

THORÉ-BÜRGER: HOMME DE LETTRES OU HOMME POLITIQUE?

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Théophile Thoré (1807-1869), known in later life as W Bürger (ill.1) – and posthumously as Thoré-Bürger – was surely a highly significant cultural mediator, and *animateur d'art*. As a leading art critic in Paris during the July monarchy (1830-48) and during the second decade of the 2nd Empire (1860's), he mediated between the Salon and its public in his lively and *parti pris* reviews.¹ In all his writings, his wide-ranging references to philosophical and political issues related different cultural and literary worlds, and throughout his career, his extensive writings on the art of the past were always intended to influence contemporary art and its public.² He also organised exhibitions and sales, and played an important role in the art market both as Thoré and as Bürger.³ His advice was eagerly sought by collectors and artists, and he also acquired many important works of art himself.⁴ He visited artists' ateliers and was consulted by other critics and art historians. His widely read museum guides and pioneering researches into Dutch 17th-century art were an enduring influence on the historiography of that school for many years after his death.⁵

During his lifetime, he decisively influenced the reception of both modern art and the art of the past, and he mediated between past and contemporary art to their

¹ On Thoré's art criticism during the July monarchy, see Grate Pontus, *Deux critiques d'art de l'époque romantique: Thoré-Bürger et Gustave Planche* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1959).

² Frances Suzman Jowell, *Thoré-Bürger and the art of the past* (New York-London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977).

³ Frances Suzman Jowell, "Thoré-Bürger – A Critical Role in the Art Market," *Burlington Magazine* 138 (1996): 115-29.

⁴ Frances Suzman Jowell, "Thoré-Bürger's art collection: 'a rather unusual gallery of bric-à-brac'," *Simiolus. Netherlands quarterly for the history of art* 30 (2003), 54-119.

⁵ Peter Hecht, "Rembrandt and Raphael back to back: the contribution of Thoré," *Simiolus. Netherlands quarterly for the history of art* 26 (1998): 213-24; Frances Suzman Jowell, "From Thoré to Bürger: the image of Dutch art before and after the Musées de la Hollande," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 49, n°1 (2001): 45-60 (Proceedings of colloque The Shifting Image of the Golden Age, Rijksmuseum, 29-30 May 2000); Thomas W. Gaethgens, "Wilhelm Bode and Dutch painting," *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 49, n°1, (2001): 61-71.



III. 1 Léopold Flameng, *Portrait of W. Bürger*, etching,
Frontispiece *Salons de W. Bürger*, 1870

mutual benefit. He animated the art of the past, in the light of the present, while investing modern art with the authority of his favoured Old Masters.⁶ It is difficult to separate his various interacting roles as progressive art critic and pioneering art historian, as collector/amateur, as consultant and intermediary in the art market.

However, in terms of one criterion for this study – the rescue or recovery of ‘neglected’ agents or mediators of the art world – it cannot be claimed that Thoré-Bürger acted in ‘the wings of artistic scenes’ or that these various roles have been too modestly studied. There is an extensive literature on all these aspects of his career.⁷ But what of the other facet of his career, his role as *homme politique* and republican journalist? This is important because all his endeavours as *homme de lettres* were informed by his lifelong republican commitments. At times, these even dramatically disrupted his career in the art world. However, his political career, if judged by results, was demonstrably a failure, resulting in imprisonment and exile, and his role of *homme politique* is usually relegated to a passing reference and understandably overshadowed by his impressive achievements as an art critic and art historian.

This study would like to consider how he mediated between his political and artistic commitments, with particular reference to the political circumstances of the major disruptions of his career as *homme de lettres*.

