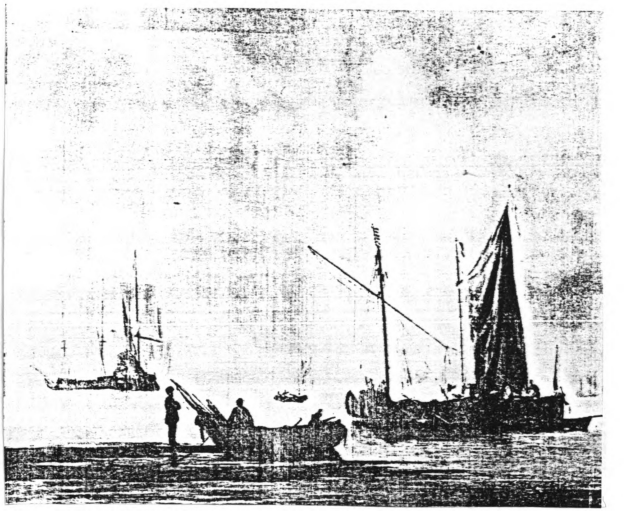

Figure 1-4: Willem van de Velde, A calm, 34.5 x 44.5 cm., Private collection, Switzerland.

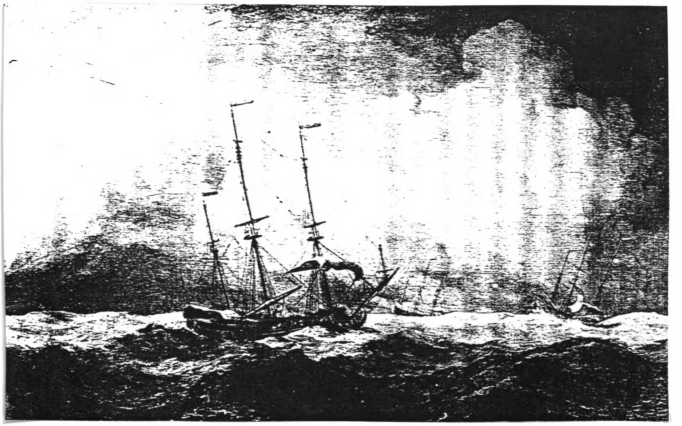

Figure 1-5: Willem van de Velde, English Ship in a Storm, 31 x 51 cm., canvas, Mrs. Robinson, Esq.

nature with a subjective quality that goes beyond the recording of nature. In a catalog:

> "The beauty of nature is made manifest in his works, but so too is the mystery of nature, which seems to exceed the comprehension of its parts. His images thus convey an allusive and affective dimension which transcends ordinary perceptions of reality and suggests the perfection of order, and divine sources of the cosmos itself."[5]

Obviously Claude Lorrain is more concerned with natural phenomenon. He focuses on harbors which had become so important to trade and exploration; but unlike the more practical Dutch, his paintings are idealizations and dreams of historical situations. French classicism is evident in these balanced views that focus on the setting sun. Often he paints large ships in a proto-Romantic fashion, bound for distant lands. His works suggest something beyond the present in time and space, as in his seaport picture, (Fig. 1-6).

> ". . .his images of journeying, especially those focused on embarkations where impending voyages are explicit, suggest the idea of the 'voyage of life'. The travelers are about to set sail from their well-defined harbors into the sea and the light, which suggest the unknown, the ineffable and the future."[6]

In eighteenth century France, Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), carries on the tradition of marine painting, and ship portraiture, begun by Claude Lorrain and the Dutch seventeenth century masters. He painted the harbors of France on commission. His works contain the same delicacies of nuances, poignancy and natural repose and refreshment as the earlier

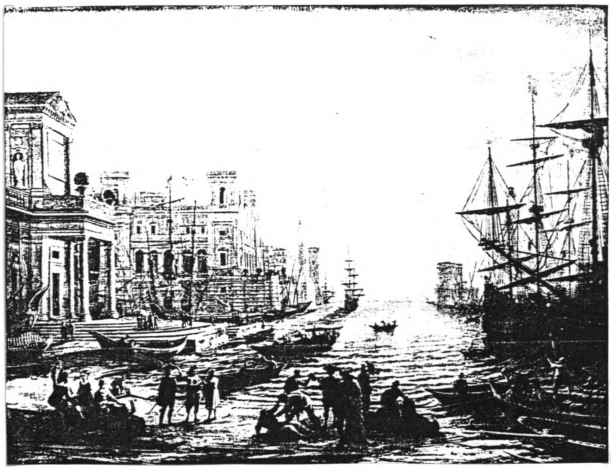

Figure 1-6: Claude Lorrain, Seaport, with Setting Sun, 103 x 135 cm., oil on canvas, Louvre, Paris.

Claude Lorrain's. They are poetic visions of the sea and of man's works in the form of grandiloquent ships.

In Figures 1-7 and 1-8 we see two of Vernet's finest imaginative works painted after his return to France. They show that still in the 1770s his powers of design and execution remained as high as ever. At first glance Vernet's ships seem similar to Claude Lorrain's, but the discerning eye of Philip Conisbee notes that:

> "There are more types of weather effects in Vernet's art; or to take another example, his art is literally more realistic in the depiction of shipping, which is usually correctly detailed as opposed to Claude's beautiful but impossibly tall ships, which accord with his more ideal and poetic pictorial conceptions."[7]

Vernet has the ability to create monumentally conceived seascapes in a balanced harmonious fashion. He composed his pictures on the canvas, just as Monet would do later. Vernet did not want to be constrained by a sketch. Some of his highly expressive storm scenes are direct predecessors of the nineteenth century French-Romantic marines.

His anti-academic art stance links him to the Impressionists, as does his technique of observing nature directly and advising his students to do so. He once said to E. Vigee Lebrun:

> "My child, follow no school system. . . but above all do as much as you can after nature: nature is the first of all teachers. If you study her with care, that will prevent you from adopting any manner."[8]

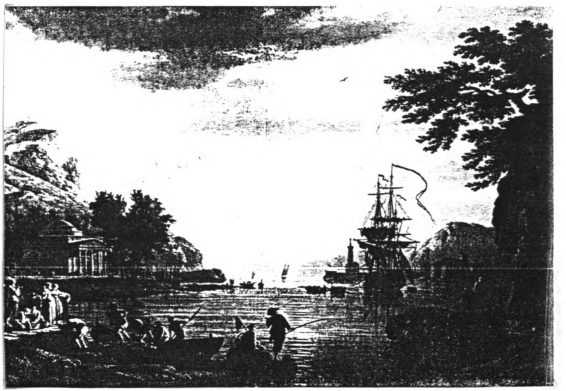

Figure 1-7: Claude-Joseph Vernet, Calm: Sunset, 1773 114 x 160 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, England.

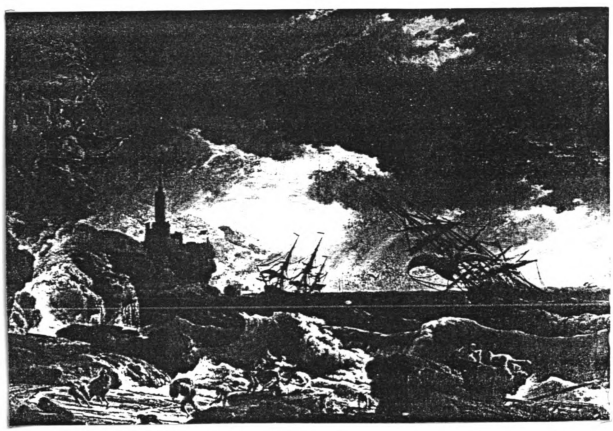

Figure 1-8: Claude-Joseph Vernet, Storm on the Coast, 1773, 114 x 160 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, England.

Be true to your senses seems to be the message Vernet conveys through these words. They sound similar to the vision Boudin passed on to Monet. By the nineteenth century the art of ship painting was changing, especially under the hand of a British artist, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851).

The impact of the seventeenth century Dutch marine art upon the British cannot be overstressed. The van de Veldes arrived in England in 1673, bringing their tradition and expertise of painting ships. The painters of the Romantic era in England then developed and specialized in the coastal scene which usually included ships:

> "More than any earlier artists, British painters of the Romantic era made the coastal scene a major theme in art. Their priority in this respect is perhaps not surprising in a country where no place is more than seventy miles from the seashore. Dutch marine painters of the seventeenth century to be sure, preceeded the British in exploiting some of the possibilities of this richly diverse subject, which unites aspects of both landscape and seascape. However, coastal scenes never occupied so prominent a place in Dutch art as they came to occupy in British Romantic art."[9]

Most of these coastal scenes include ships, usually commercial vessels. These ships are puny compared to the awesome nature of their surrounding sky, earth, and water. These relatively small boats are often overwhelmed by the forces of nature, whether they are still or raging. Britain's variety of coastal topography also plays an important role in most of these works, except for Turner's which are the

first to depict shipwrecks far out at sea, with no land in sight. These dramatic visions of Turner's are even more dismal and hopeless than the coastal scenes that inspired them. In other works beaches or rocky, barren cliffs appear against the open sea and limitless sky. In these English Romantic marines the artists try to capture the fugitive effects of nature; they strive to find the painterly means to depict these effects. Seascapes by nature are more transient than landscapes and pose particular problems for the artist.

Turner and his shortlived contemporary, Richard Parkes Bonington (1801-1828), are successful in their endeavors to capture the evanescent effects of nature upon man's boats and tinge their paintings with various moods, often suggestive of the sublime. Their solid yet delicate boats amidst the elements of air and water make a poignant contrast between the fragility of man's existence and the permanence of nature; the appearance of these boats against the sky also points up nature in its fugitive aspects: in the light, shadow, and clouds of the sky. By contrast, the Impressionists, who used some techniques of these artists, were not interested in such contrasts, the stuff of Romanticism, but they were intrigued by the momentary aspects.

Turner was excellent at portraying the image of man at sea overshadowed by an awe-inspiring nature. His Dordrecht: The Dort Packet-Boat from Rotterdam becalmed (Fig. 1-9) forms

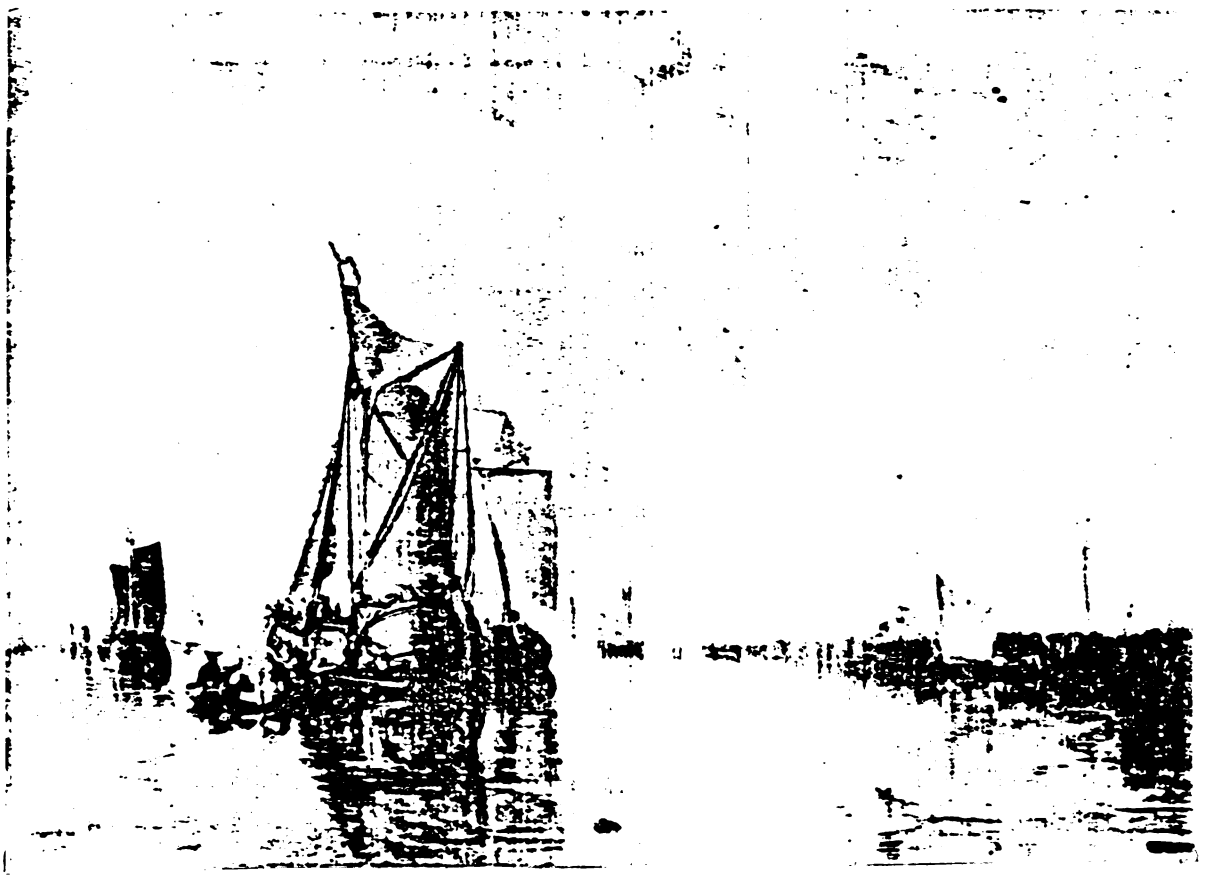

Figure 1-9: J.M.W. Turner, Dordrecht: The Dort Packet-Boat From Rotterdam becalmed, 1818, 157.5 x 233.5 cm. canvas, Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon collection.

the conclusion to Turner's earlier period of development. Completed in 1818, it shows the influence of Cuyp, who painted a similar scene, (Fig. 1-2). The heavy-laden ship floats lightly and apparently effortlessly on the mirror-like water. There still is a picturesque quality, which he will downplay in his later work, Van Tromp, Going about to Please His Masters, (Fig. 1-10), for a heightened emotionalism.

By 1832 his mature style was emerging as is evident in two works, Helvoetsluys (Fig. 1-11) and A Paddle Steamer in a Storm (Fig. 1-12). They resemble the Dutch works still less. In these examples of his emerging style, Turner becomes a more intense observer than the Dutch had been of natural phenomena. Once he strapped himself to the mast of a ship to experience a snow storm at sea. He persisted in his endeavors to capture the raw elements of nature and to show what the scene was like, thereby sacrificing details in the process. This practice of observing nature provides a precedent for the directness and spontaneity of the Impressionists, via Jongkind and Boudin.

