

Manipulation and sexism in anarchism society: The case of Gustave Courbet

Estrella Trincado Aznar¹

Recibido: 14/10/2023 Aceptado: 25/11/2023

Abstract. This article highlights one of the drifts that an anarchist society, defended by some ecofeminism, could lead to: the subjugation of women. From the sociology of economics, culture, and the arts, it shows how the French anarchist painter Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), a close friend of the thinker Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), manipulated his paintings to nullify the role of women in society, maybe even out of awareness. Proudhon and Courbet, while appealing to radical freedom and seeking to maintain their independence from power, were driven by arrogance rather than by the dream of an inclusive and free society for all.

Keywords: Gustave Courbet, Proudhon, anarchism, the arts, sexism

JEL codes: B31, B51

[es] Manipulación y sexismo en la sociedad anarquista: El caso de Gustave Courbet

Resumen. Este artículo pone en evidencia una de las derivas que una sociedad anarquista, defendida por algunos ecofeministas, puede tener: el sometimiento de las mujeres. En particular, desde la sociología de la economía, la cultura y el arte, muestra cómo el pintor anarquista francés Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), amigo íntimo del pensador Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), manipuló sus pinturas para anular el papel de la mujer en la sociedad, tal vez incluso sin ser muy consciente. Proudhon y Courbet, aunque apelaban a la libertad radical y procuraron mantener su independencia del poder, se movían por la arrogancia más que por el sueño de una sociedad inclusiva y libre para todos.

Palabras clave: Gustave Courbet, Proudhon, anarquismo, arte, sexismo

Códigos JEL: B31, B51

[pt] Manipulação e sexismo na sociedade anarquista: o caso de Gustave Courbet

Resumo. Este artigo destaca uma deriva que uma sociedade anarquista, defendida pelo Ecofeminismo, pode ter: a subjugação das mulheres. Em particular, a partir da sociologia da economia, cultura y arte, ela explica como o pintor anarquista francês Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), amigo íntimo do pensador Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), manipulou suas pinturas para anular o papel da mulher na sociedade, talvez até mesmo sem estar muito consciente. Proudhon e Courbet, embora apelassem à liberdade radical e dedicassem toda a sua vida a tentar manter a sua independência do poder, foram movidos pela arrogância e não pelo sonho de uma sociedade inclusiva e livre para todos.

Palavras-chave: Gustave Courbet, Proudhon, anarquismo, arte, sexismo

Códigos JEL: B31, B51

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. The ideas of Proudhon (1809-1865). 3. Women according to Proudhon. 4. Proudhon and Courbet. 5. Arts, anarchism and manipulation. 6. Conclusions. References.

Cómo citar: Trincado, E. (2023). Manipulation and sexism in anarchism society: the case of Gustave Courbet, en *Iberian Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 10(2), 105-112.

¹ Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

Contact: estrinaz@ccee.ucm.es

ORCID: 0000-0002-3422-2360

A preliminary version of the article is in Trincado (2023).

1. Introduction

The French painter Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was a close friend of the thinker Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), a French anarchist, a forerunner of socialist ideas. Courbet studied in Paris (1839) as his parents wanted him to pursue a career in law, but upon arriving in Paris, he devoted himself to the arts. In 1846 he and two other friends made a manifesto against romantic and neoclassical tendencies and in favor of realism. Courbet is credited with the invention of the term realism itself, which he understood as honesty and sincerity with the truth. Courbet's realism, strongly influenced by the revolutionary environments of the 19th century, protested academic painting and the exotic motifs of Romanticism (Courbet, 1969). According to Faunce (1993) and Faunce and Nochling (1989), this insistence of Courbet on the right of artists to be independent witnesses to the truth of their own time, lies at the heart of our own concept of the modern. In Courbet's studio, notable personalities met, among them Proudhon, who dedicated to the paintings of Courbet, whom he called the artist of the great paradoxes, the pamphlet *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale* (Proudhon, 1865). Without a doubt, Proudhon's concerns and social approaches fit perfectly with the ideas that Courbet showed in some of his paintings, such as *The Stonecutters* or *Young Communards in Prison*. Courbet's group disbanded after the coup d'état of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte in 1852, and the painter returned to his hometown, Ornans.

In 1855, Courbet exhibited several of his works at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, but upon seeing the jury's rejection of some of his paintings, he decided to inaugurate an individual exhibition which he named the *Pavillon du Réalisme* adjacent to the official show. This initiative opened a way for dissemination managed by the artists themselves. Among the works that he exhibited in that place, it is worth mentioning *The Painter's Workshop*, in which he portrayed all the people who had exerted a certain influence on his life (figure 1).