It is particularly gratifying to have the opportunity to consider Thoré-Bürger at an event held in Brussels, for despite the official hostility and onerous conditions imposed on French political refugees, it was in this city that he found the personal support and friendship that proved vital to his intellectual and personal survival during his exile from France. Let’s begin, therefore, with an extract from a letter received in Brussels in May 1850 by an eminent man of letters, Felix Delhasse (1809-99). Posted from Montreux (Swiss Alps) dated 30 April, it was signed ‘Paul Dutreih – peintre’ (ill. 2):

Pardon, mon cher Delhasse, de tous ces embarras. Si je vous traite en vieil ami, c’est qu’il y a onze ans que nous sommes en rapport de politique et d’affection! Il y a onze ans vous m’avez écrit à propos de *la Démocratie*, et depuis ce tems là, avons-nous travaillé pour la cause populaire. J’ai bien souffert, pour ma part, sans me vanter. Outre la prison et le reste, je suis *depuis le République*, à mon second exil – à perpétuité, cette fois, – ce que ne m’empêche pas d’espérer que nous rentrerons bientôt en France et que nous nous mettrons, cette fois-ci, les mains dans la Révolution jusqu’au coude.⁸

⁶ Frances Suzman Jowell, “Impressionism and the Golden Age of Dutch Art,” in *Inspiring Impressionism. The Impressionists and the Art of the Past*, ed. Ann Dumas (Denver: Denver Art Museum - New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 79-109.

⁷ For a recent bibliography, see Frances Suzman Jowell, “Théophile Thoré,” in *Dictionnaire critique des historiens de l’art actifs en France de la Révolution à la Première Guerre mondiale*, Dir. Philippe Sénéchal, Claire Barbillon, Paris, site web de l’INHA, 2009.

⁸ Paul Cottin, ed., *Thoré-Bürger peint par lui-même. Lettres et notes intimes* (Paris: Aux bureaux de la Nouvelle Revue Rétrospective, 1900), 105-6.



III. 2 Paul Dutreih (Théophile Thoré), *Self-portrait*, 1849
(France, Private Collection)

'Ces embarras' concerned the urgent publication of a political pamphlet of 138 pages entitled *Liberté!* which vehemently denounced three servitudes: Catholicism, Monarchy and Capital, and advocated instead the three liberties – 'République-démocratique-sociale' as the vital means of defeating tyranny and despotism. The brochure was intended to galvanise the scattered and disconsolate French republicans who were sorely disappointed by the political developments in the aftermath of the 1848 Revolution in France. Delhasse was urged to ensure its wide distribution in Europe in the hope that it would help rescue the floundering French republic. It was defiantly signed T. Thoré, a name that would soon disappear from public view.

'Paul Dutreih, peintre' was the first of some twenty pseudonyms that Thoré used during his peripatetic and fugitive ten year political exile. He took refuge initially in Switzerland until he was forced to leave after 2 December 1851. After a brief secret sojourn in Belgium, he left for England mid February 1852, where together with several other political refugees, he remained for almost a year. Thereafter, except for brief but significant visits to the Netherlands, Germany and England after 1855, he was based – albeit unofficially – in Belgium. It was in Brussels in 1855 that he adopted his most long-lasting pseudonym: 'W. Bürger'.

Why the German Bürger? Translated as 'citizen' – it gave 'le citoyen Thoré' a supranational identity, and also marked his return to serious scholarly projects. Henceforth his otherwise proscribed writings were published in France as 'W. Bürger'. He chose to retain the name even after his return to Paris following the amnesty of 1859.

The young Théophile Thoré would not be resuscitated until 1868, when W. Bürger republished his major Salons of the 1840s, accompanied by an essay dated 1857: *Nouvelles Tendances de l'art*. This essay explained his more recent beliefs about past and modern art, and was intended as a bridge between his earlier and later writings on art. However, it should be remembered that his earlier career had, from its earliest years, ricocheted between politics and art.

His earliest-recorded political activism dates from his enthusiastic youthful participation in the *Trois Glorieuses* of 1830 – the street revolution that overthrew Charles X and introduced the constitutional monarchy of Louis-Philippe. However, by 1833 he joined the ranks of disaffected republicans, now vociferously opposing the new regime.