The other British artist to exert an influence upon Jongkind and Boudin was Richard Parkes Bonington (1802-1828). Bonington was drawn to the coastal scenery during the 1820s. His superb, Fishing Boats, Dead Calm (Fig. 1-13) displays his talent for executing beautiful paintings of boats at sea that glow in the sunlight of nature. His later works could be more evocative like Turner's, but he possessed the ability

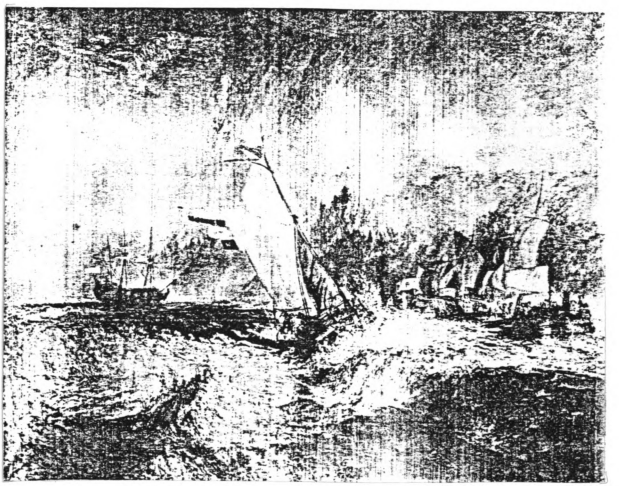

Figure 1-10: J.M.W. Turner, Van Tromp, Going about to Please his master, ships at sea, getting a good wetting, c. 1844, 91.5 x 122 cm., Royal Holloway College, Englefield Green, Surrey.

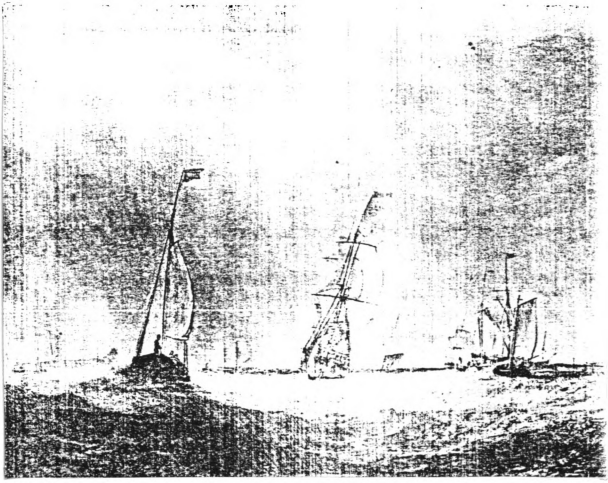

Figure 1-11: J.M.W. Turner, Helvoetsluys, 1832, 90 x 120 cm. canvas, Thomas Agnew & Sons Ltd., London.

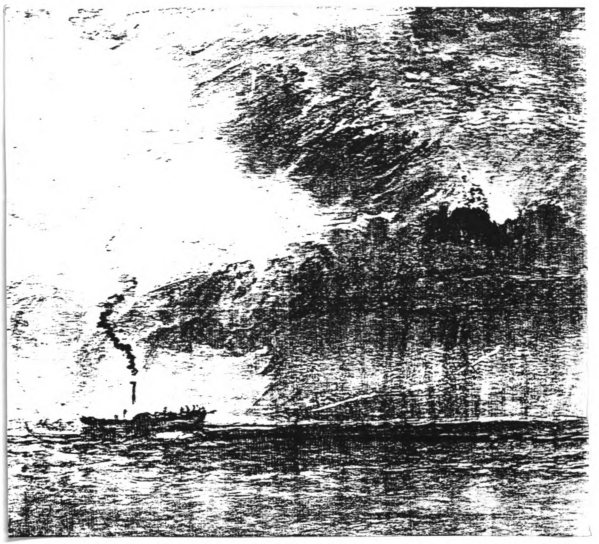

Figure 1-12: J.M.W. Turner, A Paddle-Steamer in a Storm, (?) 1841, 232 x 289 mm., water-color, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon collection.

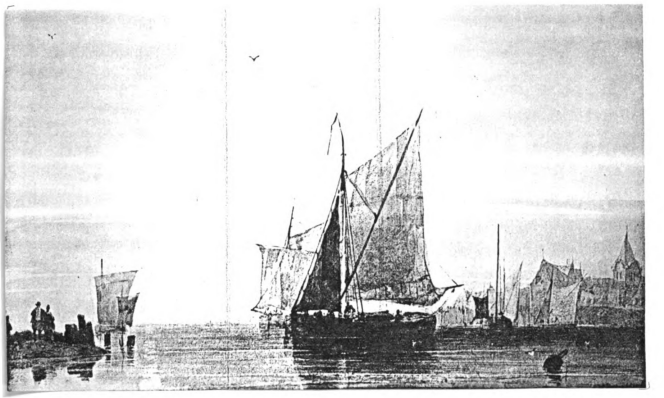

Figure 1-13: Richard Bonington, Fishing Boats: Dead Calm, 1823, 16 x 26 cm., oil on canvas, Wallace collection.

in his own right to paint charming, seductive, wonderfully effective pictures of light, sea, and ships.

Eugene Isabey (1803-1886) continued the Romantic seascape tradition in France with works such as, Marine (Fig.1-14) in which man battles against the elements. This was a favorite theme with the Romantics. Here the steamship lunges headlong in the fury of a raging storm. The wind and churning water tosses the steamship as if it were light and weightless. The element of danger, ever present in Romantic works, looms in the aspect of imminent shipwreck, if the ship fails to reach the shelter of harbor.

The sense of adventure, mixed with possible threat, was part of the Romantic conception of ships. In these pictures of the sea, the boats were often embarking on a voyage that could be full of peril in the form of storms. In contrast, the Impressionists boats did not travel so far from home and harbor and, therefore, were safer. Another important distinction between the Romantic ship and the Impressionist boat was the latter's preference for depicting pleasure craft, especially sailboats. The Romantics painted commercial vessels more often.

Like the earlier Dutch and British, Isabey painted fishing boats. In his Fishing Boats (Fig. 1-15) of the Normandy coast, Isabey uses one of his favorite compositional motifs, that of two boats juxtaposed at different angles. Sometimes

Figure 1-14: Eugene Isabey, Marine, c.1850-51, 23.5 x 37.5, oil on panel, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington.

Figure 1-15: Eugene Isabey, Fishing Boats, 1862, 19.5 x 34.6 cm., watercolor, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

he renders scenes with boats against the architectural setting of a town or a coastal scene with topographical details to let us know where the ship is located. The ships are, in any case, the central element in these pictures. They characterize the coastal town of the nineteenth century and record aspects of the local fishing industry.

By the mid to late 1800s certain towns along the Normandy coast were becoming gathering places for the middle classes. Etretat was one such town. Jean Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875) paints The Beach (Fig. 1-16), an unusual work in his oeuvre, in 1872. The late work is contemporary to Monet's move to Argenteuil. The subject is a place Monet knew well and would paint extensively in the 1880s. Etretat had already become a summer seaside resort but Corot avoids all this for the fishing boats and local people to artfully animate the shore. Usually his boats are not so prominent. Corot makes the boats seem perhaps larger than they actually were so that they overshadow the figures, being nearly darkened, quasi-abstract shapes. He has omitted details in favor of these patterns together with those suggested by the collapsed masts and rigging. It is an impersonal depiction of a quiet corner in a sheltered world. The boats might stand as symbols of a world on the brink of momentous change. Johann Bartold Jongkind (1819-1891) paints the greatest number of boats on the Normandy coast. He is the link between the Romantics and the Impressionists. His schooners appear

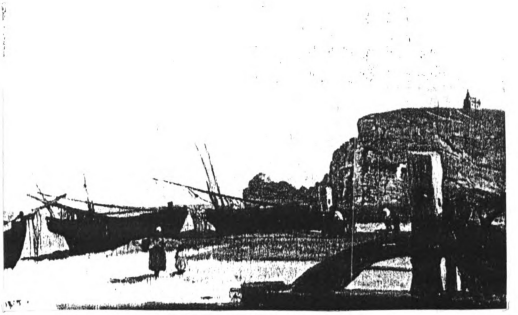

Figure 1-16: Camille Corot, The Beach, 1872, 37 x 55 cm. oil on canvas, St. Louis Art Museum.

similar to those found in the tranquil English or Dutch harbors. But, unlike the Romantics, his seas are calm and he treats seascapes for the effects of light on water, on ships and beaches. He paints ships near Honfleur and LeHavre often, (Figs. 1-17 and 1-18). These are picturesque harbors, remote from the tragedies threatened by the open sea of Turner's world. Jongkind, a Dutch artist who was well-traveled and knew his heritage, painted with Dutch masters in mind. His work influenced the Impressionists directly. Monet admired the immediate, vivid luminosity in Jongkind's works.

Jongkind's Honfleur (Fig. 1-19) is similar to Cuyp's harbor scene (Fig. 1-2) with the low horizon and cloud-filled sky. However, Jongkind's picture has a different mood from the calm, innocent Dutch painting. The port of Honfleur appears to be less romanticized than Cuyp's. His two ships are more complicated in the juxtaposition of masts and rigging. Honfleur was a delightful port for the supplanted Dutchman to behold. He visited there often in the company of Isabey and later with Monet. Jongkind's Dutch heritage is evident in his pictures of calm harbors and commercial boats.

It was with Isabey's advice that the other proto-Impressionist and mentor to Monet, Eugene Boudin (1824-1898), began painting the social promenades along the coastal watering places.

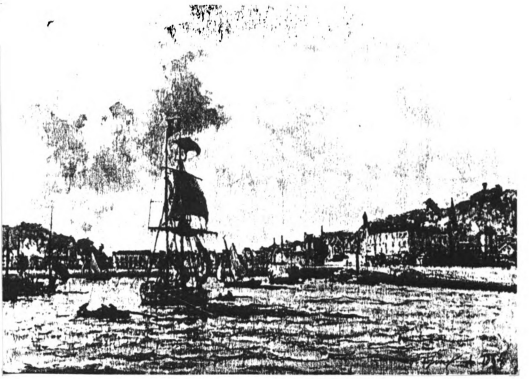

Figure 1-17: Johan Barthold Jongkind, Entrance to the Port of Honfleur (Windy Day), 1864, 41.9 x 56.2 cm., oil on canvas, Art Institute, Chicago.

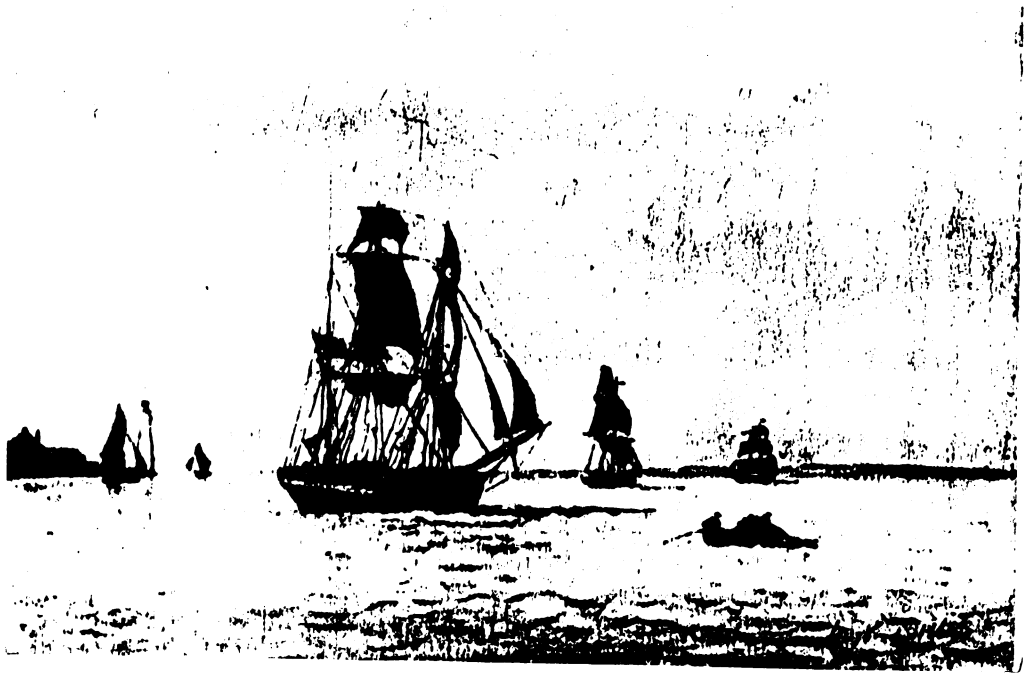

Figure 1-18: Johan Barthold Jongkind, Entrance to the Port of Honfleur, 1864, 33.7 x 43.2 cm. oil on canvas, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

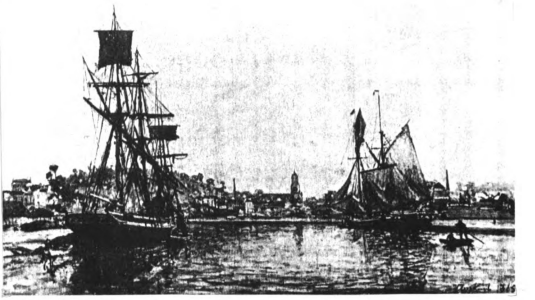

Figure 1-19: Johan Barthold Jongkind, Honfleur, 1865, 52.1 x 81.6 cm., oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Sailing and bathing were two popular forms of recreation in nineteenth century France. By mid-century, the middle class Parisians thronged to the beaches, transported by the recently extended railroad. A contemporary observed:

> "Throughout the Second Empire the popularity of the Norman beaches was to grow from season to season. Paris, having tasted the sea, could no longer do without it, and every year the number of bathers became larger. Financial speculation taking a part, twenty new resorts were founded and developed . . .Casinos rose up on the shadow of cliff, bathing cabins grew like mushrooms, and soon the whole coast, from the dunes of the Pas-de-Calais to the mouth of the Dives, was during the summer months no more than an immense bathing establishment."[10]

Serious writers and artists also traveled to the beaches. In the early 1860s, Boudin painted pictures of the fashionable resorts of Deauville and Trouville. Theodore Reff explains the popularity of these seaside resorts for the artist:

> "Encouraged by the marine painter Isabey to work at Trouville in the early 1860s, when it was becoming the most fashionable summer resort on the Normandy coast, Boudin soon established himself as a specialist in recording the activities of the upper-middle-class, predominantly Parisian society that frequented the beach and its casino and strolled along its jettys and quays."[11]

These wealthy people made excellent patrons and collectors for his brilliant, little pictures. In one representative work, Bathing at Deauville (Fig. 1-20), Boudin's characteristic freshness of color and lightness of touch are evident. The well-dressed bourgeoisie are gathered frieze-like below a large explanse of sky. Boudin paints only two

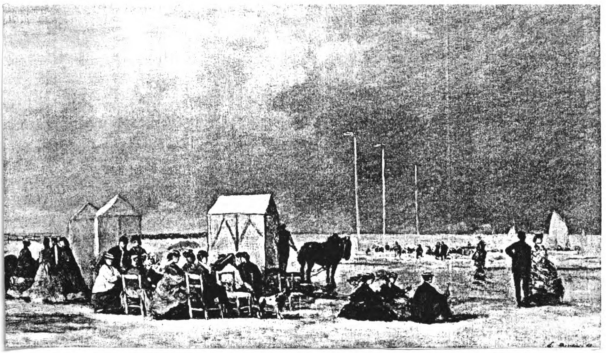

Figure 1-20: Eugene Boudin, Bathing at Deauville, 1865
34.6 x 57.7 cm., oil on wood, Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon collection, Virginia.

sailboats which are background accents that clearly chronicle, in panoramic form, the life and activities of the beach. Boudin concentrates on the people on the beach, not the sailboats at seaside. Boudin was one of the first landscape artists to present the landscape as an environment of leisure and recreation. In the majority of their pictures of boats and boating, the Impressionists take the position of the tourist.[12] Their pictures are more than mere chronicles, however. Monet and the others carry Boudin's studies of atmosphere further and their brushstrokes and color become more varied and intensified.