Figure 1.



Source: The painter's workshop
 Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)
 Dating of the work: 1855
 Material: Oil on canvas.
 Style: Realism
 Size: 147 × 198 cm.
 Location: Petit-Palais Museum. Paris
 Wikisource: [Courbet L'Atelier du peintre – Gustave Courbet – Wikipedia](#)

Courbet liked to scandalize the right-minded classes and was one of the most influential artists in France at

the time. His combative naturalism is evident in his female nudes, where he captures carnal forms of female sensuality in which body hair, which was usually omitted in academic nudes, is clearly drawn. This is the case of the rupturist paintings *The Origin of the World* and *The Sleepers* (in them Courbet exhibits women as an instrument of reproduction and exhibition of pleasure).

Courbet was awarded the Legion of Honor medal, but he rejected it. He stated that he wanted to die as a free man, without depending on any power or religion. "I am a student of nature, I have only had myself as a teacher, the most constant work of my life has been devoted to the preservation of my independence" (Herding, 1991, 278). Courbet defended the proletariat's capacity for sacrifice and agreed to participate in the brief government of the Paris Commune of 1871, when the French city passed for a few days into the hands of a socialist government completely opposed to Napoléon III, which caused the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. It was a self-managed movement that had a team of 92 leaders who ran the city, and one of those leaders was Gustave Courbet. The truth is that the utopia of the Paris Commune did not last long, specifically 72 days since the army ended up besieging the capital and finally reestablishing the previous order. Many of the community members who had participated were condemned, some with death penalty and others with imprisonment. It was during his time in captivity that he painted the illustration for *Young Communards in Prison*, an image he first painted in chalk. When Courbet was released from prison, he fled to Switzerland, where he ended up dying of cirrhosis (Courbet, 2014). Figure 2 is one of the many self-portraits of an author defined by those who knew him as egomaniacal, obsessive, impulsive, excessive, generous, and passionate.

Figure 2.



Source: The Desperate
 Source: Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)
 Dating of the work: 1845
 Material: Oil on canvas.
 Style: Realism
 Size: 44 × 55 cm.
 Location: Private collection
 Wikisource: [Gustave Courbet – Le Désespéré \(1843\) – Gustave Courbet – Wikipedia](#)

2. The ideas of Proudhon (1809-1865)

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), was an anarchist philosopher, politician and French revolutionary who, together with Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta,

became one of the fathers of the anarchist movement and its first economic trend, mutualism (Proudhon, 1923, Cuvillier et al, 1939). At the age of 19, he joined a printing press, working as a proofreader while learning the art of printing typography, where he was an autodidact. Just Muiron, a Fourierist, offered him a job as editor-in-chief of the newspaper *The Impartial* and then he founded a small printing press with two other partners. His work, *What is property?*, appeared in 1840, made him suddenly famous. In 1843 he wrote two important works: *The creation of order in humanity* and *The system of economic contradictions or the Philosophy of misery*. The latter gave rise to a harsh response from Marx, who wrote his *The misery of philosophy*, precisely one year after *Philosophy of Misery* was published (1844) in 1848. Proudhon was elected deputy to the National Assembly when proclaiming the Second Republic. In December he 10th that same year, Louis Napoléon was proclaimed President of the Republic by the National Assembly. Two and a half years later, the President would become Emperor. Proudhon harshly attacked Louis Napoléon and considered him the worst enemy of the proletariat and socialism. For this reason, he was condemned in 1849 to several years in prison. He fled to Belgium, where he lived in anonymity for a time, earning a living as a private mathematics teacher. On one occasion, upon returning for private reasons to France, he was discovered and imprisoned in the prison of Saint Pelagia. There he promoted an alliance of the proletariat with the middle class to overthrow Louis Napoléon, an attitude that will be reproached by some socialists.

Proudhon met Marx in Paris and he quotes him in his work *The Holy Family* (Marx and Engels 1844). After Proudhon's death, Marx (1865) would write a letter to Herr Schweitzer commenting that Proudhon never understood true scientific dialectics, so he could not go beyond sophistry, linked to his petit-bourgeois point of view. "There remains only one governing motive, the *vanity* of the subject, and the only question for him, as for all vain people, is the success of the moment, the *éclat* of the day" (Marx, 1965, letter from 24 January).

In 1858, Proudhon writes *On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church*, and in 1863 he publishes another of his pivotal works: *The Federative Principle*. In it, he broadly develops his conception of a comprehensive federalism, which aims not only to decentralize political power in the communes or municipalities, but also, and above all, to decentralize economic power and put the land and the instruments of production in the hands of the local community of workers. In 1865, *On the political capacity of the working class* appears.