Abandoning the law in which he was trained, he took on a new vocation as *homme de lettres*, with special emphasis on the visual arts. This emphasis, however, did not exclude politics, for he always insisted on the art critic's prophetic and polemical role to further the advent of a new society. In his Salon of 1838 he reiterated that: 'La critique affirmative nécessite donc une idée philosophique, une croyance politique et sociale qui la dirige et lui serve de criterium dans ses jugemens.'⁹

He alluded to a wide range of earlier philosophers – figures such as Spinoza, Leibnitz, Rousseau, to mention a few; and he allied himself with various contemporary social/political philosophers, mostly followers of Saint Simon – in particular Pierre Leroux, who preached an evangelical socialism 'l'Humanité'. It was the source of Thoré's famous slogan 'l'art pour l'homme', which denoted art that reflected shared concerns, and would be accessible to all in content and form. Through shared experience and inclusiveness, art could thus further the fraternal future of mankind by prefiguring its future unity, harmony and 'solidarité'.¹⁰

His strongly partial judgements about different schools of art reflected current political debates, and gave a political or philosophical dimension to his aesthetic judgements. Thus, in the Delacroix versus Ingres controversy, the age-old debate of colour versus line, he deemed modern French subject matter and expressive colouristic brushwork as artistically and socially progressive, while castigating classical subjects and neo-classical Roman landscapes painted in a linear style with a smooth finish as sterile, reactionary and thus a wilful denial of progress.

⁹ Cited in Jowell 1977, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, Ch I, II; Neil MacWilliam, *Dreams of Happiness: Social Art and the French Left, 1830-1850*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 181-7.

As well as the implicit politicisation of his art criticism, he published several direct polemical attacks on the regime – on its official art institutions and its governance of the arts. Furthermore, in the late 1830s he energetically campaigned for a new opposition newspaper *La Démocratie*, which would unite all competing factions of the opposition and thus defeat the current regime. His campaign failed: the project collapsed, and in its wake he published a brochure explaining its aims.¹¹ However, instead of toppling the monarchy, it landed Thoré in Sainte Pélagie for the year 1841.

He emerged from prison utterly unrepentant but perhaps more cautious. Although he risked the occasional political article published under a pseudonym, he also embarked on a safer career in the art market, co-founding and directing (with Paul Lacroix) the *Alliance des Arts* – a new agency for the sale of works of art, which also published an informative and sometimes argumentative *Bulletin*. Here he became familiar with major collections and collectors – such as Cypierre who pioneered the rehabilitation of the 18th-century French artists such as Watteau, Fragonard, Boucher. Thoré deplored their official neglect in national museums, and defended them as the most original and truly French artists in the history of the national school. This improbable association of rococo art with strands of left wing politics prompted the conservative critic Delécluze to comment acerbically in 1849 on the paradox of the ‘le mélange monstrueux des opinions républicaines avec le retour du goût pour les ouvrages de Watteau et de Boucher.’¹²

From 1844, as official art critic for a leading newspaper *Le Constitutionnel*, Thoré wrote his best known Salon reviews, in which he further elaborated on ideas about the moral and social value of beauty as part of the democratic socialist doctrine of ‘l’Humanité’. However, in his art criticism he also increasingly emphasised the importance of understanding the technical means of painting: ‘la peinture a aussi sa langue, c’est-à-dire ses moyens d’expression, perfectionnées par les efforts successifs des grands hommes de la tradition, et c’est la partie technique de l’art.’¹³ He rejected the direct didacticism explicit in the subject or theme, and instead appealed to aesthetic criteria which emphasised the artist’s poetic interpretation of nature as realised through the full gamut of the traditional means of painting.

However, despite his committed championship of those artists he considered innovative and progressive, his art-criticism came to an abrupt end on the outbreak of the revolution of 1848. He concluded his truncated Salon review in ringing tones:

¹¹ T. Thoré, *La vérité sur le parti démocratique* (Paris: Imprimerie de Mme de Lacombe, 1840).