Before Boudin went to the coast, Isabey had taken Jongkind to the Normandy coast in 1827. The tradition continued with Boudin showing Monet the benefits of painting outdoors, especially on the coast. Boudin's strength lies in his depictions of sea and sky. His quick brushstroke is able to successfully render the atmospheric and ephemeral qualities of light and space. The ever-shifting, fluffy clouds are masterpieces in themselves. Sometimes his boats dominate the scene. Boudin used the same artistic touches as Jongkind: the colorful sails set against the billowy clouds and the whitecaps on the water as in Figure 1-21. Boudin's preoccupation was most often with the sky and water. Boats are secondary considerations in his pictures of the coastal resorts. Many of his pictures are exquisite cloud studies as well as boating pictures. He rarely painted inland

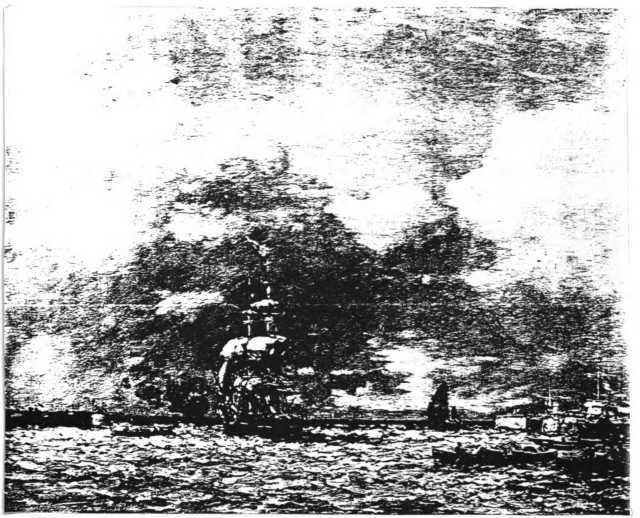

Figure 1-21: Eugene Boudin, Entry to the Port of LeHavre, 1864, 45 x 55 cm., oil on canvas, E.A. Sursham, St. Albans, England.

scenes; two exceptions are his views of the Seine at Argenteuil (Figs. 1-22 and 1-23). They lack the power that Monet was to achieve in depicting comparable views. They are similar to Boudin's pictures of Deauville or Trouville, except here the fashionable crowd is gathered on the banks of the Seine to watch a regatta. The tourist vision is present in these scenes of anonymous people at leisure. Boudin remained true to his instinctual attraction to the Normandy coast, where he was born and raised. Had he not suffered an injury on a ship, he might have been a sailor. He openly admired his father who captained a vessel carrying passengers, mostly tourists, from LeHavre to Honfleur. As with so many of the best marine painters, Boudin had an early childhood connection with the sea and boats. Monet shared the same interest and connection. These artists were initially intrigued by the harbors of commerce and trade; they paint vessels with practical, commercial ends. The fishing craft are prosaic, solid and bulky. Their bloated forms reflect their purpose of holding the catch in their bellies.

The Impressionists, especially Monet, reject commercial boats as their subjects. With the increasing popularity of pleasure boating among the middle classes, these artists have a new subject to paint. The pleasure boats represent the leisure, and escape, the middle class existence promised. Monet, Renoir, and Sisley found the bourgeois life extremely appealing; hence they tried to associate themselves with

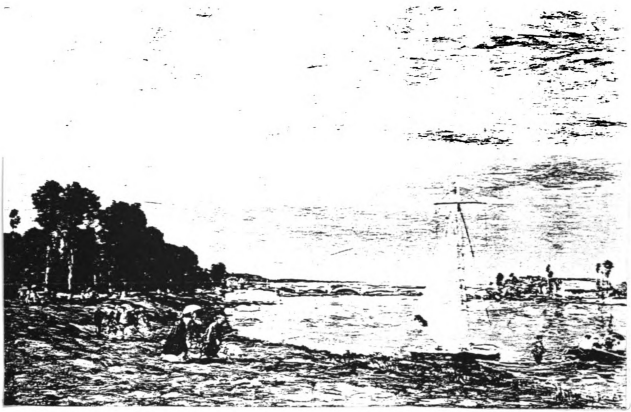

Figure 1-22: Eugene Boudin, The Seine at Argenteuil, 1869 30 x 47 cm., oil on canvas, Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon, Upperville, Virginia.

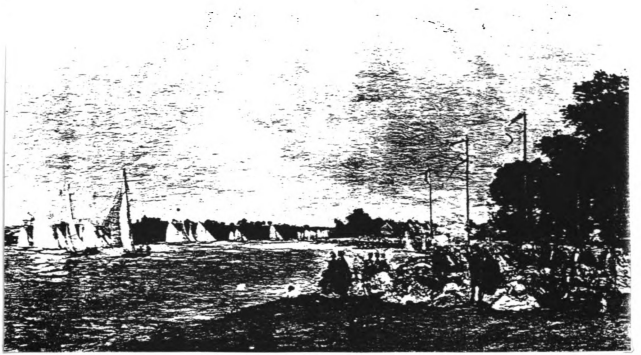

Figure 1-23: Eugene Boudin, The Regatta at Argenteuil, 1866, 46 x 73 cm., oil on canvas, Johannesburg Art Gallery, South Africa.

this life through their art, by painting activities that would appeal to the middle class, prospective patrons.

CHAPTER TWO:

Nineteenth Century Leisure: Riverside and Seashore

Monet's early pictures of commercial ships are easily explained in terms of his background, his travels, and his mentors. Monet grew up in LeHavre, a busy port on the Normandy coast where his father was a successful ship supplier. Monet spent time around the wharves and ships, probably dreaming of faraway places and people. Later, to avoid the Franco-Prussian War, he sailed to London where he saw the paintings of Turner and other British marine artists in the museums. On his return, he stopped in Holland. Here he would have seen seventeenth century Dutch ship pictures. While in Holland Monet painted the canals and the commercial vessels. Before his travels, Monet observed and painted ships on the Normandy coast alongside his teacher and friend, Eugene Boudin, whose favorite subjects were ships in port or at sea.

Monet paints the port cities of Honfleur and LeHavre, emphasizing the ships at anchor. These views recall similar Dutch scenes where the ship is prominent, symbol of a prosperous, independent nation whose people take pride in their commerce and wealth. In Port of Honfleur, (Fig. 2-1) Monet's picture looks physically different from the Dutch paintings, but one gets a similar sense of his pride in these massive ships. His point of view is low; he looks upward at their looming hulls, masts and rigging. While consciously making his ships look different, the Dutch would never cut part of

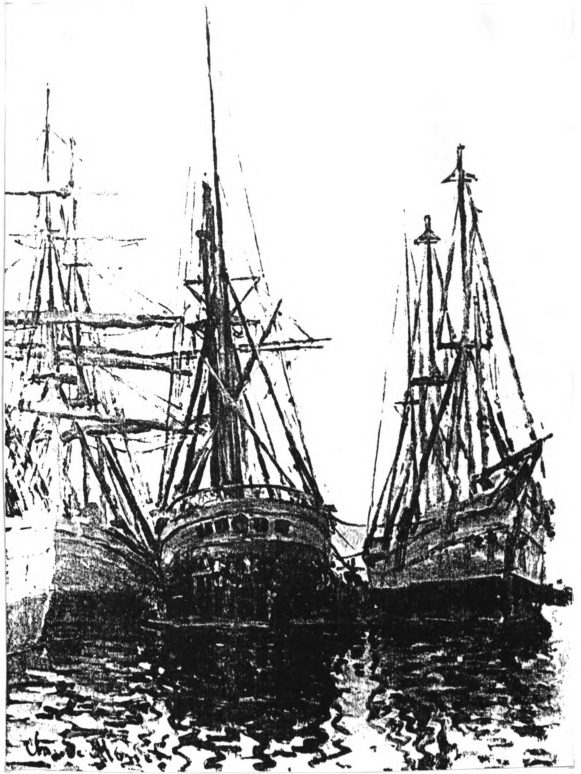

Figure 2-1: Claude Monet, Port of Honfleur, c, 1870
71 x 54 cm., oil on canvas, Alex, Reid & Lefevre

a ship out of the picture, subconsciously he seems connected with the Dutch masters' works.

Steamer and Fishing Boats in the Harbor of Honfleur (Fig.2-2) seems closer to the Dutch perspective, since they would usually paint the whole harbor resplendent with tall, sturdy ships. Once again Monet paints his harbor that harkens back to the Dutch or British. He artfully arranges the working vessels in a colorfully accented grouping which, at the same time, look forward to the Impressionist style with its broadly stroked reflections in the water.

Another connection with the Dutch art is evident in Monet's famous, Impression, Sunrise (Fig. 2-3). Here Monet characterizes the physical aspect of the port of LeHavre under renovation and industrialization after the Franco-Prussian War in a positivistic light.[1] Just as the Dutch recorded their nationalism and civic pride in their paintings of ships, so does Monet in his picture. Paul Tucker says:

> "This progressive, consummately beautiful scene, where man clearly has his place, strongly recalls Turners'or even more appropriately the port views of Joseph Vernet and Claude Lorrain, an apt combination for Monet of nineteenth century innovation and French tradition. And, like these past masters, Monet idealizes his scene; LeHavre was not in fact a very attractive city, as various guidebooks of the 1850s and 1860s pointed out."[2]

Monet has his foot in two worlds before he concentrates almost exclusively on the pleasure boats of Argenteuil. Monet came to the motif of sailboating through the figure just as Degas came to the ballet through portraiture. Initially Monet

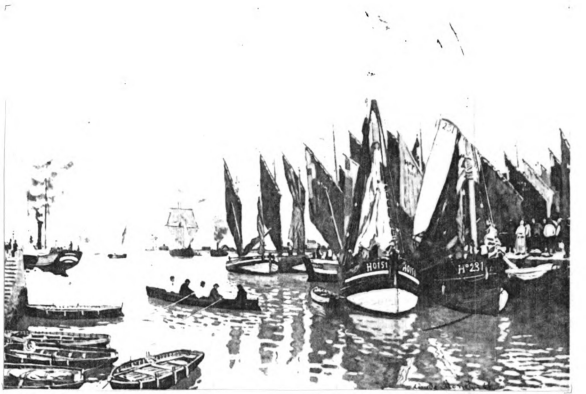

Figure 2-2: Claude Monet, Steamer and Fishing Boats in the Harbor of Honfleur, 1866, 59.5 x 91" oil on canvas, present whereabouts unknown.

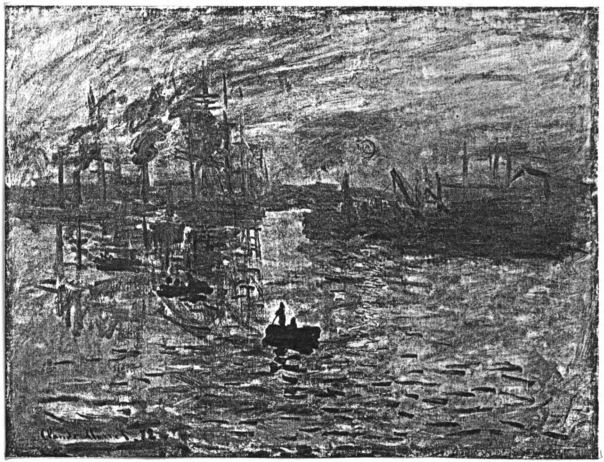

Figure 2-3: Claude Monet, Impression, Sunrise, 1872, 48 x 63 cm., oil on canvas, Musee Marmottan, Paris.

was under the influence of Boudin. Later, with a focus on the figure, he denies some of Boudin's landscape orientation, but still includes the sailboat, a theme he will exploit later. (See the next chapter)

Monet paints leisure boats and commerce ships together at Sainte-Adresse (Fig. 2-4), an attractive, coastal, resort town. Monet seems more interested in the recreational aspect of boating, which his early Regatta at Sainte-Adresse (Fig. 2-5) reveals. In both views the people are as prominent as the pleasure boats they observe.

Leisure time was an important by-product of the Industrial Revolution. For the people who now had free time, certain activities, such as sailing, became immensely popular. Weekend sailing, or bathing, on the sea coast provided an opportunity for convivial family and courtship rituals. Monet's family is no exception on their seaside terrace, (Fig. 2-4). It is a rosy world that drew Monet's attention and inspired his hope of attaining some part of it.

Monet paints modern life, but for him that means when dominated with figures, people that mean something to him. Monet stayed with Camille at Trouville in 1870, just after their marriage. In On the Beach at Trouville (Fig. 2-6) the focus in on Camille. Monet zooms in on Camille, omitting most of the beach and bathers. Monet includes a lone sailboat on the open sea behind her. Using a quick brushstroke and a pastel-colored palette, Monet creates a feeling of

Figure 2-4: Claude Monet, Beach at Sainte-Adresse, 1867, 75 x 101 cm., oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago.

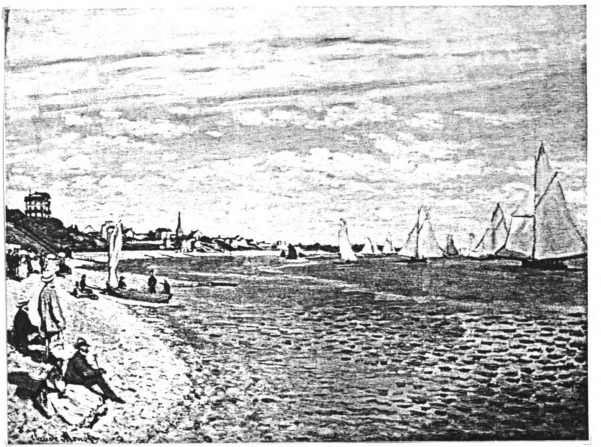

Figure 2-5: Claude Monet, Regatta at Sainte-Adresse, 1867, 75.5 x 101.5 cm., oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 2-6: Claude Monet, On the Beach at Trouville, 1870, 37.5 x 46 cm., oil on canvas, Mr. & Mrs. John Hay Whitney, New York.

spontaneity centered on his wife's figure. This view is similar to a close-up snapshot of a loved one. Monet paints this type of composition as well as the panoramic vision which he learned from Boudin. Between these two extremes, Monet explores the range of compositional possibilities, especially when he works at Argenteuil.