Proudhon maintained that rights to the freedom, equality and security were natural, absolute, and inviolable, but not the right of property since the rich have properties at the expense of the lack of the many. Property is thus intrinsically antisocial. Serial dialectics or balance of forces is a logical method and a philosophical notion that states that antinomies (thesis and antithesis) are not resolved by means of a synthesis surpassing both, and instead they complement each other generating a balance without losing each one autonomy and contradiction of the other. This dialectical notion, originated by Proudhon in his observations of the pluralism of nature or society, extends to economics and politics,

especially around the concept of federative principle of the anarchism. This is the union of self-governed communities through different levels of local, regional, or national federations and confederations in such a way that the political power is distributed and flows from the particular to the general, that is, from the base that is the common to the confederation with the purpose of avoiding the centralism of powers (Trincado, 2003).

Proudhon spoke for the first time about surplus value and considered, like Marx, that the value of all commodities is –must be– determined by the labor time necessary to produce them, so that surplus value, interest, leases, the rent of the land are eliminated, and there is no exploitation (on his debate with Bastiat on interest, see Proudhon and Bastiat, 1850). Proudhon defended mutualism or contractualism in which possession –not absolute ownership– is based on mutual contracts between the parties involved, and there is a People's Bank that facilitates interest-free mutual credit. Thus, he proposes a stateless society where producers freely associate in industry federations that replace employers. An unequal exchange or agreement would represent exploitation or usury. In this sense, he is also based on the desiderata of "free money": money is the creation of the authority (State) that represents bourgeois and capitalist oppression. The issuance of money must have real assets (movable or immovable) as a counterpart, which could be any asset valued based on labour embodied.

3. Women according to Proudhon

Despite his apparently egalitarian doctrine, Proudhon believed in the inferiority of the female sex to the male. He even denied women the power to think (see letter in Mirecourt. 1870, 27). It is strange that he did not recognize that this phenomenon of lack of rationality could be due to education and the absence of cultivation of female talent. According to Proudhon, men seek a balance of rights and duties; women love distinctions and privileges. For women, the justice that levels the ranks is unbearable.

Proudhon, however, felt great tenderness towards his mother, who was for him a woman of superior talent, endowed with much character (Woodcock, 1972, 1). He will put the same name to her daughter Catherine to honour the memory of the poor farmer who was so valuable, and who lived unknown. Proudhon himself educated his daughters and Catherine served as her father's secretary from childhood. The precocious enlightenment of Proudhon's daughter astonished Proudhon's friends. However, the exalted defender of the people married a humble worker, and in an intimate letter he said to one of his friends: "I didn't marry out of passion, I got married out of reflection. With my mother dead, I felt a void that only paternity could fill, and I looked for her along straight and honest paths. I got married because I was homesick" (Gimeno de Flaquer 2023).

Proudhon believed that a woman's role was in the home where the authority of the man should prevail, as he writes in his posthumously published book *Pornocracy, or Women in Modern Times* (Proudhon 1875). Proudhon had a conservative view of sex roles, and stressed how both sexes needed each other to be happy. He thus writes in 1846 in *The Philosophy of Misery*:

For my part, (...) I can't explain the fate of women outside the family and home... but... what is so humiliating about this alternative? In what way is the mission of the woman in charge of managing the house, of everything that relates to consumption and savings, inferior to that of the man, whose proper function is the management of the workshop, that is, government of production and exchange? Man and woman need each other as the two constitutive principles of work: marriage, in its indissoluble duality, is the incarnation of economic dualism that is expressed in general terms, consumption and production... But humanity is male and female, and hence the need for the house and property. Let the two sexes unite, and instantly, from this mystical union, the most amazing of all human institutions is born: property and the division of the common patrimony into individual sovereignties. (Proudhon 1846, 319)

Proudhon in this sense was defending the conservative doctrine of Malthus (1798), which criticized the theories of Godwin, a precursor of the anarchist movement and critic of the two institutions of family and private property –although Proudhon criticized Malthusianism idea that masses are poor because they are numerous (Proudhon, 1886). Godwin pointed out at the principle of population as one of the problems that flexible sexual union can lead to. Godwin considered that the family militates against benevolent, social passions. Likewise, Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin's wife, stated in *Mary* (1788) that many of the injustices suffered by women are due to the institution of marriage (Pérez Calle and Trincado 2023).