¹² Cited in “Art and the Language of Politics,” in *Past and Present in Art and Taste*, ed. Francis Haskell (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1987), 68-9.

¹³ “Artistes de dix-neuvième siècle. Leopold Robert,” *Les Beaux-Arts I* (1843): 283, cited in Jowell 1977, 99.

Nous n'arrêterons pas longtemps nos lecteurs sur le Salon de 1848. La politique nous réserve des spectacles plus intéressants. Nous faisons aujourd'hui mieux que de l'art et de la poésie: nous faisons de l'histoire vivante.¹⁴

He refused the directorship of Beaux-Arts (to which Jeanron was then appointed) and as 'le citoyen Thoré' he joined the most radical socialist factions of the republican movement. He founded and edited the newspaper *La Vraie République* and its defiant successor *Le Journal de la Vraie République*. Each was, in turn, closed down and its offices ransacked. He stood (unsuccessfully) as left-wing candidate in various elections, was implicated in the June days of 1848, and fled to England for a few months. A year later, back in Paris, he supported an abortive left-wing coup in June against the French occupation of Rome, and had to flee again – this time crossing the Swiss border. Tried in absentia, he was exiled for life.

These events explain the circumstances of his letter to Delhasse in 1850 – at a time when Thoré (alias Dutreih) was still hopeful and engaged in 'l'histoire vivante'. In *Liberté!* he declared that democracy and socialism would transform France and the world: 'Qu'un peuple ait la liberté, il aura bientôt l'égalité, la fraternité, la vérité, la justice'¹⁵ and he called on the people to rise against tyranny and declare their own sovereignty – to choose between 'la barbarie et la liberté'.¹⁶ However, Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état of December 2, 1851 and his installation as Emperor a year later finally dashed Thoré's republican hopes. He and other French political refugees were expelled from Switzerland,¹⁷ and he spent the next few fugitive years in futile pamphleteering, plotting and planning. In short, 'l'histoire vivante' may have been more interesting than the arts, but it had failed. Furthermore, it also resulted in a momentous disruption of his career as art critic in Paris.

By mid-1854, he seems to have begun to think about the possibility of recovering his other vocation. As he wrote to his friend Delhasse in August 1854 '... je n'ai pas perdu la passion des arts. Si je l'avais égarée, je l'ai retrouvée dimanche dernier à Bruges où j'ai revu les Memling de l'hôpital et tant d'autres belles choses.'¹⁸ The following year he was involved with the launch of *La revue universelle des arts*, a new art journal in Brussels, founded by his old friend and collaborator Paul Lacroix. Under his new pseudonym, W. Bürger, he returned to writing about the arts.

¹⁴ "Salon de 1848," in *Salons de T. Thoré. 1844, 1845, 1846, 1847, 1848, avec une préface par W Bürger* (Paris: Librairie internationale - Bruxelles, Leipzig, Livourne: A. Lacroix, Verboeckhoven et C^e. Éditeurs, 1868), 565.

¹⁵ Théophile Thoré, *Liberté* (Bruxelles: Ch. Vanderauwera, 1850), 8.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 138.

¹⁷ See for a comprehensive account of Thoré's refugee years in Switzerland: Marc Vuilleumier, "Théophile Thoré et les républicains réfugiés en Suisse de 1849 à 1851," *Revue suisse d'histoire* 14, fasc.1(1964), 1-32.

¹⁸ Unpublished letter to Delhasse, dated 10 August 1854; Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Papiers de Thoré-Bürger, 7908-7922: MSS 7911

Although stirred by the news of the great *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, he was also acutely aware that his exile had effectively removed him from direct contact with contemporary French art. He was absent during the early years of the Realist movement and he noticed ruefully that his earlier art criticism was not even alluded to in the prolific critical accounts of the French school at the *Exposition Universelle*.