Another popular beach, at Boulogne, attracted several artists, Manet included. In the Beach at Boulogne (Fig. 2-7) Manet uses another compositional arrangement. Here the people are randomly scattered on the sand, just as they would be seen in a passing glance. The color is more subdued and the brushstroke swift. The boats are tiny, hovering near the horizon. Interestingly, Manet paints a fishing vessel, a small dinghy, a steamboat, a schooner and another sailboat. The variety and placement of these boats echoes the figures on the beach. Again the figurative element is the dominant one.

Manet and the Impressionists play up the holiday aspect of the beach with its pleasure boats or ferries surrounded by figures. This is not unusual since these artists were sensitive to their environment and sought out activities of the middle classes. Although he might have painted The Beach at Boulogne from an assembled series of sketches, he is faithful to the atmosphere of the beach. It would have been a crowded place according to contemporary accounts:

Figure 2-7: Edouard Manet, On the Beach at Boulogne, 1869, 32 x 65 cm., oil on canvas, Mr. & Mrs. Paul Mellon collection, Pasadena.

> ". . .by 1865 the number of bathing cabins had grown from three to one hundred fifty and was growing every season; by 1867, the railroad line had been extended from Calais to Boulogne, placing the city on the direct line between London and Paris and greatly increasing the number of passengers stopping there."[3]

A lithograph from 1860 (Fig. 2-8) illustrates what the beach at Boulogne looked like. All the elements which are shown in Manet's painting are recorded here: the flat beach, horse-drawn bathing cabins, the jetty and its strollers, the harbor and its sailboats, even the Folkestone Ferry. Manet's vision is that of a tourist observing the beach, open sea with boats. Here one finds the fashionable Parisians he loved to paint at their leisure. In two paintings Manet captures what the panoramic illustration encompasses, and he does it not in an aloof way. He is a bit above, but close in and sees only fragments.

In his Departure of the Folkestone Ferry (Fig. 2-9) one finds Manet's characteristic, swift brushstroke delineating the figures who embark upon a solidly and accurately rendered ferry boat. Manet, like the Impressionists later, was a keen observer of modern life. He painted this scene from his window in the Hotel de Folkestone. He, too, was lured to the beach because of its greater popularity and accessibility.

These bright pictures of boats and people at leisure are small in number in Manet's oeuvre. During his earlier sojourn at Boulogne he painted the harbor and fishing boats,

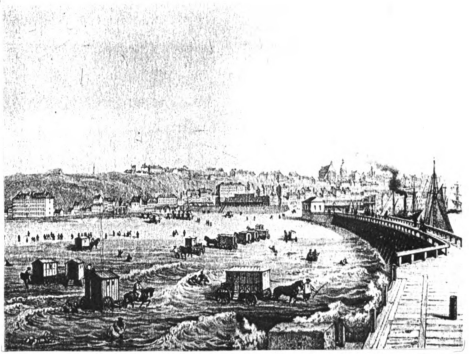

Figure 2-8: Léon Asselineau, View of the Baths, Seen From the Jetty at Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1860, lithograph, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Figure 2-9: Edouard Manet, Departure of the Folkestone Ferry, 1869, 59 x 71 cm., oil on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

(Fig. 2-10). This viewpoint recalls the seventeenth century Dutch harbors with their anchored shipping vessels.

Another painting of 1864, The Battle of the Kearsarge and Alabama, (Fig. 2-11), makes a connection between the romantic and the tourist view. In the foreground is a noncombatant with French flag flying. The boat is full of people watching the battle, like Turner's Burning of the Houses of Parliament, (Fig. 2-12), with its boat laden with curious spectators. But Manet makes it bluntly factual, unlike Turner's boats which are caught in a cataclysmic flux. Manet's boats do not evoke the strong emotions of which Turner's were capable.

In 1873 Manet painted another beach scene, On the Beach (Fig. 2-13) that has the immediacy similar to Monet's views of Camille on the beach. In this snapshot view the figures loom large in comparison with the tiny boats on the horizon. The boats barely fit into the narrow band of grey sky. As usual with the close-up view, the boats play a subsidiary role to the intimacy between Manet's wife, Suzanne, and his brother, Eugene. This picture may have inspired a rare scene of outdoor bathing by Degas, Beach Scene of 1876 (Fig. 2-14). Both pictures are divided by nearly flat, smoothly painted bands of color. The small sailboats in the limpid, pale water appear almost as toy models of the real things. The dominant figures are randomly dispersed as in Manet's picture. The

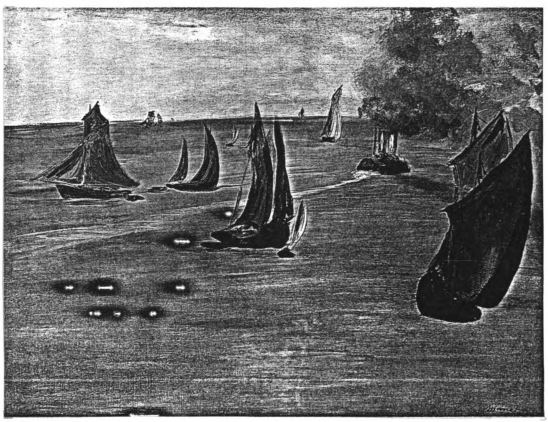

Figure 2-10: Edouard Manet, Departure from Boulogne Harbor, 1864-65, 74 x 93 cm., oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago.

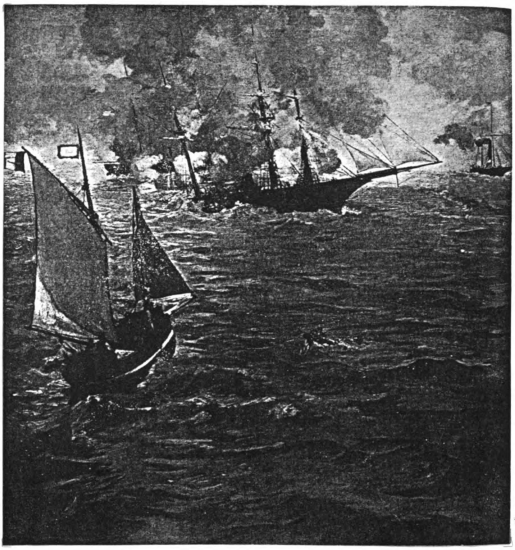

Figure 2-11: Edouard Manet, Battle of the Kearsarge and Alabama, 1864, 134 x 127 cm., Johnson G. Johnson collection, Philadelphia.

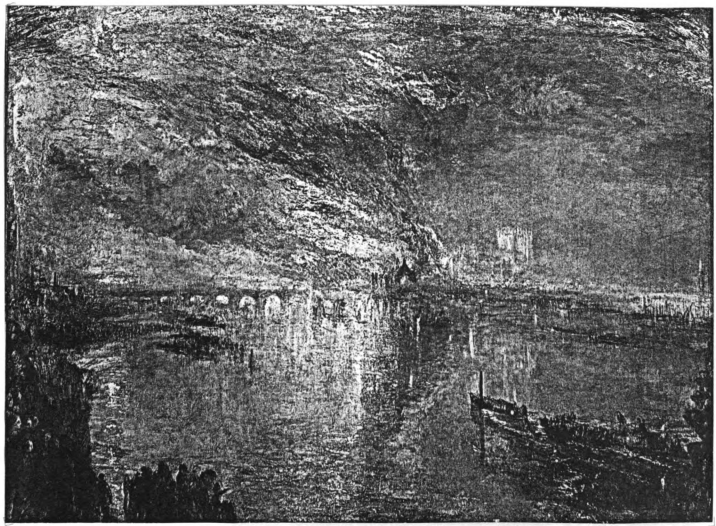

Figure 2-12: J.M.W. Turner, Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, October 16, 1834, 1835, 927 x 1,232 mm., oil on canvas Cleveland Museum of Art.

Figure 2-13: Edouard Manet, On the Beach, 1873, 59.6 x 73.2 cm oil on canvas, Musee d'Orsay, Paris.

Figure 2-14: Edgar Degas, Beach Scene, 1876-77, 47 x 82.5 cm oil on paper, mounted on canvas, National Gallery, London.

young girl and women are largest, drawing the eye to the center. Once again, the boats accompany a figurative panorama. This is what Degas would have seen, painting outdoors. Although he composed this picture in the studio, he was an observer; one would have seen many boats on the open sea while bathing or strolling along the beach. Unlike Manet, Degas created a story on his beach, but he is not far removed from that tourist vision.

Often the Impressionists painted rowboats. Rowing was another popular pastime imported from England. Joanna Richardson in La Vie Parisienne, explains who participated in rowing:

> "Parisians never quite acquired the English love of messing about in boats; but those who did not move in the highest social circles were remarkably addicted to rowing."[4]

M. Delvau, writing in 1867, describes how quickly the popularity of various types of boating grew:

> "We are no such fanatics about boats as the English and the Americans, but we have finally grown enthusiastic. . .We don't have a Yacht Club, but we have a Rowing Club. We don't go from Europe to America in a nutshell, but we have freshwater regattas and salt water regattas, at LeHavre and at Asnieres, on rivers and on lakes. The taste for boating has developed remarkably in the last fifteen years; and what proves it is that an official list of pleasure boats recorded in the various maritime departments of France since the circular of 23 May 1862 gives a figure of 4,696 boats and craft manned by 5,776 amateurs, not to mention sailing boats, rowing boats and steam ships designed for the navigation of the river--there are more than 8,000 of these."[5]

A popular resort where Parisians gathered to swim or row could be found at a site close to Bougival, known as La Grenouillere. Monet and Renoir both painted there in 1869. Prior to 1869, Monet had been at La Grenouillère making preliminary studies with the intention of returning to paint full-size oil pictures. In his enthusiasm regarding the site, he encouraged Renoir to join him. Thus we may assume Monet chose the point of view and Renoir accompanied him. Monet already knew what effect he desired and pursued this through several paintings which he considered sketches.

Monet finished what he hoped would be a masterpiece of large figurative work with Le Dejeuner Sur L'herbe. Two years later he went to La Grenouillère to sketch the water, light, boats, and people. From these early studies, two exquisite impressionistic paintings emerge as masterpieces, (Figs. 2-15 & 2-16). While these views depict colorfully dressed figures akin to those we saw at leisure on the coastal beaches there is a subtle difference: the boats play a more substantial role by dominating the foreground and here they are rowboats. Rowboats have a different connotation than sailboats.

Sailing a yacht requires strength, skill and mental agility in order to exploit the winds. Rowing a small, wooden boat requires only strength and minimal amount of skill. Rowing a woman about on a lake or pond was viewed

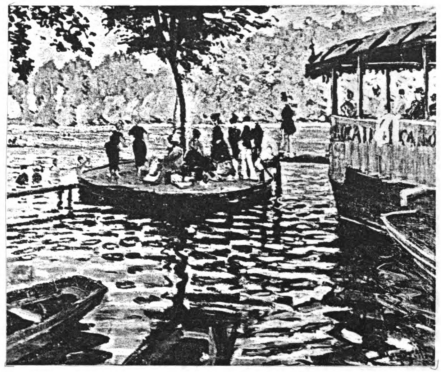

Figure 2-16: Claude Monet, La Grenouillère, 1869, 73 x 89 cm., oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

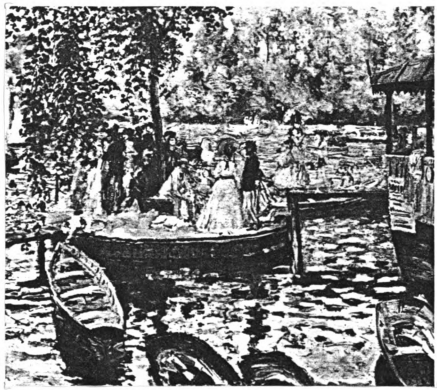

Figure 2-17: August Renoir, La Grenouillère, 1869, 65 x 80 cm., oil on canvas, Stockholm National Museum.

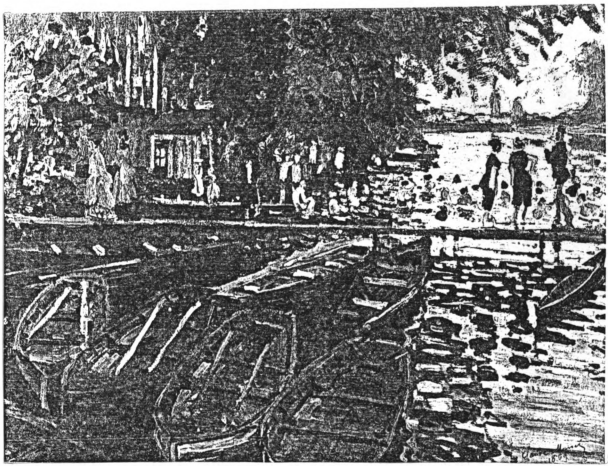

Figure 2-15: Claude Monet, Bathers at La Grenouillère, 1869, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London.

as being chivalrous or romantic. I am not sure how often women rowed back then, but I would imagine they could participate just as easily as a man; whereas, few women probably sailed alone.[6]

Monet creates interesting spatial relationships with his rowboats in Fig. 2-15. Their shapes are delineated with long strokes of flattened patches of bright green. They lead the eye inward, toward the swimming figures. The angle of vision upon the moored rowboats creates a visual tension. Monet's angle of vision is down from above, and as a result reveals the arrangement of seats and floor slats inside these wooden boats. The point of view reflects Monet's interest in Japanese prints. Simultaneously, he views the dock in profile with the bathers standing securely on it. Beyond these figures the space opens quickly and rushes back into the distance and the opposite shoreline. In this picture of La Grenouillère Monet has taken a contemporary, slice-of-life subject with the central image of pleasure boats, and constructed a visually intriguing picture. The rowboats serve both as symbols of middle class leisure, or play, and objects that are manipulated artistically to create an effect.

In his other view of La Grenouillère (Fig. 2-16), the boats are less prominent. Bathing, socializing, boating, and eating are all included here which makes the place attractive to the leisured classes, and this strikes Monet. He focuses on the crowded, miniature island. The foreground rowboats

are cropped at the bottom, their sterns point toward the central island. The floating restaurant to the right and the dock opposite create a one point perspective, which also focuses on the island with its flickering suggestion of conviviality.

Renoir's picture (Fig. 2-17) at first glance appears to be more fussy and busy in effect. He takes a more delicate, painterly approach; while, in comparison, Monet applies the paint in thick, patterned patches. Renoir paints the figures' clothing and poses more precisely and brings the island up closer, revealing his empathy for the figures and their activities. The rowboats are not painted as distinctly or as well-defined as Monet's. Here, they blend in with the water and appear unresolved as to their spatial relation to the whole area. Renoir's interest lies in the people. Monet's vision encompasses the people. Renoir includes a sailboat to the far left, but it is tucked in behind the foliated tree, nearly obscured, almost an afterthought. Renoir records as much of the pleasant bourgeois scene as possible. Kermit Champa addresses the distinction between Monet's and Renoir's art when he says:

> "Where Monet's procedures seem consciously exclusive of certain effects, Renoir's attempt to be comprehensive."[7]

In these pictures at La Grenouillère, and those of Argenteuil later, Monet takes up what is traditionally picturesque, the boats, but does away with any lingering sentimentality.