Many other anarchists criticize Proudhon's consideration of women, as Joseph Déjacque or André Léo, which argued that the political and private spheres were inextricably linked. Elvira López (2009) affirms that Proudhon had to share with Clemencia Roger a Political Economy prize in the University of Lausanne, something that he did not like. Perhaps, his appreciation of the entire female sex came from then.

Another question is the theoretical perspective of Marxism, since Engels (1885), in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, spoke of the emergence of marriage and patriarchy, institution that went after another institution of marriage easily dissolvable by both parties, called "syndiasmic family". In this type of family, man not only called his children his own sons and daughters, but also those of his brothers, who, in turn, also called him father. On the contrary, he called his sisters' children nephews and nieces, who called him uncle. Conversely, the woman, at the same time as her own children, called sons and daughters those of her sisters, who called her mother. But she called nephews and nieces her brothers' children, who called her aunt. Likewise, children of siblings called each other brothers and sisters. That is to say, the family bond was extensive, and the woman was not above the man, but it was society that slowly led to the emergence of this social difference, creating a differential element between modes of production derived from the reproductive factor of the workforce.

4. Proudhon and Courbet

Proudhon and Courbet met in Paris in 1847 and both frequented the Parisian artistic and literary bohemia. In

1848, Proudhon became fully involved in the revolution as a deputy and Courbet was a distant observer of the events, but together with his friend he would defend the installed Republic. The process of transformation of the political and social context of domination and oppression led the intellectual world, heir of the Enlightenment and the egalitarian spirit of 1789, to reflect on other alternatives to the social order. The Saint-Simonians and the Fourierists laid the foundations for a socialist thought based on equality, justice, the republic, and democracy. Proudhon and Courbet would opt for the anarchist movement. In 1854, Courbet wanted to paint Proudhon in *The Painter's Workshop* in the company of intellectual friends or artists of the time such as Alfred Bruyas or Max Buchon, Charles Baudelaire or Castagnary. In 1863, Courbet painted *The Return of the Conference* depicting two drunken priests on a donkey at the entrance to the seminary. The work scandalized and was rejected at the Salon. To publicize his work, Courbet asked Proudhon to make a note in his newspaper. Then, an exchange begins between the two on issues such as art in society, which led Proudhon (1980) to write *On the Principle of Art and Social Destination*, published posthumously (see Proudhon, 1875). Among other ideas, Proudhon considered that art had a moral and educational mission: to elevate man, and achieve the values represented in equality, justice, and freedom. At the same time, he thought that works of art must be a testimony of the era that they are part from and to do so the artist must translate and express the collective aspirations, and this can only be achieved if it is free of all tutelage and sponsorship, if it is truly independent. Proudhon defended the educational and moral mission of art, the works of art being close to the truth and profound social transformations of anarchism. Courbet was in tune with these ideas and proposed sincerity and honesty with the subject represented in arts, "the most real" without hesitation, presenting a harsh criticism of social conditions.

Courbet, like Proudhon, believed that art could remedy social contradictions and during the Commune he was named President of the Fine Arts Commission. After the revolutionary government fell, he was accused of the destruction of the Vendôme column dedicated to Napoléon Bonaparte. This column, with a height of 44 meters and an average diameter of 3.60 meters, was erected to celebrate the victory in the Battle of Austerlitz and constructed between the 18th and 19th centuries. At its base, there is a plaque on which you can read in Latin: "Napoléon Augustus Emperor dedicated to the glory of the Grand Army this column formed with the bronze taken from the enemy during the German war, won under his orders in 1805 in three months." The column replaced an effigy of the Republic. In the events of the Commune of 1871, the column was demolished, as it was considered a monument to barbarism, militarism, as well as a denial of international law. However, Courbet was sentenced to six months in prison for this, in addition to paying the costs of its repair, 300,000 francs. The fine was so high that it had to be paid over 30 years. This sentence plunged him into ruin and caused him to flee to Switzerland (1873) for fear of being imprisoned again. Shortly after, the column was restored and remains to this day.