From 1855, as W. Bürger, he welcomed what he interpreted as a present trend towards universality, on the transcendence of nationality toward a recognition of common humanity. He advocated this idea for contemporary art and, as he had always done, he justified his views by reference to historical and critical interpretations of the art of the past.¹⁹ His first major publication was his extensive review of the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures exhibition.²⁰ He also embarked on erudite and lively guides to collections in Belgium, Holland, and Germany, extracts of which first appeared in *L'Indépendance belge* – gaining wide publicity for his research.

Having abandoned his struggle for a defunct Second French Republic, he turned instead to championing the art and society of an earlier republic, the 17th-century Dutch republic – and to studying its relatively unresearched artists whom he termed 'les illustres inconnus.'²¹ Although he based his studies mostly on the Dutch museums, it was in fact in Brussels, in his catalogue to the Arenberg collection of 1859, that he first announced his most celebrated project of all: the rescue from unjust oblivion of 'un original incomparable, un inconnu de genie,'²² Jan van der Meer de Delft – for in this Belgian collection he had discovered an unknown portrait of a young woman, actually signed by this rare artist.²³

Mystified by the rarity and obscurity of this superb painter – he listed the presently identified Vermeer paintings: some five or six works – all but one in private collections.

At that time nothing was known about Vermeer's life whom Thoré dubbed his 'Sphynx'. However, an earlier passing reference to van der Meer as a pupil of Fabritius (another virtually unknown painter) prompted Bürger's second excited announcement in the Arenberg catalogue, of yet another recent discovery in a Brussels collection, 'un petit morceau de rien', which hung obscurely in the residence of his friend le chevalier Camberlyn: it was the tiny image of a *Goldfinch*

¹⁹ Jowell 1977.

²⁰ W. Bürger, *Trésors d'art exposés à Manchester en 1857 et provenant des collections royales, des collections publiques et des collections particulières de la Grande-Bretagne* (Paris: Vve Jules Renouard, 1857); initially published in *Le Siècle*.

²¹ W. Bürger, *Musées de la Hollande. Amsterdam et la Haye. Études sur l'École Hollandaise* (Paris: Librairie Vve. Renouard, 1858), 272-3

²² W. Bürger, *Galerie d'Arenberg à Bruxelles* (Paris: Librairie Vve Renouard; Bruxelles et Leipzig: Auguste Schnée, 1859), 27.

²³ *Ibidem*, 34-6; Johannes Vermeer, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c.1666-67; oil on canvas, Metropolitan museum of Art, New York.

signed C. Fabritius – a work that is now one of the treasures in the Mauritshuis, The Hague.²⁴

By the time Bürger returned to France in 1860 (after the amnesty of 1859), he was already renowned for his scholarly connoisseurship and pioneering research into Dutch 17th-century art. In the second volume of his *Musées de la Hollande* in 1860, he was well on the way to changing forever the critical fortunes (and misfortunes) of several artists. His most famous achievement was, of course, his ‘rediscovery’ of Vermeer, which culminated in his catalogue of 1866.²⁵ But amongst others, Bürger also successfully championed Frans Hals,²⁶ and Fabritius²⁷. It was Bürger who effectively established the long-lasting triumvirate of Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer, and his interpretations would decisively influence the historiography and reception of the 17th-century Dutch school until the middle of the 20th century.²⁸

His scholarly interest in the Dutch school for all its impeccable research and attention to style and quality was far from politically disinterested. As he explained in the first of his volumes on the Dutch museums, he attributed the emergence of a distinct, original Dutch school of painting to its hard-won political and religious freedom – and to the independence and energy of its individual citizens. Not only did they create the very soil beneath their feet, they had ‘par un élan spontané du génie national’ recreated their society and their moral and intellectual world – and produced an utterly original art – ‘naturalism.’ Instead of glorifying rulers, their art served the whole nation – and indeed all mankind, depicting ‘la vie vivante’ – all aspects of life and nature as observed and experienced, producing a vivid visual history of their entire society and of their country – in images strongly marked by the individuality of each artist. It was, in short, ‘l’art pour l’homme.’²⁹