Figure 2-17A: Auguste Renoir, La Grenouillère, 1869, 64 x 80 cm., oil on canvas, Stockholm National Museum.

To a lesser extent, Renoir does the same. (See also Fig.2-17A)

Monet painted another smaller boating picture in the same year, 1869, The Landing-Stage (Fig. 2-18). This is unusual for Monet, to show figures so close-up, seated in a rowboat. There is an echo of Watteau's, Embarkation from Cythera, with its theme of elegant, courtly love; but this is modern life. The stylishly dressed men and women, engaged in conversation, sit next to their rowboat. Other figures float nearby in a smaller rowboat. A sailboat tacks in the distance. The scene is a cliché of the bourgeois, leisurely-spent Sunday outing. The boats are the accoutrements or toys made to serve the courtship ritual or social occasion.

Caillebotte was the other Impressionist to paint boats and boating of the bourgeoisie. Kirk T. Varnedoe explains:

> "Soon after the series of street scenes of 1876-77 large and complicated convases that must have precluded almost any work for quite awhile, Caillebotte began another series, dealing with rowing on the river Yerres. It is the most forceful, as it carries over some of the aggressive dynamics of space and scale found in the street views."[8]

In these views, Caillebotte pursues the vision of the urban dweller-turned-oarsman in a realist vein with Oarsman in a Top Hat (Fig. 2-19). Here the city comes to the country in the figure of the sporting bourgeois on excursion. He has rented a boat, removed his jacket and yet finds the safest place for his top hat to be his head. The lowered point of view brings the spectator in sharply, almost as if one were

Figure 2-18: Claude Monet, L'Embarcadere, 1869, 21.25 x 29" oil on canvas, whereabouts unknown.

Figure 2-19: Gustave Caillebotte, Oarsman in a Top Hat, c. 1877, 90 x 117 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, Paris.

seated in the stern. The man's attention is elsewhere, but he is very near. We could be sitting in that rowboat. Caillebotte's use of one point perspective effectively creates this illusion. The scene is very real and sharply characteristic of a city person transplanted temporarily.

In another picture of Oarsmen (Fig. 2-20) done in the same year, Caillebotte takes a Japanese perspective, omitting the horizon, focusing sharply downward on the two rowing men. Compared to the other oarsmen, these two are more aggressively rowing in unison and in proper attire. Caillebotte pays careful attention to details of the men and the boat down to the oarlock. One gets a real sense of the boat as it glides along the water. Once again, Caillebotte places the spectator nearly on top of the boat. The Oarsmen recalls his earlier Floor Planers. In both we see figures in sequential action and the same pose with the outstretched, elongated arms in concentrated activity. His fascination with movement and space is evident. Varnedoe notes that:

> "Caillebotte's palette has brightened considerably in the interim between the two pictures (Figs.2-19 and 2-20) no doubt influenced by the work of Monet and Renoir, and his design is now far simpler, with fewer elements."[9]

He continues with:

> "The particular appeal of boats and boating-related activities for Impressionist painters may have other roots, beyond the simple picturesque quality of the motifs. The kind of image Caillebotte shows here, of the man in the small boat, of the sporting amateur civilized but in

Figure 2-20: Gustave Caillebotte, Oarsmen, 1877, 81 x 116 cm. oil on canvas, Private collection, Paris.

> nature, independent and at leisure to move happily with tides and the winds, may have been for these painters an emblem of the ideal, much in the way that the man astride the fiery horse is an emblem of the concerns of the Romantic generation."[10]

The Impressionists do not imbue their boating pictures with any overt emotional quality as the Romantics did earlier. They do not suggest that the viewer should have any particular response, nor do they refer to anything beyond that which is depicted.

Caillebotte paints the greatest variety of boats. In the series of the river Yerres, he paints several pictures of perissoires, fragile, flat-bottomed skiffs. Less sophisticated than actual rowing skulls, but lighter and nimbler than the sturdy boats seen in Figs.2-21 & 2-22, they are propelled with a two-bladed kayak paddle, as shown in Fig. 2-23. Caillebotte learned his boating skills on this river. His accurate pictures display his interest and knowledge about these boats and boating.

Caillebotte's view realistically depicts the action and motion of this type of boating. The boats' movement is more important than the identity of the men.

The other sort of boating, sailing, was painted more frequently by the Impressionist than any other. It was part of the development of pleasure boating described by Daryl:

> "Au total, on peut dire que la periode 1865 à 1870 fut feconde en resultats pour la navigation de plaisance. La Société des Régates Parisiennes,

Figure 2-21: Gustave Caillebotte, Canoes, 1877, 88 x 117 cm., oil on canvas, National Gallery, Washington.

Figure 2-22: Gustave Caillebotte, Canoes, 1878, 157 x 113 cm., oil on canvas, Musee de Rennes.

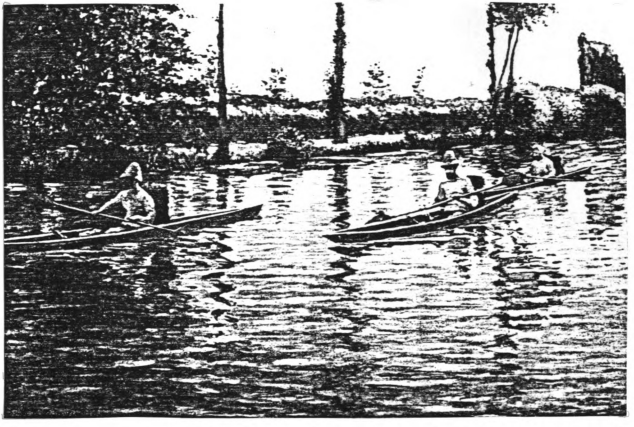

Figure 2-23: Gustave Caillebotte, Canoes, 1877, 103 x 156 cm. oil on canvas, Milwaukee Art Center.

> la plus importante d'alors, joua un rôle important dans ce developpement, auquel l'Exposition de 1867 vint encore donner un elan considérable."[11]

Therefore it is not unusual for the majority of paintings to appear after these formative years of the sport of sailing. A drawing from the popular journal, L'Illustration (Fig. 2-24) shows the sailing activity of a springtime regatta that took place in May 1858 at Saint-Cloud. In the perissoires near the shore, men in the striped shirts of a boating costume wait for the sailing craft that compete to go by. They have pulled over to watch. Since all the boats are in one mass, one could assume this was the beginning of the race. When the Impressionists painted sailboats in a regatta, they approach the subject in various ways. Sisley painted a Regatta at Molesey, England, (Fig. 2-25) in 1874. He captures the festivities and excitement involved in such an event. He loosened his technique after encountering Monet's influence at Argenteuil. Whatever the source for his inspiration, Sisley effectively paints a rowing regatta with onlookers, flapping flags and the spirit of a sporting event. His frenzied strokes delineate the long, thin sculls which are the central focus. Unlike his earlier pictures of boats, he does not give this one a tranquil or picturesque character. The grey-green colors are dark and somber, perhaps a cloud is passing over. Also, Sisley moves in closer than usual.

Renoir, early in his career, painted the Return of the Boating Party (Fig. 2-26), in which his interest in figures

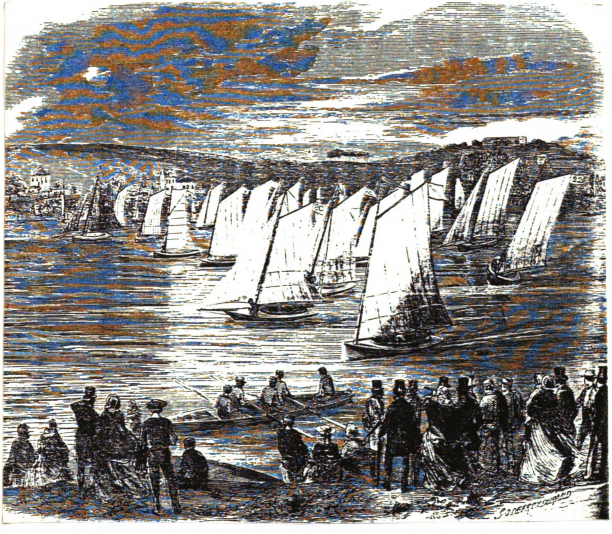

Figure 2-24: Spring Race of the Parisian Regatta Society, L'Illustration, May 8, 1858, vol. 31, Paris.

Figure 2-25: Alfred Sisley, Regatta at Molesey, England, 1874, oil on canvas, Jeu de Paume, Paris.

is evident, but as usual he places them in a context. Here they have just returned from a sailing excursion on a river. The men are folding the sail. The picture is detailed, showing the middle class at their leisure.

Scenes of conviviality abound in Renoir's figurative groups. In Boating Party at Chatou (Fig. 2-27) the sport of rowing appears again. Other canoes and sailboats stand out against the bright blue of the river. The men of the party could possibly be Manet or Caillebotte. The boat itself looks too long and unwieldy, but Renoir is not concerned with nautical accuracy. In these boating pictures, (see also Outing in a Rowboat, Fig. 2-28), Renoir displays the middle or lower classes having fun, frolicking in and around rowboats or small sailboats.

That most of these scenes of boats painted by the Impressionists occur on the river is not unusual. More people chose to boat on the Seine since it was accessible, demanded less skill for sailing, and must have been cheaper than renting or owning a larger, seaworthy yacht. Daryl describes the difference in size of the vessels and where they could appropriately sail:

> "Mais, il faut le reconnaitre, le batteau à derive parisien, d'une incontestable supériorité dans les eaux calmes des rivières, perd une partie de ses avantages dans les eaux agitées d'une mer un peu forte: d'autre part, les bateaux à dérive de grandes dimensions étaient charges de gréements démesurés qui fatiguaient beaucoup à la mer et qui étaient très dur à manoeuvrer."[12]

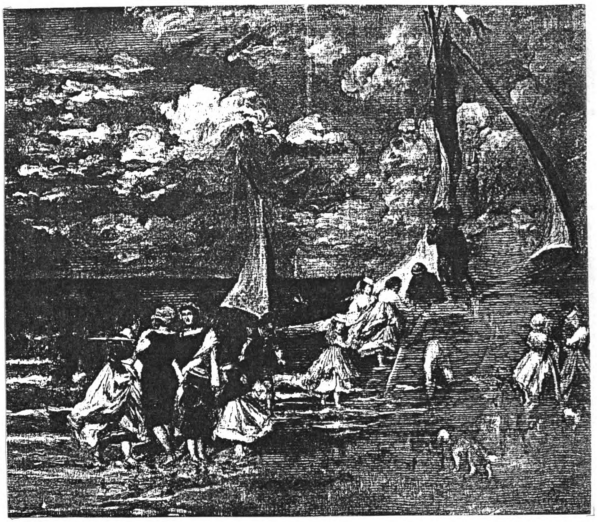

Figure 2-26: Auguste Renoir, Return of the Boating Party, 1862, 20 x 24", oil on canvas, Private collection, Montreal.

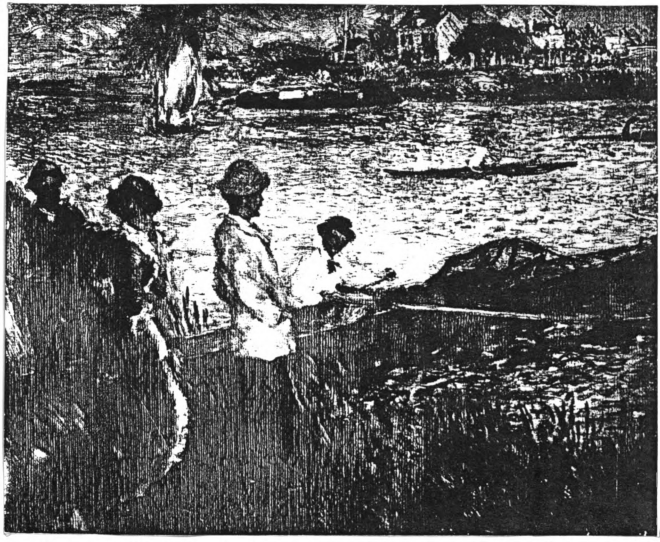

Figure 2-27: Auguste Renoir, Canoeists at Chatou, 1879, 81 x 100 cm., oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Manet shows a small sailboat with two large figures in a couple of views entitled, Boating (Fig. 2-29), and Argenteuil (Fig. 2-30) of 1874. These pictures predate Caillebotte's experiments with space and figures inside the boats. These views are intimate, and of necessity, fragmented. In the first, Boating, the man is steering at the helm, staring at the spectator frankly. He is the model for the second view, Argenteuil. He wears the sailing garb of a white T-shirt, breeches, and a straw hat. She is more fashionably dressed with a beautifully striped, blue and white frock. Manet focuses slightly downward and into their boat as if we have invaded their space. The sail is visible in the upper right corner. No horizon line exists to place this company in a more specific setting than a river somewhere.

In Argenteuil the couple is not in the boat. Several are moored behind them. Once again, the people are the focus.

In all of these boat scenes, most of which include prominently displayed figures, one can read an aspect of social history. The time that people of the middle or lower classes had to spare was often spent in or around the water and boats. They left the smoking, dirty factories to find peace and pleasure in the country. An irony exists for those who worked to gain leisure and then continued to work at the efforts of sport. According to Van Liere, sailing is a difficult task to master. One must be constantly alert and ready to act in the correct manner to maneuver the boat.[13]

Figure 2-28: Auguste Renoir, Outing in a Rowboat, 1866, 26.75 x 35.73", oil on canvas, Private collection.

Figure 2-29: Edouard Manet, Boating, 1874, 96 c 130 cm., oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Figure 2-30: Edouard Manet, Argenteuil, 1874, 149 c 131 cm., oil on canvas, Tournai, Musee des Beaux-Arts.

Like the Realists before them, the Impressionists sought for subjects visible and contemporary. However, the latter more often chose subjects of the middle class and their recreational activities. Shown in pleasant surroundings, they are not idealized or sentimentalized. Each artist interprets, in his own artistic perspective, the boats and boating activities of the French, especially Parisians, who flocked to the seashore or suburbs in ever greater numbers after 1850. The result is a variety of pictures that delightfully show us the spirit of the times and the enthusiasm these people had for boating and leisure.