5. Arts, anarchism and manipulation

The painting *Proudhon and his daughters* (Figure 3) was a tribute by Courbet to Proudhon when he learned that his friend was ill. Shortly before his death in 1865, she obtained a photograph of him to paint this work and presents them to us at a young age, and accompanied by his two daughters, in one of the happiest moments of his life. Without a doubt, the affection between the two was expressed in this painting. It is a painting where we see the character of Proudhon as a thinker in a meditative attitude, carrying out his intellectual task, dressed in a craftsman's blouse and with his books and notebooks. He is wearing the typical blouse of the Beauce region, a gift from a fellow prisoner during his imprisonment in Sainte-Pélagie and a symbol of his political struggle, while his hat made from felt recalls his proletarian origins. Courbet wanted to represent him to us by doing his job and fulfilling his mission within society. At the same time, we see him in a humble pose that tells us both about his character and his ideas, since he wanted to show his egalitarian ideals. Sitting on the floor, her daughter Catherine deciphers the alphabet as proof that she had already begun her instruction. Meanwhile, Marcelle, her youngest daughter, seems totally absorbed in her childish games. The image would correspond to the year 1853, a date that appeared in the original work written on one of the steps leading to the family residence. It was the year in which Proudhon, imprisoned in 1849 for his opposition to Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, regained his freedom.

However, Courbet also wanted to present him to us as a family man, enjoying a lovely daytime outing with his daughters Catherine and Stéphanie. Nonetheless, he calls the painting *Proudhon and his sons* (enfants), not *Proudhon and his daughters* (filles). In fact, originally Proudhon's wife appeared in the image, as we see in the upper drawing of Figure 3. However, after a first exhibition of the painting in 1865, the work was not well received because the scene broke the rules of the commemorative portrait, which led to much criticism. Courbet was shocked after feeling that cold reception and modified his painting after the exhibition, deleting the figure of the pregnant wife that was on the right side of the painting (lower painting of Figure 3). By erasing the image of Euphrasie, he attenuated the anecdotal nature of the scene, highlighting the figure of the philosopher. Thus, the canvas was repainted shortly before the artist's great personal exhibition in 1867 and instead of Euphrasie, a basket and the wicker armchair upholstered with fabrics appeared. In the first version, the title was *Proudhon and his family* and in the second Pierre Joseph *Proudhon and his sons*, as previously commented. If we look closely at the painting, almost with the naked eye we can see traces of the female figure. Although it still looks much clearer with X-rays.

This is how Courbet justified the woman's absence in a letter to Euphrasie herself in April 1865 discovered in 2008 (Chu 1996, 229, 282).

Lady

I am very grateful to you for your kindness in sending me my friend PJ's clothes.

I portrayed him the best I could. I wish I could have done it the way it deserved. Your portrait should also be in the painting, but the time that has passed between PJ's death and the

opening of the exhibition has not allowed me to do it in a way that looks natural. I hope that we can at some point arrange it so that you can give me the pleasure of adding a figure to replace the one that is provisionally there. If you want to see PJ's portrait you can see it on May 1st, the opening day of the Salon at the Palais de l'Industrie. I don't know if I'll be able to go because I'm traveling and that's why I haven't been able to respond to you until now. I will send the clothes you recommended to Md. Ve Proudhon in Burgille or Bugille-les-Mornay. On the opening day, the painting will be very loud and there will be many people. I will have to spend a lot of time with the lovely ladies and friends.

Receive my most sincere and cordial greetings.

Gustav Courbet (1865)

But this is what he says in a letter to Jules Castagnary: "I took out the woman, I finished the children, I redid the background, I retouched Proudhon. Now it seems superb to me" (Ecalé 1959). Euphrasie's absence, therefore, was more than intended by Courbet.

Seized with other Courbet paintings in 1873, the work was sold in 1877 to Jean-Hubert Debrousse, who bought it for only 1,500 francs when the selling price was 5,000 francs. After Debrousse's death, his collection was auctioned in 1900. The painting was purchased for 6,150 francs by the city of Paris.

Figure 3.



Source: Proudhon and his sons (previously Proudhon and his family)

Source: Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)

Dating of the work: 1865

Material: Oil on canvas.

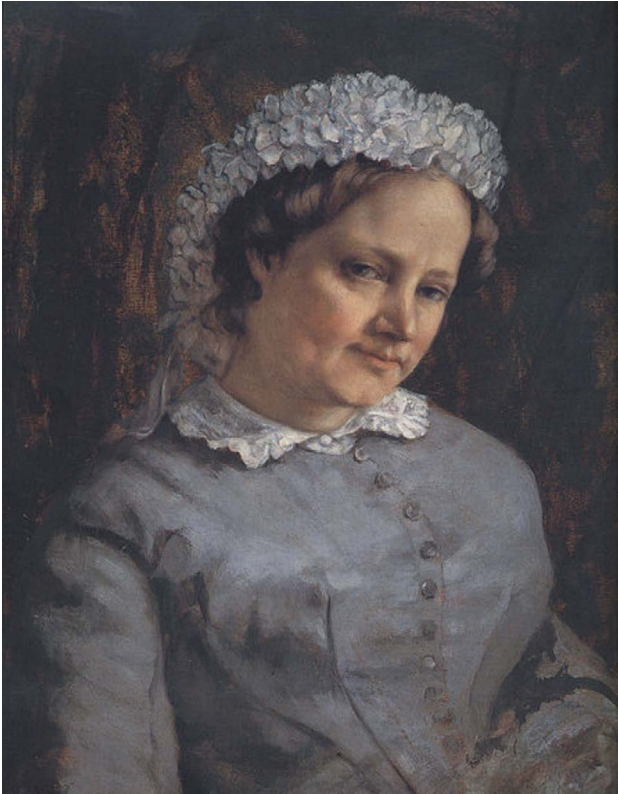
Size: 147 × 198 cm.