Bürger’s championship of Dutch art was certainly understood as a surrogate political campaign by at least one enthralled reader – his old ally and fellow exile, the radical socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon commented in his review:

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 29-30. See its later acquisition by Thoré: Frances Suzman Jowell, “Thoré-Bürger et la découverte du Chardonneret,” in *Carel Fabritius et l’âge d’or de Delft*, ed. Ariane van Suchtelen et al., Dossier de l’Art, 114 (Dijon: Éditions Faton, 2004), 40-3.

²⁵ Frances Suzman Jowell, “Vermeer and Thoré-Bürger: Recoveries of Reputation,” in *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan Gaskell, Michiel Jonker (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1998), 35-57.

²⁶ Frances Suzman Jowell, “Thoré-Bürger and Vermeer: critical and commercial fortunes,” in *Shop Talk: studies in honor of Seymour Slive*, ed. C.P.Schneider et al., (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 1995), 124-7 and Frances Suzman Jowell, “The Rediscovery of Frans Hals,” in *Frans Hals*, ed. Seymour Slive (London: Royal Academy of Arts; Brussels: Ludion, 1989), 61-86.

²⁷ Christopher Brown, *Carel Fabritius* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1981), 64-82.

²⁸ Hecht 1998, 213-24. See also: Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr, “Dou’s Reputation,” in *Gerrit Dou 1613-1675 Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr (Washington: National Gallery of Art National Gallery of Art, Washington; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 12-24.

²⁹ Jowell 2001, 48.

en nous parlant d'art, et d'art hollandaise, il nous a fait rêver d'autre chose: le lecteur en décidera. Ce qui est sur, ce que nous avons cru voir, toucher, sentir nous avons vu le progrès de l'humanité.³⁰

Bürger responded to him in a private letter:

Ils disent tous: que ce gaillard connaît bien les tableaux! – Par diable! Je me mocque bien de leurs vieilles toiles, si je n'y voyais pas l'Homme dessus. Oui, (entre nous), mon idée est qu'on peut travailler à la vérité et à la justice en parlant d'un rayon de soleil, et qu'un propos sur Rembrandt peut signifier autant pour la Révolution qu'un manifeste du citoyen Ledru à la République universelle.³¹

Although there may be a slight element of humouring the recipient of the letter, it is interesting that a few years later, when invited to address the *Cercle artistique de Bruxelles* in 1864, he couched his refusal in political terms. As he confided to his friend Delhasse, the time was not propitious:

J'ai quelque fois vivement parlé dans les Clubs, quand la passion politique nous exaltait et entraînait aussi notre public. Aujourd'hui j'aurais peur. Si les circonstances étaient un peu modifiées, et s'il était permis de parler absolument comme on pense, en mêlant même à Rembrandt ou à Velasquez, ou à Watteau, ou à n'importe quelle futilité artistique, ce petit grain d'humanité et de sociabilité qui germe, pousse et fleurit, malgré tout, dans une œuvre d'art, et lui donne son caractère et sa beauté!

Vous savez bien que pour interpréter l'histoire, il faut la voir de trois points de vue: en face, c'est le présent; en arrière; et en avant – l'avenir. Il me semble impossible de parler de Rembrandt, par exemple, sans abîmer l'hypocrisie et le despotisme, sans glorifier la lumière, qui est la liberté, toute les qualités humaines qui touchent à la politique, à la Révolution, au progrès et à la civilisation.³²