CHAPTER THREE:

The Seine at Argenteuil

From the 1850s onwards boating became a popular diversion, second only to horseracing, in France. Sailing was one of the sports imported from England during the Second Empire when the French bourgeois exhibited a kind of Anglomania, copying many British things: horse racing, clubs, pleasure boating. In the early years, between 1870 and 1880, the Impressionists collectively painted many scenes of boats or boating. It is in Argenteuil where Monet paints pleasure boats; earlier he painted mostly international merchant ships, fishing vessels and old dories.[1] Rewald states:

> "Probably no single place could be identified more closely with Impressionism than Argenteuil where, at one time or another, practically all of the friends worked but, where in 1874 particularly, Monet, Renoir, and Manet went to paint."[2]

Argenteuil was a busy town from mid-April to October with bimonthly sailboat races. The first regatta at Argenteuil took place on August 25, 1850. By the time Monet moved to Argenteuil, just over twenty years later, the town had become a celebrated center for pleasure boating in France. The railroad, extended from Asnieres after mid-century, provided easy inexpensive transportation to this newly industrialized suburb of Paris. The river was ideal for boating according to Paul Tucker:

> "After looping back on itself at Saint-Denis, the river dropped between Epinay and Bezons to an average depth of 21 meters, opened to an average width of 195 meters, and flowed unencumbered by

> islands or curves for more than 10 kilometers--a combination of physical attributes unequaled by any other suburb of the capital."[3]

By 1858 Argenteuil had its own sailing club; the Cercle de Voile, established by the Societe des Regates Parisiennes. When Monet moved there in 1873 Argenteuil was no longer a sleepy argicultural community, but was a rapidly growing industrial town. In his many views of the Seine, Monet avoids the barges and commercial vessels that plied the river to and from Paris as well as supply goods to Argenteuil.

The importance of these pleasure craft to Monet's total oeuvre would not exist if they did not forecast the Argenteuil period 1873-76. This is the heart of the Impressionist period for these years saw the group form and establish its first exhibits and thereby become an identifiable group with a new vision to present. Pleasure craft are intrinsic to the Impressionist dream for they occupy much of Monet's attention in particular.

Before he settled at Argenteuil, Monet had painted fishing boats at Honfleur, commercial shipping at LeHavre, Rouen, and the Netherlands. On two occasions he reveals his partiality toward painting subjects of middle class diversion. His two paintings of Sainte-Adresse (Figs. 3-1 & 2-5) revolve around people, showing his family at their leisure. This was a world of which he was once a part. Now, he longed to have his own family, with Camille, and live the bourgeois life independent of his father.

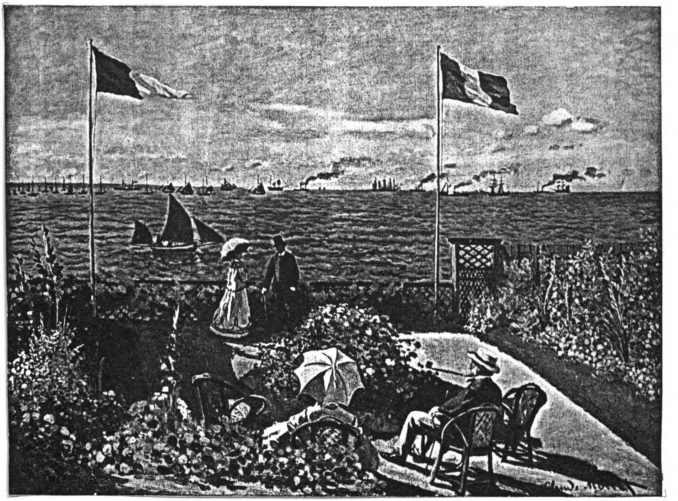

Figure 3-1: Claude Monet, Terrace at Sainte-Adresse, c.1867, 95 x 127 cm., oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Monet settled at Argenteuil in 1871 to live, work, and raise a family. He had married Camille Doncieux and committed himself to making a successful middle class life, just as his father had in LeHavre. Edouard Manet was instrumental in finding Monet a house in Argenteuil. His famly owned property across the river in Gennevillers. Argenteuil was the first place Monet could call home since he had moved from his parents' house in LeHavre in 1862.

Earlier that year, 1871, in London Monet had met the dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel, who was able to sell some of his paintings. In the first year at Argenteuil, 1872, Monet sold 38 paintings for a total of 12,100 francs; the family felt an immediate change in life-style. Monet was a successful painter and provider for his family. This was his dream and vision that comes through in his pictures of pleasure boats at Argenteuil.

With few exceptions, Monet's boating views of Argenteuil reflect the peaceful, serene, bourgeois existence of which he was now happily a part. There is nothing turbulent and upsetting about these pictures. The boats represent the leisure, the good life he had wanted and finally achieved in this town. With no financial worries, he concentrated on his art, painting the boats from a variety of angles, always seeking the perfect balance and vision--between man and nature, industry and leisure, city and country. However, Monet was not truly a part of the bourgeois scene he created; he

was an artist on the periphery, looking intently to transscribe the real into the ideal. While Monet avoids the smoky, noisy steamboats, and clutter of numerous sailboats that must have occurred on a bright, windy Sunday, his river-scenes are well-composed sunlit, sparkling visions of empty boats, waiting for the weekend pleasure seekers. He was a resident and therefore involved, he was also removed--the eye with which he observed so keenly and acutely, in order to present idyllic visions which one can drift into effortlessly. They must have pleased some of his middle class patrons, even if he would be criticized by critics again and again.

Now he is part of the class that enjoys the leisurely pastime or sport of yachting. Monet limits himself, for the first time in his life, to one area from 1872-76. He approaches the river and pleasure boats from as many angles as possible, initially painting from the shore. In these views boats play an increasingly important role, as he seems to grow more comfortable with the town.

Initially, Monet's views of the river focus on the Petit-Bras, away from the town's center of navigational activity around the bridges and the basin area. In 1872, he paints Sailboat on the Petit Bras of the Seine (Fig. 3-2), the first pleasure boat of the Argenteuil years. The small yacht, with two figures, dominates the scene, floating serenely on the river. Here the boat provides an escape back to nature. The view is reminiscent of the Romantic landscapes of Daubigny

Figure 3-2: Claude Monet, Sailboat on the Petit Bras of the Seine, Argenteuil, 1872, 51 x 64 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, USA.

Figure 3-3: Claude Monet, The Promenade at Argenteuil, 1872, 53 x 65 cm., oil on canvas, National Gallery, Washington.

and Constable. Before Monet concentrates his vision on the environs near the bridges, he explores the relationship between nature and man in his views of the Promenade at Argenteuil (Fig. 3-3). Here the tiny sailboat plays a diminished role in relation to the landscape, sky and river. A stillness pervades the scene; one could wonder how the boat could sail without any breeze, which indicates the breeze there must be, despite the glassy surface of the water; it must be one of the gentlest of winds. Man and his boat, coexist peacefully with nature. Wind, a natural source of power, leaves no mark on the nearly rural landscape. Monet is exploring one idyllic vision of Argenteuil far from the town.

In the Basin of Argenteuil (Fig. 3-4) we see the epitome of the life at Argenteuil, for the weekend visitor as well as the resident. A family walks along the promenade. Other fashionable women can be seen at the water's edge. Almost as a charming contrivance, Monet includes three yachts sailing on the river. They are far enough away that we do not focus on them exclusively, nor do we know if they are there for sport or leisure. Yet, they provide a festive foil to the recreational scene. Monet paints a steamboat in the distance. The two vastly different forms of river transportation are essential parts of the total scene.

Alfred Sisley (1839-1899) spent time in Argenteuil in 1872 sometimes painting the same motifs as Monet. However, he placed himself out at a further distance, painting

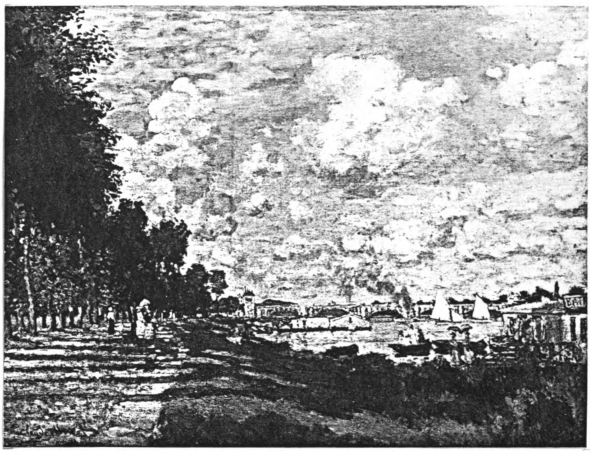

Figure 3-4: Claude Monet, Basin of Argenteuil, 1872, 60 x 80.5 cm., oil on canvas, Musee du Louvre, Paris.

picturesque views that are not as specific at Monet's, Highway Bridge (Fig. 3-5). The boats in Sisley's pictures are dominated by the river and surrounding landscape. The boats are simple, small sailing craft. He does not share Monet's distinct interest and knowledge of boats.

In 1872 Monet painted his first Regatta at Argenteuil (Fig. 3-6). Here the sailboats play an important role; they are the focus, compositionally balancing the shoreline of Petit-Gennevillers. Monet's fascination with the picturesque quality of boats is evident through his emphasis on their sails, downplaying the hulls of the craft. The reflections are roughly painted, as is the landscape, in a similar technique to that he used at La Grenouillere. The broad orange and white strokes make a striking contrast to the azure water. In his Sailboat (Fig. 3-7), from the same year, Monet has rearranged the boats to figure even more prominently. The landscape is diminished. This picture is unusual in Monet's work at Argenteuil. He rarely showed the bank so far away, running parallel to the picture plane. Usually he painted boats alongside a large piece of shore that would indicate where he was painting. This picture could be anywhere. Boats of varying size are scattered all over the river. The largest has a full-blown sail whose rounded shape is echoed in the ominous clouds. These are the last pictures of pleasure boats from 1872.

Figure 3-5: Alfred Sisley, Highway Bridge, 1872
34 x 60 cm., oil on canvas, Brooks Memorial
Art Gallery, Memphis, Tennessee.

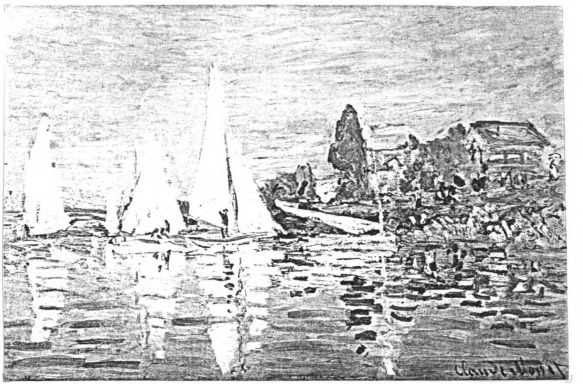

Figure 3-6: Claude Monet, Regatta at Argenteuil, c.1872, 48 x 75 cm., oil on canvas, Musee du Louvre, Paris.

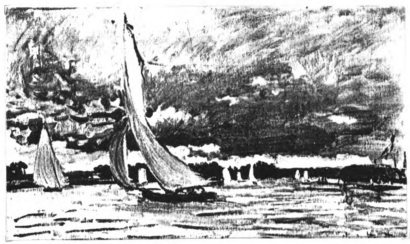

Figure 3-7: Claude Monet, Sailboats, 1872, 41.5 x 71.5 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, France.

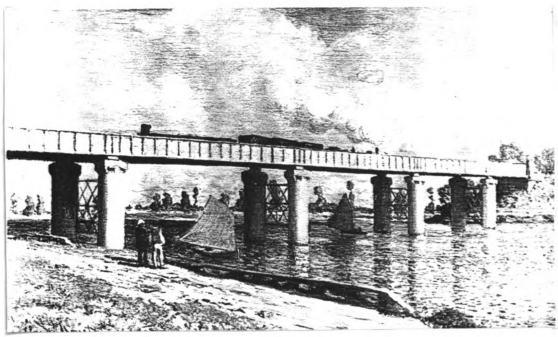

Figure 3-8: Claude Monet, Railroad Bridge Viewed From the Port, 1873, 60 x 99 cm., oil on canvas, Niarchos collection, London.

Later in the year, Monet goes through a phase when he paints commercial vessels, such as fishing boats, or the famous Impression Sunrise (Fig. 2-3), which emphasizes the commercial/industrial progress of the port behind the small rowboat: LeHavre.

In an early picture of 1873, The Railroad Bridge (Fig. 3-8) Monet shows his continued interest in the industrial aspect this time back at Argenteuil. Here the focus is not the two pleasure boats underneath the bridge. Rather, the picture can be read as either the dominance of the locomotive (representing the commercial) over the boats, which represent the recreational, or that these two aspects peacefully coexist at Argenteuil. The bourgeois dream includes both. After all, the middle class had to work to afford pleasure. Two gentlemen observe the puffing locomotive as it speeds across the massive, grey, steel bridge. It was a common motif in seventeenth century Dutch paintings to have two or more observers of a landscape. The worlds of commerce and leisure intersect at the river. Monet has almost contrived the scene in a classical, balanced composition. While the boats are a part of the scene, their relative size seems to indicate they play a subordinate role. This is the only picture of pleasure boats from that year in Argenteuil. Between then and 1874, Monet travels to the Normandy coast, and Amsterdam, where he paints more fishing boats or commercial activity. Going back to Argenteuil and continuing to paint in 1874 must have provided

him with a more calm, restful perspective. That is the overwhelming feeling one gets from the pictures of that year in which he concentrates on the river and pleasure boats.

Another aspect of these paintings is that Monet is moving closer to them and to the center of town where there is more boating activity surrounding the bridges. By now he is probably more familiar and comfortable with the town and seems drawn to the sailboating activity of the weekend pleasure seekers. Unlike any earlier pictures, Monet focuses on the moored sailboats; they are the composition, not attractive additions to a riverscape. Monet picks quiet times when the people are gone and paints the empty boats. Perhaps this is what he saw most often during the week, when everyone else was working elsewhere.

Monet consistently approaches the boats from the shoreline as seen in The Bridge at Argenteuil (Fig. 3-9) of 1874. This is a classic example from this period. Three solitary boats are moored slightly away from the shoreline which Monet does not include. The bridge and far shore meet at a right angle, closing the space, reinforcing the presence of the boats. In several of these pictures Monet paints empty boats with the bridge as an interesting, angular backdrop.[4]

In 1874, Monet continues seeking subjects, most of which are the pleasure boats. He decides to make a studio boat on the model of Daubigny's. This is done probably with help in the design by Caillebotte, who would also paint and eventually

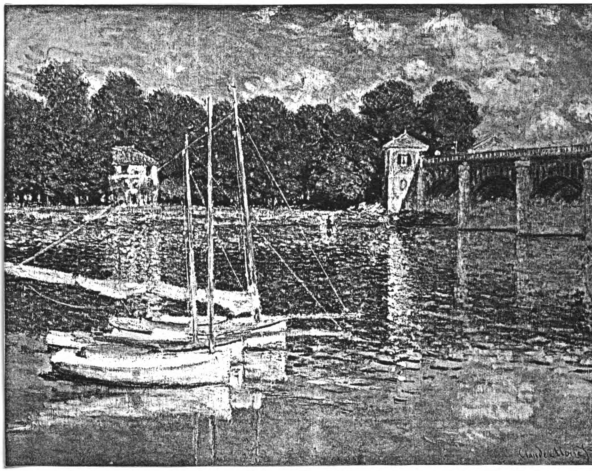

Figure 3-9: Claude Monet, Bridge at Argenteuil, 1874, 60 x 80 cm., oil on canvas, Musee du Louvre, Paris.

settle here.