Location: Petit-Palais Museum. Paris

Wikisource: [Proudhon-children - Proudhon and His Children - Wikipedia](#)

Courbet later produced a portrait of Euphrasie (see figure 4). but for Courbet the woman had not reached sufficient status to gain that space in *Proudhon and his children*. However, as we have seen in Proudhon's theory, in anarchism it was not unusual for women to be reduced to a sewing basket. The family, and the children, could be a matter of status, but the wife and daughters had to be hidden or silenced.

Figure 4.

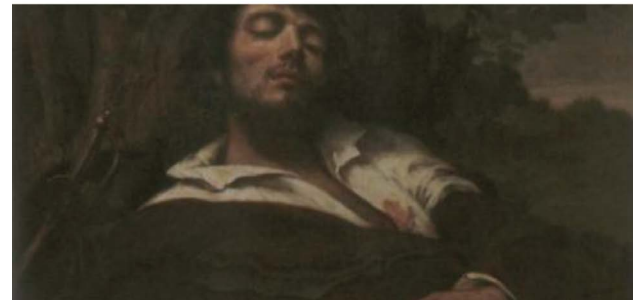


Source: Mme. Proudhon. Courbet, 1865, 0.73x0.59
In *Madame Proudhon – Gustave Courbet* | Musée d'Orsay (musee-orsay.fr)

Furthermore, it seems that few painters were as fond as Courbet of “recycling” their work, particularly by discarding the women. Sometimes, because the economic precariousness that he suffered for long periods forced him to reuse the material. Others, because he was not happy with the result or because the circumstances in which the painting was painted changed. This seems to be the case that motivates the change in *The Wounded Man*, which also hides a story underneath. In figure 5, we see the painting, which is one of the author's many self-portraits. The author portrays himself as beautiful and interesting, languid, always slimmer than we know he was from photographs, lying with a wound in his chest. But a 1973 radiographic study determined that beneath the surface of this painting lies not one, but two different pictures. In one, the profile of a woman's face appears, and in another, there is a couple tenderly embraced in a composition like the one we can see in the engraving *Country Siesta* (1844). It seems clear that in the last phase of making the canvas the painter once again got rid of the woman. Perhaps it was because the female model, who seems to be Virginie Binet, who was the artist's alleged lover, give him the shove in 1851. Obviously, the special link in sexual familiar relationships could be

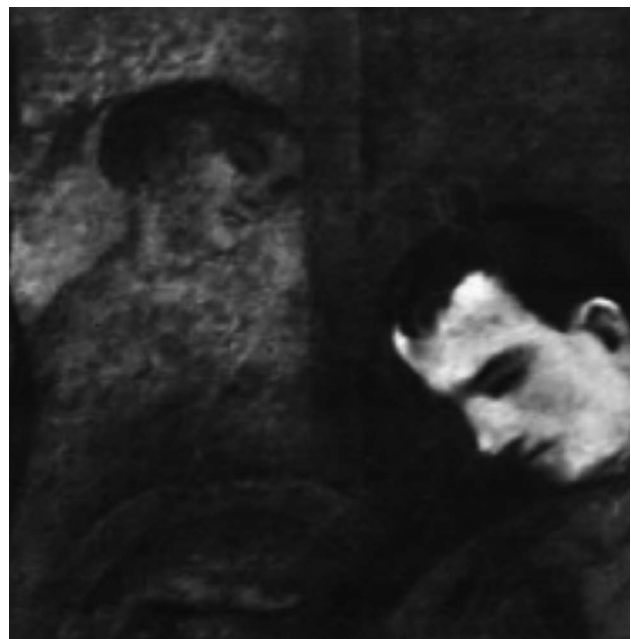
the basis for gender submission. In the final version, Courbet embraces the nothingness in the canvas with an attitude of torment, and instead of *Country Siesta*, he calls the painting *The wounded man* (self-portrait). In fact, we know from his letters that this was one of the few paintings that Courbet wanted to keep among his possessions throughout his life. After, he painted copies from this same painting to profit from his composition without having to say goodbye to the original.