As a returned political exile, Bürger generally expressed his political views privately but occasionally he could not resist direct political comment – as in his attacks against officially favoured artists such as Gerome, Bougereau and Cabanal in his Salon review of 1865 in which he referred to 'cet art detestable qui fournit des tableaux à la cour, à l'Etat, aux musées...' He fiercely attacked the latest painting by Gérôme: the *Réception des ambassadeurs siamois au palais de Fontainebleau*, 1865 (Versailles), commenting sarcastically in the first section of his review for *L'Indépendance belge*:

Le monarque représentant la France de 1864, assisté de sa famille, de ses courtisans et dignitaires, abaisse un regard terne sur une file d'étrangers couchés à plat ventre, qui serpentent vers le trône, comme les tronçons d'un reptile caparaçonné – caparaçonné – d'étoffes luisante. Glorieuse cérémonie pour l'humanité, proclamé solidaire par les utopistes et les philosophes.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Extract of letter in Fondation Custodia (coll. Frits Lugt), Institut néerlandais, Paris; published in Jowell 2001, 48.

³² Cottin 1900, 222-3.

After dismissing its clumsy composition and style he further derides 'ces images mirifiques d'une humanité horizontale, contre laquelle je serais heureux, si je savais le latin [which he did] de citer les beaux vers antique sur la structure verticale qui permet à l'homme de contempler le ciel.' He contemptuously rejects other subjects by Gérome, listing them as prostrate figures praying in a mosque; prurient images of the slave market; a bellydancer entertaining drunk soldiers: 'Prosternation, ou la prostitution politique, religieuse et morale ...' He continues rhetorically: why choose images of abjection and servitude? Why degrade 'l'homme et la femme dans leur caractère individuel et social?'. Why always abuse 'la conscience, la morale, l'histoire, la poésie, la nature, tous les sentiments esthétiques du vrai, du juste et du beau'?

He sarcastically suggests another important subject: the ambassador of some Catholic nation, such as France, kissing the slipper of the Pope.

It is not surprising that he received a sharp rejoinder from his incensed editor Berardi in Brussels. In an unpublished letter³³, Berardi reminds Bürger that if he wishes his review to circulate in France he should stick to matters of art and avoid issues relating to directly or indirectly to the administration or politics. Although Bürger necessarily became more circumspect in his public political comment, he was unrestrained in private correspondence:

Qui fait la guerre, la ruine, es ténèbres, les épidémies, massacres, pillages, incendies, etc.etc.? Le Césarisme, et surtout la bêtise humaine...[J]e vis dans une colère perpétuelle, en présence de ces infamies et de ces malheurs. Si l'on employait, à sanifier le monde, ce qu'on dépense en canons, fusils et engins d'ameurtre, le mal serait bientôt vaincu...³⁴

In his review of the *Exposition Universelle* of 1867, Bürger declares his faith in positivism and science as keys to future progress while only hinting at the wider political implications: 'Je crois que la société moderne se caractérise par son aversion ..de tout le passé superstitieux our surnaturel; que la nature – c'est a dire l'univers et nous-mêmes – l'humanité – est la source unique de toute connaissance, de tout sentiment et de toute forme...' He adds that:

les dogmes tendent à rejeter ce qui contrarie la justice et la liberté; la science se fait par l'observation et l'expérience... Les arts touchant ainsi à la philosophie et à la politique, peuvent donc aider à l'avènement d'une société droite et libre. Sans cela, je n'écrirais pas sur les arts, quoique j'aime beaucoup les tableaux, et je me retirerais au bord d'un petit lac – pour élever des poissons.³⁵

Which, of course, he never did – for although the exigencies of French political history at times forced him to choose between engaging in active politics and fulfilling his role as *animateur d'art*, his chosen vocation as *l'homme de lettres* was throughout his career animated and inspired by his social commitment as *l'homme politique*.

³³ Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Papiers de Thoré-Bürger, 7908-7922: MSS 7912.

³⁴ Cottin 1900, 207-8

³⁵ T. Thoré (préface, complétée par Marius Chaumelin), *Salons de W. Bürger, 1861-1868*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie de Vve Jules Renouard, 1870), 452-4.