The boat let him find locations that were not bound to land. In one sense he became one with the activities on the basin, although not a participant as much as an observer. His boat became another of these floating subjects he not only painted from but also painted. The Studio Boat (Fig. 3-10) records his boat simply; he has placed himself inside. Tucker observes:

> "Isolated and alone, he is the modern Daubigny, searching for untrammeled nature; if Argenteuil was not exactly that, he could make it such."[5]

Tucker is correct in supposing that Monet transcribed his viewpoint, editing in or out certain features to create the atmosphere and setting he desired, but whether Monet wanted to distance himself from Argenteuil's activities is questionable.

Monet became more involved in the public aspect of boating, painting regattas and crowded areas, later in 1874. He encouraged Renoir and Manet to paint similar motifs. With boats Monet could paint nature and people, if he so desired. Of all manmade things, boats held the greatest fascination for Monet since he was a youth. Especially in this period when he was striving to lead the good bourgeois life, in a town renowned for its sailing, Monet was attracted to the subject of pleasure boats and the life of leisure they represented. Monet tended to approach people external to his

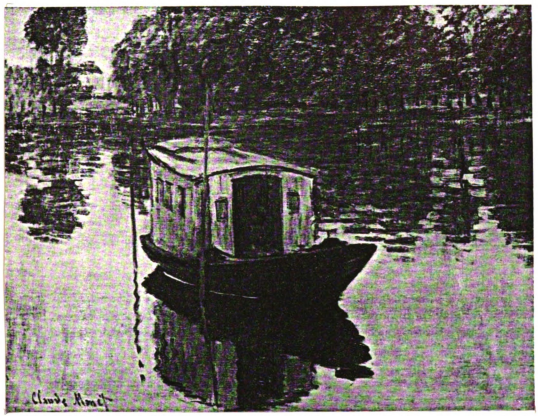

Figure 3-10: Claude Monet, The Floating Studio, 1874, 50 x 64 cm., oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands.

life in an oblique way. With his sailboats he does it again. They provide symbols of man's presence and progress. Monet's people are secondary and anonymous.

August Renoir (1841-1919) had a different perspective. he painted the boats in relation to the more prominent figures. Monet painted empty boats or he put them so far in the distance that people were not visible. Monet painted figures in sailboats once, in the company of Renoir.

Renoir frequently visited Monet in Argenteuil. The broad river with sailing boats and picturesque bridges attracted both artists. They put up their easels in front of the same views, and painted the same motifs twice. Rewald states:

> "They both now adopted a comma-like brushstroke, even smaller than the one they had chosen for their works at La Grenouillère, a brushstroke which permitted them to record every nuance they observed. The surfaces of their canvases were thus covered with a vibrating tissue of small dots and strokes, none of which by themselves defined any form."[6]

Renoir tended to copy the scene directly as he saw it, rather than rearranging it as Monet often did. For example, in Renoir's Sailboats at Argenteuil (Fig. 3-11) one sees a nearly similar painting to Monet's Sailboats at Argenteuil (Fig. 3-12). Renoir places one man on the small dock, another maneuvers the sailboat. An empty boat is anchored nearby while other people sail by in boats. Renoir includes too many boats, in my judgment. They are crowded, giving the

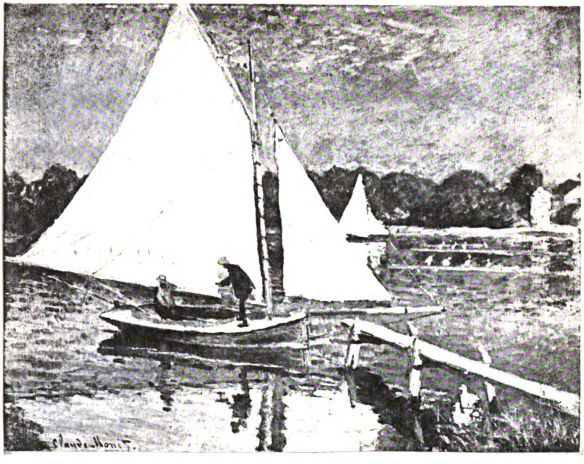

Figure 3-11: Claude Monet, Sailboats at Argenteuil, 1874, 60 x 81 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, Paris.

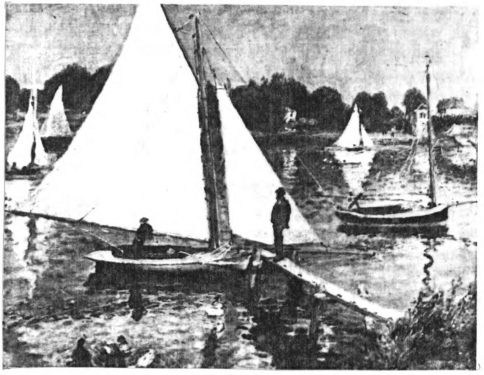

Figure 3-12: Auguste Renoir, Sailboats at Argenteuil, 1874, 20 x 26", oil on canvas, Portland Art Museum, Oregon.

composition no clear, coherent focus like Monet's. Monet limits the number of sailboats to two. He shows rowers farther out more clearly then Renoir. Monet, having lived here longer, was probably the greater influence stylistically. Renoir might have shifted Monet's perspective somewhat causing him to focus on the people with the boats. Earlier at La Grenouillère Renoir had followed Monet's example, which is what he is doing here at Argenteuil.

Renoir was a figurative painter whose interest in landscape was only sparked by Monet. If Renoir had to choose, he would have focused less attention on the boat and more on the people, which he did in his Canoeists at Chatou (Fig. 2-27). Renoir did not share Monet's interest in painting boats or boating. It was only on these few occasions when he visited Monet that he would set up his easel near the same nautical motif.

It may have been Renoir's idea to paint the large regatta at Argenteuil in 1874. Tucker states:

> "It is quite possible, in fact, that the two regatta pictures from 1874 were the product not of Monet's initiative but of Renoir's. An occasional house-guest that summer, Renoir was more attracted than his host to people and public events, and may have persuaded Monet to join him when he rendered the same Regatta from Gennevilliers (Figs. 3-13 & 3-14). He also may have convinced Monet to be more specific than usual, for Monet included a crowd of spectators and a scull in his view, the first time they appear in any of his boating pictures."[7]

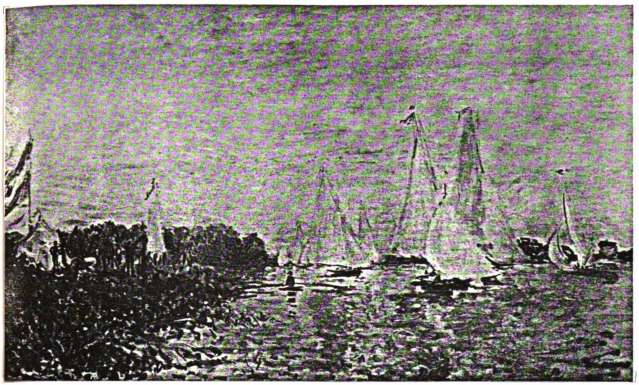

Figure 3-13: Claude Monet, Regatta from Gennevilliers, 1874, 59 x 99 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, Paris.

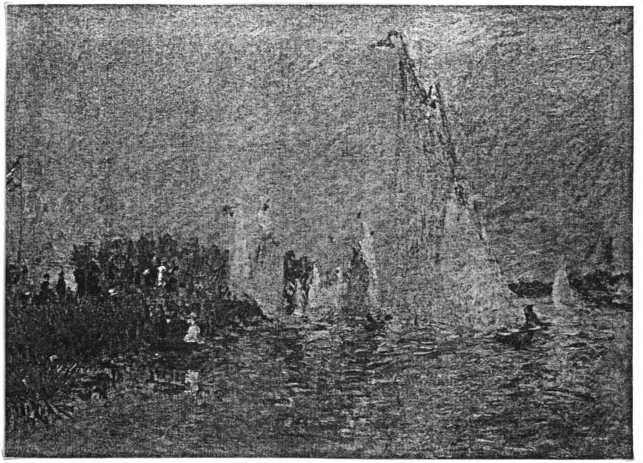

Figure 3-14: Auguste Renoir, Regatta from Gennevilliers, 1874, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The Yacht Club de France sponsored an impressive regatta on June 7, 1874. Monet and Renoir were probably there and painted their pictures which now serve as records of the colorful, animated spectacle. Their pictures would be historically important only to yachtsmen. Further on Tucker adds:

> "Indeed, it would be in keeping with the general tendancy of Monet, Renoir. . .to subordinate or disregard the 'important' action in favor of that which would express the 'mysterious beauty' lent to modernity by human life."[8]

Monet rarely painted steamboats, preferring to present sailboats which by now had become a popular activity with the middle classes. Both Monet and Renoir successfully capture the excitement of the regatta and the surrounding festivities. The regatta paintings are light-filled, pleasant pictures of sailboats and spectators. Once again Monet's picture has a sureness of execution which, in comparison to Renoir's soften approach, gives it an indelibility. The latter used the same brushstroke as Monet, but blurs the boats. Monet preserves their shapes and bouyance distinctly. The sails, hulls, and water do not blend, but maintain separate spatial boundaries and give a feeling of random motion to the scene. Renoir's boats blend into one another in a flurry of confusion. He was not as careful about composing spatial relationships between the sailboats as Monet. He seems more concerned with the figural activity on the bank.

The other Regatta from the Basin (Fig. 3-15), from the same year, shifts in perspective. Monet could have painted

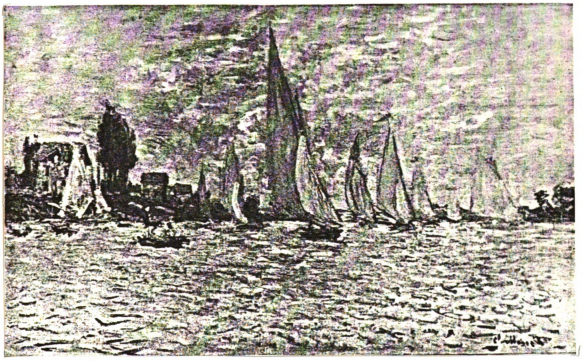

Figure 3-15: Claude Monet, Regatta from the Basin, 1874, 60 x 100 cm., oil on canvas, Louvre, Paris.

this from his studio boat. Monet has painted the area beyond the boat house or the river from a pier of the bridge, and omitted the crowd of spectators. Here his brushwork is thicker and more varied. The impending storm, evident from the darkening skies, creates a feeling of excitement and urgency. Here the sailboats are moving more rapidly, their sails in full bloom from the strong wind. They dominate the view unlike most of his other pictures of boats.

Manet joined Monet and Renoir in 1874, painting Monet in His Studio Boat (Fig. 3-16), a delightful record of the artist's activity. Manet's art was figure-centered like Renoir's. He painted two pictures of boating in which the people are the subjects, (see preceding chapter) who happen to be in rowboats or sculls. Thus in observing pleasure boating at Argenteuil, Manet was able to record modern life of a different nature than what he saw in the cafes of Paris. Argenteuil presented another side of bourgeois life.

In contrast to the other Impressionists, Monet was the most adept and consistent in his investigations of this subject; but he lives here. Pleasure boating was a central activity in Argenteuil. Monet had always been drawn to the river and boats previously London and Holland.

In 1875 Monet painted the moored Red Boats II (Fig. 3-17) in the boat rental area. These are the final series of pleasure boats he paints at Argenteuil. After that, in 1876, he paints several isolated views of his Studio Boat (Fig. 3-18).

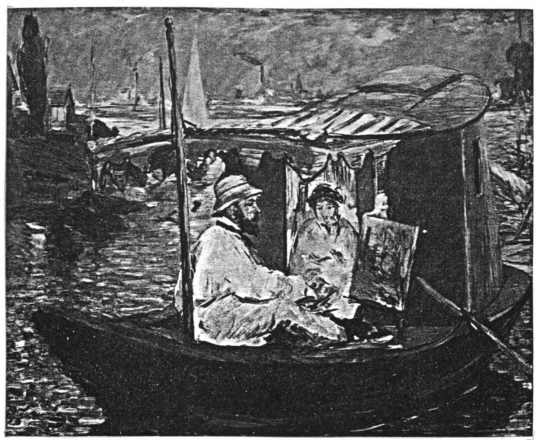

Figure 3-16: Edouard Manet, Monet in His Studio Boat, 1874, oil on canvas, Neue Pinokothek, Munich.

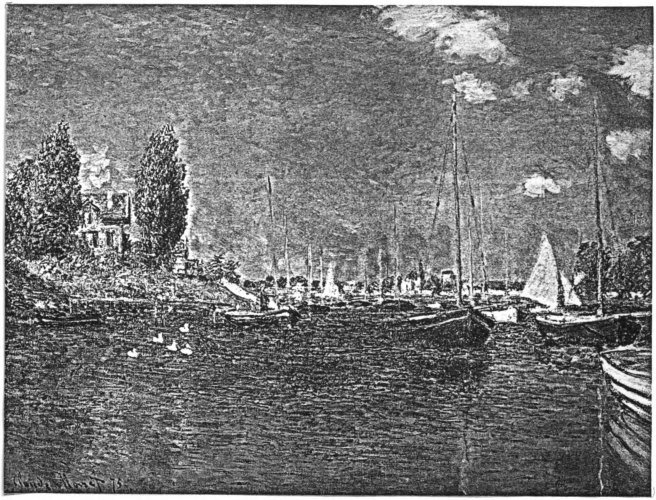

Figure 3-17: Claude Monet, Red Boats II, 1875, 55 x 65 cm., oil on canvas, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Massachusetts.

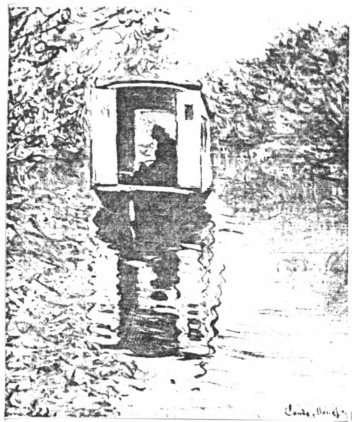

Figure 3-18: Claude Monet, Studio Boat, 1876, 72 x 60 cm. oil on canvas, Barnes Foundation Museum of Art, Merion, PA.

Before that, however, Monet paints an unusual picture of Men Unloading Coal (Fig. 3-19). This picture focuses on industrial boats in a rhythmical composition: the men are evenly spaced, carrying their black burdens to the heavy brown boats along the shoreline. They are going to and fro in a hypnotic, systematic, alternating sequence. The boats represent the other side of life, near Clichy, the busy commercial aspect. The colors are somber, earth tones which create a different atmosphere apart from the light, frivolous, billowy pictures of pleasure boats. For the most part, Monet avoids the industrial aspect of Argenteuil. He does not paint the commercial barges as he has done here. This picture would be very gloomy and serious except for the men who move their loads in an eye-catching, artful fashion.