Figure 5.



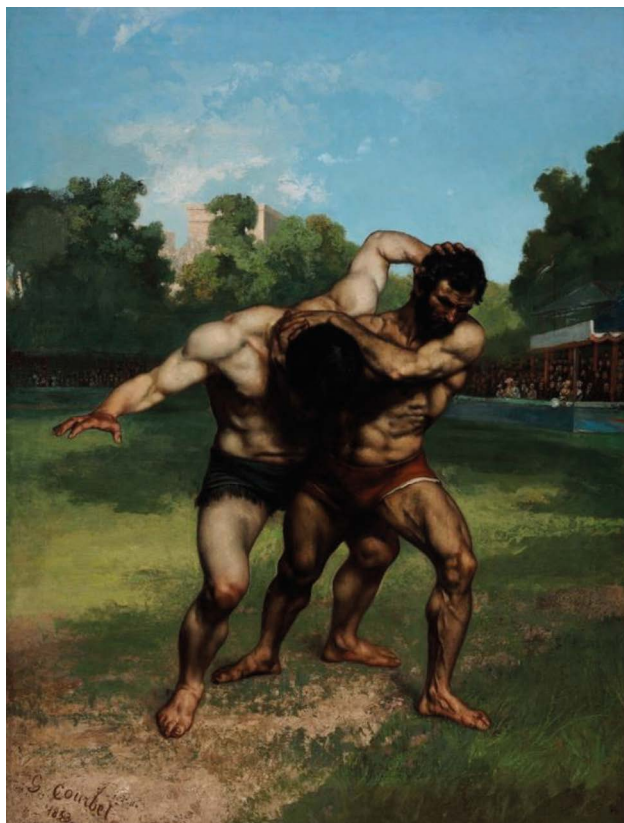
Source: The Wounded Man (previously Country Siesta)
Source: Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)
Dating of the work: 1840
Material: Oil on canvas.
Size: 81.5 × 97.5 cm.
Location: Orsay Museum
Wikisource: [The Wounded Man – The Wounded Man \(painting\) – Wikipedia](#)

Figure 6.



Source: Detail from The Painter's Workshop

Figure 7.



Source: The fighters

Source: Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)

Dating of the work: 1853

Material: Oil on canvas.

Size: 198 × 252 cm.

Location: Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary

Wikisource: [Gustave Courbet – The Wrestlers – Google Art Project](#) – [The Wrestlers \(Courbet\) – Wikipedia](#)

But Courbet also left Baudelaire widowed by his lover Jeanne Duval in the final touches to *The Painter's Workshop* (see figure 1 and figure 7). On the far right of the painting, we find Baudelaire, near the painter, leaning on the edge of a table, with an open book on his knees. Further to the left, we see a middle-class couple. Between them, the shadow of a character seems to have been erased under a layer of paint. It appears that while Courbet was exhibiting his painting, Baudelaire asked him to

remove his mistress from the painting, a woman who was to Baudelaire “Monsieur from two to four.” Her dark complexion also made her contemporaries prejudiced towards her. This woman’s life seems to have been sad: she let herself be carried away by alcoholism and, after a hemiplegia, she became almost blind (Flottes, 1922).

Finally, for economic reasons, Courbet also reused the canvas on which he painted his *Walpurgis Night* (1841) shown at the Salon of 1848 and destroyed it shortly afterwards to replace it with *The Wrestlers* (figure 7). That herculean and masculine portrait forever obscured that of a woman whom the artist, 30 years after painting her, still remembered in a heartfelt letter. Another woman erased. Could it be a simple coincidence?

6. Conclusions

In this study, we have seen how, at a metacognitive level, the self-manipulation of Courbet’s work is underpinned by ideological reasons and a sinister objective of maintaining the subaltern role of women in society. Pierre Joseph Proudhon and Gustave Courbet were two anarchists who fought for workers’ rights, from politics and economics and from art. However, women for them were just a light in the home, an instrument for reproduction and a display of pleasure. Courbet, who had acclaimed the importance of the worker in *The Stonecutters* or *Young Communards in Prison*, tries to erase all vestiges of the female sex in his most intellectual paintings. It is not surprising that this happened in the painting *Proudhon and his family*, given that Proudhon himself believed in the intellectual inferiority of the female sex. However, Courbet repeats his misdeed in his work *The Wounded Man* (self-portrait), in *The Fighters* or in *The Painter’s Workshop*. In the letter found in 2008, Courbet lies to Proudhon’s wife saying that he did not include her in the painting dedicated to Proudhon because he had not managed to paint her naturally. The painting that included her already existed, but Courbet was not interested in leaving her in it because, as he said in another letter, it seemed to him that the painting looked superb without her. Women did not have a place in the working world of anarchism as, ironically, they were for them as a “property” at home.

References

- Chu, P. (1996). *Correspondance of Courbet*, Flammarion.
- Courbet, G. (1865). *Lettre autographe inédite sur son portrait de Proudhon signée* [fin mars ou avril 1865, à Mme Pierre-Joseph Proudhon] (Musée du Petit-Palais).
- Courbet, G. et al. (1969) *Gustave Courbet, peintre de l’art vivant*. Paris: La Bibliothèque des Arts.
- Courbet, G. et al. (2014). *Gustave Courbet: les années suisses*. Paris: Art Lys (Musée Rath (Ginebra)).
- Cuvillier A, Diez-Canedo M.L., Gascón Hernández J. (1939), *Proudhon*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica (Serie de los inmortales).
- Écalle, M. (1959). Sobre el retrato de Proudhon y sus hijos de Gustave Courbet, *Bulletin du Laboratoire du Louvre*, n 4.
- Engels, F. ([1885] 2017). *El origen de la familia, la propiedad privada y el estado*, Editorial progreso.
- Flottes, P. ([1922] 2018). *Baudelaire; l’homme et le poète*, Forgotten Books.
- Faunce, S. and Nochlin, L. (1989) “Courbet Reconsidered,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 47(3), pp. 299–299. doi: 10.2307/431018
- Faunce, S. (1993). *Gustave Courbet*. New York: H.N. Abrams.
- Gimeno de Flaquer, C. (2023). *La mujer según Proudhon*, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes.
- Herding, K. (1991). *Courbet: to venture independence*. Yale University Press.
- López, E., (2009). *El movimiento feminista: primeros trazos del feminismo en Argentina* (1ª, Ser. Reediciones y antologías, 9). Biblioteca Nacional.

- Malthus, T. R. (1798). *An essay on the principle of population*, John Murray.
- Marx, Carl (1865). Sobre Proudhon, (Carta a J. B. Schweitzer), *Social-Demokrat*, n 16, 17, 18 del 1, 3 y 5 de febrero de 1865. Digitalización y Edición Electrónica: [Ediciones Bandera Roja](#). Marxists Internet Archive, 2003.
- Marx, K.; Engels, F. (1844). *La Sagrada Familia*, Frankfurt (1ª edición).
- Mirecourt Eugène de. (1870), *Proudhon*. Paris: Librairie des contemporaines (Histoire contemporaine. portraits et silhouettes au XIXe siècle, 97).
- Pérez Calle, B. y Trincado, E. (2023) «Derechos de la mujer y sentimiento religioso: La esclavitud invisibilizada denunciada por Wakefield, Wollstonecraft, Tristán y Luxemburgo», *Derecho y religión*, 18, pp. 107-122.
- Proudhon, P. J. (1865). *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale*, Garnier Frères.
- (1875). *Correspondance De P.-J. Proudhon*. edited by Langlois Amédée Jérôme Paris: A. Lacroix et ce.
- (1886). *The Malthusians: P.J. Proudhon*. London: International Pub. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/16387414.html>.
- (1923). *Oeuvres complètes de P. J. Proudhon*. Paris: Librairie des Sciences Politiques et Sociales Marcel Rivière.
- (1980). *Sobre el principio del arte y sobre su destinación social*. Aguilar.
- Proudhon P. J., Bastiat, F. (1850). *Intérêt et principal: discussion entre M. Proudhon et M. Bastiat sur l'intérêt des capitaux*. Paris: Garnier Frères.
- Trincado, E. (2003). *Crítica a la doctrina de la utilidad y revisión de las teorías de Hume, Smith y Bentham*, E-Prints UCM.
- Trincado Aznar, E. (2023) «La manipulación de Gustave Courbet del cuadro “Proudhon y sus hijos”», en *Universos distópicos y manipulación en la comunicación contemporánea: del periodismo a las series pasando por la política*. Madrid: Dykinson, pp. 875-894.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1788). *Mary, A Fiction*, Joseph Johnson.
- Woodcock, G. (1972). *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: His Life and Work*. Schocken Books.