The other important Impressionist to connect with Monet and the others at Argenteuil was Caillebotte. He was involved with Impressionists initially as a supporter and patron before he exhibited with them in 1876. Most of his works would be considered representative of realism or very unlike the impressionistic technique used by Monet, Renoir, or Sisley. The primacy of modern subject matter is the link between Caillebotte and the Impressionist painters. Marie Berhaut elucidates the connection further:

> "But the former also found in Impressionism novelties of composition made to serve reality and it is in this area that the real meeting of his art and that of his friends took place."[9]

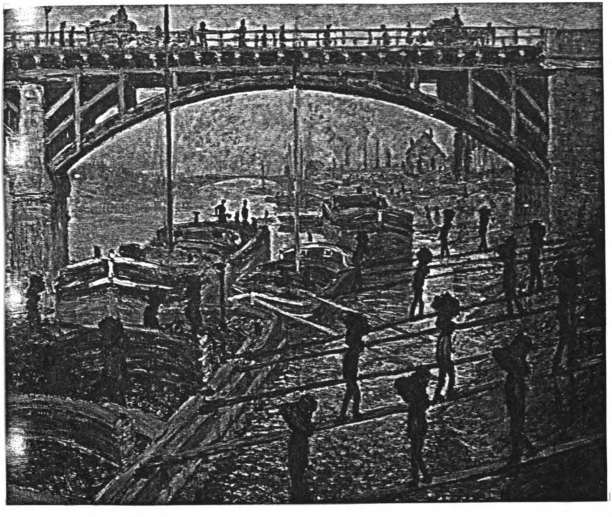

Figure 3-19: Claude Monet, Men Unloading Coal, 1875, 55 x 66 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, Paris.

He assimilated some stylistic devices into his painting: asymmetry, close-ups and the play of empty spaces, also a lighter palette--these came from the Impressionists. The qualities of originality and spontaneity characterize his pictures of boats and boating also.

In his views of Argenteuil, Monet's influence is evident, although Caillebotte does not sacrifice form or structural rhythm to express luminous vibration. In the Seine at Argenteuil (Fig. 3-20), Caillebotte has taken a point of view similar to some of those by Monet. The spot is farther upstream from the highway bridge. The focus is clearly on the two medium-sized yachts anchored near the shore. Their masts and lines are accurately depicted, as are the hulls. Being an avid sailor is Caillebotte's advantage with this subject matter. The technique recalls Monet's quick and varied brushstroke. Caillebotte's interest in presenting unusual angles is evident in this view--the river flows in a quickly receding diagonal to the right with the bank cropped sharply. This is one of the few pictures Caillebotte ever painted without human figures.

Caillebotte was another Impressionist painter who lived and painted at Argenteuil. Since 1882 he had a house in Petit-Gennevilliers and probably competed in several regattas held at Argenteuil. He was financially well-off; thus, he could afford to support his friends, paint at his leisure, and pursue other interests such as sailing. Caillebotte

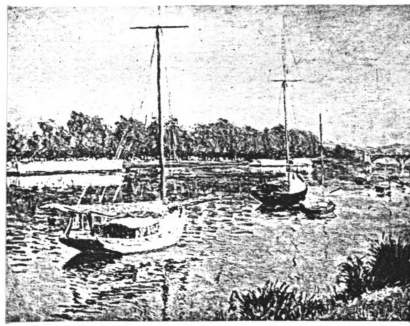

Figure 3-20: Gustave Caillebotte, Seine at Argenteuil, c.1882, 70 x 81 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, France.

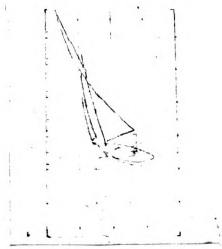

Figure 3-23: Gustave Caillebotte, Drawing for Regatta at Argenteuil, 1893, 9.75 x 12", Pencil on paper, detail.

settled there permanently in 1887.

A year later he painted Sailboats at Argenteuil, (Fig. 3-21). Caillebotte paints this view from a spot near the highway bridge, a vantage point similar to some chosen by Monet. What distinguishes Caillebotte's picture is the enormous size of the sailboats compared to Monet's or Renoir's. Being a sailor, Caillebotte focuses almost exclusively on the boats and their relative positions either sailing or moored. The masts appear relatively large compared to the distant bridge. The dock provides a spatial, horizontal contrast against the vertical masts. He includes only a small portion of the shore. The boats are the nucleus of this composition. Except for small figures in two of the pleasure boats, people are conspicuously absent from the picture.

In a later Regatta at Argenteuil (Fig. 3-22) Caillebotte further illustrates his interest not only in painting sailboats, but also in competing in the sport. The picture records the swift pace of a regatta. Two sailors are moving on a rapid tack toward another anchored boat. They will have to shift in order to avoid a collision.

The boating scenes of Monet and Renoir would have been known to Caillebotte but herein lies the difference between those painters and Caillebotte:

> ". . . his interest is always more directly related to the shapes of boats, masts and sails. Although none of Caillebotte's

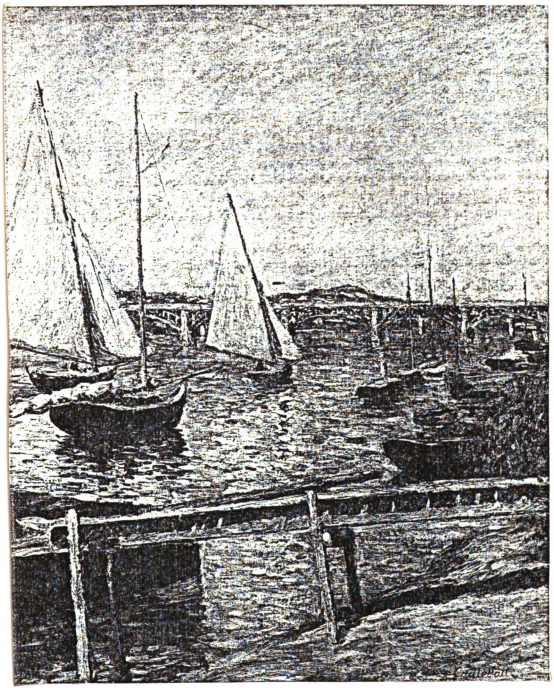

Figure 3-21: Gustave Caillebotte, Sailboats at Argenteuil, c.1888, 55 x 65 cm., oil on canvas, Jeu de Paume, Paris.

Figure 3-22: Gustave Caillebotte, Regatta at Argenteuil, 1893, 117 x 157 cm., oil on canvas, Private collection, Paris.

> blueprints for boats survive, we are fortunate enough to have a squared drawing (Fig. 3-23) related to the present painting."[10]

The mast and sail provide a striking compositional device that separates the areas of activity with the stilled boats on the left. The two men, one possibly Caillebotte himself, are busy. No other Impressionist painter rendered regattas with the detailed accuracy of Caillebotte. This picture does two things: it shows the picturesque view of Argenteuil, with the small, anchored yachts; it records an actual race enjoyed by Caillebotte and his companion.

Marie Berhaut discusses the connection between Caillebotte's art and Realism:

> "In adopting from the beginning the imperatives of this Realism that breaks with all the conventions of academic art and rejects the principle of the hierarchy of subjects, Caillebotte chooses as a field of study the people and things that surround him, in the middle of which he lives, the events of which he is witness."[11]

This realism was a take-off point for the Impressionist studies of light and color. Caillebotte stayed away from this concern in the first half of his career. Later, with his paintings of Argenteuil one can see the influence of Monet and Renoir. Caillebotte is more a recorder of the boats and people than the other Impressionists. Unlike Monet who captures the riverscape at Argenteuil and its atmosphere of leisure, Caillebotte's boaters have a more psychologically remote, journalistic accuracy to them.

CONCLUSION

The Impressionists paint pleasure boats that were a popular form of recreation in mid-nineteenth century France. Usually their boats contain figural groups of middle class patrons who row or sail with gusto. These sailboats or rowboats represent leisure and weekend recreation away from the dirty, crowded city. The Impressionists, especially Monet, present a new vision of the country that differs from the Romantic conception of nature and the country. The Impressionists follow the middle classes to the beaches or Paris suburbs and paint their nautical activities and boats. During the 1870s they all go to Argenteuil. While they may rearrange parts of the composition to achieve unity, the Impressionists do not imbue their seascapes or riverscapes with any overt or subtle emotion or drama. Their pictures do not have any hidden message or narrative.

The Romantic seascapes or landscapes were designed to evoke in the viewer any combination of strong emotion: longing, remorse, sadness, fear, or excitement. Their ships were bound for lengthy voyages to distant, exotic lands or were sailing into dreadful, raging storms at sea. The Romantic vision with boats presented the end of a centuries old traditional viewpoint: man being dominated by a nature that had no mercy or remorse. Essentially, a vision of man being controlled by nature. Man was subject to her whim. The

water upon which he sailed was the most dangerous and unpredictable, yet necessary, aspect of nature. Being the dissatisfied creature that he is, man built ships to explore and conquer.

By the time of the Impressionists, man had invented a new kind of ships, the sailboat, for pleasure. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, man had more time and wealth to spend in and about the sailboat. Another result was an increased technology put to use for safer and more accurate sailing. Most importantly, this affects the Impressionist vision, not only a tourist vision, but a vision in which man is dominant over nature.

Man seated in his yacht, is in control of his destiny, gone is his fear and awe of nature and her destructive phenomena. This step is small, but it is there, nevertheless, this shift in viewpoint, which is an essential aspect of the modern vision the Impressionists present. In their pictures of sailboats or rowboats men and women steer their own course, aided by the benevolent breezes of nature. Sometimes, in their paintings with steamships, for example, one can see nature's elements harnessed and made to work for man instead of against him as she had in the past.

The Romantic paintings were not of the present, the stuff of ordinary, bourgeois life either. The Impressionist scenes of pleasure boating are of modern, bourgeois life. Perhaps they are too optimistic, but that partly derives from two

sources: their choice of bright, pure colors and their intention. They were not yet disillusioned with the realities of modern existence. The Impressionists were not searching for more than a comfortable life with their work, family and friends to support them. They wanted the material things that were seen to enhance life. Their pictures represented the life they sought to achieve.

Monet, Renoir, and to a lesser extent, Sisley, had already accomplished this by the 1870s. Manet and Caillebotte were fortunate to have known it all their lives. They were not dependent upon their art to achieve material success and comfort.

Painting pictures of boats was not an occurrence peculiar to France. The roots of Impressionist boat pictures go back two hundred years. The Dutch in the seventeenth century were the first artists to paint marines in which the focus was the grand three- or four-masted schooner. The Dutch artists paint ships' portraits, naval battles and merchant ships sailing on the high seas. At this time ship painting becomes a genre of its own. Dutch marines reflect their economic prosperity and their fierce, national pride which is related to their liberation and their dominance of the high seas. Beginning with the Dutch, then, marine painting reflects the nation's economic, political and social state. Later the British and even Monet follow this precedent.

There seems to be a connection between a country's state of affairs and the specific boats which are painted.

There also appears to be a connection between an artist's background and his boating pictures. Monet, Boudin, and Jongkind grew up on the coast and were actively and imaginatively involved with the sea and ships. Jongkind was a prolific boat painter. Boudin painted coastal scenes almost exclusively. Monet paints more boats than any other Impressionist artist. Some of his early pictures of boats at anchor recall similar Dutch scenes. Monet traveled in Holland. He also traveled and painted in England and saw the works of Turner, Constable, and Bonington.

In the eighteenth century the conditions were ideal for the British to develop the genre further with the Romantic seascapes. The British have an unusually rich, coastal topography and are surrounded by water. They were becoming the greatest maritime nation in history. The paintings of Turner and Bonington reflect the imagination of a country reaching the pinnacle of her power. Their viewpoint is Romantic and differs from the Impressionist.

Monet and the other Impressionists were aware of the British and Dutch tradition which preceded their art. The Impressionists borrow some of their compositions and treatment of light, clouds, ships and sky. Like the Dutch and English pictures, the Impressionist boats and boating scenes

provide a record of social history. Going one step further, however, they offer a visually delightful collection of pictures and an idyllic escape into a boat that could sail away, leaving the noise and confusion of the city behind temporarily. Nature provided a haven for the pleasure-seeking, city-weary, nineteenth century Parisian.

Notes to Introduction

[1] Andrea Belloli, ed., A Day In the Country (Los Angeles Museum of Art, 1984), p. 42.

Notes to Chapter One

[1] David Cordingly, Painters of the Sea (London: Lund Humphries, 1979), p. 11.

[2] Cordingly, p. 13.

[3] David Cordingly, Marine Painting in England 1770-1900 (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1973), p. 117.

[4] A.G.H. Bachrach, The Shock of Recognition (Londong: Art Council of Great Britain, 1971), p. 97.

[5] H. Diane Russell, Claude Lorrain 1600-1682 (New York: George Braziller, 1982), p. 81.

[6] Russell, p. 84.

[7] Philip Conisbee, Claude-Joseph Vernet 1714-1789 (London: Greater London Council, 1976).

[8] Morris Tyler, Souvenirs of Madame Vigée LeBrun (New York: J.J. Little & Co., 1879) p. 11.

[9] Louis Hawes, Presences of Nature (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1982), p. 17.

Notes to Chapter Two

[1] Paul Tucker, "The First Impressionist Exhibition and Monet's Sunrise: A Tale of Timing, Commerce and Patriotism," Art History, 7 (1984), p. 465.

[2] Tucker, "The First Impressionist Exhibition," p.

[3] Charles Brasseur, "La Chambre de Commerce de Boulogne" Boulogne-sur-Mer et la region boulonnaise (Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1899), pp. 842-43.

[4] JoAnna Richardson, La Vie Parisienne (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 116.

[5] Alfred Delvau, Les Plaisirs de Paris, Guide Practique et illustre (Paris: Faure, 1971), 247 sqq.

[6] Monet, in paintings of the 1880s, shows women at the oars and so do some paintings by Tissot.

[7] Kermit Champa, Studies in Early Impressionism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 58.

[8] J. Kirk T. Varnedoe, and Thomas P. Lee, Gustave Caillebotte: A Retrospective Exhibition (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1976), p. 121.

[9] Varnedoe, p. 122.

[10] Varnedoe, p. 123.

[11] Phillipe Daryl, Le Yacht: Histoire de la navigation maritime de plaisance (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1890), p. 47.

[12] Personal interview with Eldon Van Liere, 16 July 1985.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Paul Tucker, Monet at Argenteuil (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 92.

[2] John Rewald, History of Impressionism (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 341.

[3] Tucker, Monet at Argenteuil, p. 90.

[4] Tucker, pp. 76-77.

[5] Tucker, p. 112.

[6] Rewald, p. 284.

[7] Tucker, p. 102.

[8] Tucker, pp. 102-03.

[9] J. Kirk T. Varnedoe & Thomas Lee, Gustave Caillebotte A Retrospective Exhibition (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1976), p. 16.

[10] Marie Berhaut, Gustave Caillebotte, p. 179.

[11] Marie Berhaut, Gustave Caillebotte, p. 13.

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