A Pivotal Point: James McNeill Whistler’s Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville and the Formation of his Aesthetic

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A Pivotal Point: 
James McNeill Whistler’s *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* 
and the Formation of his Aesthetic 

by 

Eugenie Fortier 

Submitted in partial fulfillment 
of the requirements for the degree of  
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Thesis Sponsor: 

May 22, 2019  
Date  
Tara Zanardi  
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Introduction

In 1867, James McNeill Whistler articulated his active renouncement of Gustave Courbet’s artistic impact. He wrote to Henri Fantin-Latour, fellow painter and part of the Whistler-led artist alliance Société des Trois, denigrating the group’s admiration of the Realist as “depraved.” \(^1\) Whistler declared “regret” and “rage, hate even” at his previous dedication to Courbet, wishing that he had not been allured by “[t]hat damned Realism” during his early years as an artist. \(^2\) Although Whistler’s strongly worded statement against Realism and its leader Courbet was not recorded in writing until 1867, Whistler was already distancing himself beyond Realism to other techniques and modes of working from the early-to-mid 1860s. Whistler formally repudiated Courbet’s style in 1865 by painting Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville (Figure 1), a subdued, aestheticized version of Courbet’s 1854 coastal self-portrait, Seashore at Palavas (Figure 2).

After a decade-long lack of communication, Courbet drafted a letter in 1877 to Whistler about “when [they] were happy, and without other worries than those of art,” in a misguided plea for financial assistance. \(^3\) Courbet was referencing the two artists’ overlapping stays in Trouville on the Normandy coast of France twelve years earlier, during which Whistler painted Harmony in Blue and Silver and five additional canvases. \(^4\) Courbet prefaced this with the

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\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Gustave Courbet to James McNeill Whistler, 14 February 1877, Glasgow University Library, MS Whistler C196; GUW 00695.

\(^4\) The exact parameters of Whistler’s stay in Trouville is unclear and varies depending on the publication. It is described as follows biographical accounts: Pennell, Life of James McNeill Whistler: late September-November 1865. David Park Curry, James McNeill Whistler at the Freer Gallery, Richard Dorment in Whistler, and Young, MacDonald, Spencer in The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler: October-November 1865. Daniel E. Sutherland in Whistler: A Life for Art’s Sake: August-November 1865. Others such as Howard Isham and Tom Prideaux simply
acknowledgement of their mutual long silence, stating, “it is a pity, because ideas change.” During their several-months’ sojourn, Whistler and Courbet had spent so much time together that Whistler’s model and mistress, Jo Hiffernan, essentially became the same to Courbet. Trouville’s scenic vistas continuously enticed Whistler and Courbet to extend their stays and capture the coastal views on canvas; Whistler’s two letters from the Norman town report his production of “some important pictures” that he believed “would be fine – and worth quite anything of the kind [he] had ever done.” Crucially, Whistler did not write of Courbet. The ideas that had changed, as Courbet mentioned, surely were artistic tensions that emerged during this sojourn, exemplified in the subtle *Harmony in Blue and Silver*. Courbet’s letter of 1877, unsurprisingly, went unanswered by Whistler.

Thirty years later, Whistler referred to *Harmony in Blue and Silver* as “[t]he only painting by me of Courbet,” following his mention of the canvas as *Courbet -- On the Seashore* in an inventory of 1886. As a result, scholars have since scarcely mentioned *Harmony in Blue and Silver* without comparing it to its source matter, Courbet’s *Seashore at Palavas*. *Harmony in Blue and Silver* presents a lone figure standing on the shore of a calm sea on a clear day, his back turned to the viewer as he observes the vista before him. A gently sloping shoreline divides the painting in half and separates the foreground sand from the sea and sky. Each element is

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include the season, which is autumn and summer of 1865, respectively. However, Eugène Boudin’s letters stated that both Courbet and Whistler were in Trouville on October 18, and recorded Whistler’s departure on November 13. Eugène Boudin, *Lettres à Ferdinand Martin (1861-1870)*. Ed. Isolder Pludermacher. (Trouville-sur-Mer: Société des amis de musée de Eugène Boudin: 2011). Boudin, in Trouville, 13 November 1865 [1-26]: 102.

5 Ibid.


7 Andrew McLaren Young, Margaret MacDonald, Robin Spencer, with the assistance of Hamish Miles. *The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies of British Art by Yale University Press, 1980), 37.

8 It is unclear how Whistler may have encountered Courbet’s canvas, which has only been documented as being exhibited in Montpellier in 1860 and Toulouse in 1865. He may have seen a photograph of this work instead; both Courbet and Whistler already photographically documented by the 1860s.
represented as a section in a series of horizontal bands that softly merge together, with a more severe and distinct horizon line. This description could just as easily be applied to Courbet’s painting; compositionally, Whistler followed the template of his elder’s painting almost exactly. Nonetheless, he crucially substituted Courbet’s thick impasto for thin washes of color, a poignant change that would later lead to his signature style, and he reduced the composition to horizontal bands of color, relegating the seascape to a design. Whistler also raised the horizon and altered the figure, negating the suggested narrative and attitude of Courbet’s larger-than-life persona and arrogance. Combined with the aesthetic stray from its source material and the irrefutable evidence that Whistler viewed the figure in the landscape as that of Courbet, the figure gained new, weighty significance in its deliberate alterations.

This thesis posits that *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* therefore signals Whistler’s new idiosyncratic style. As an indisputable reinterpretation of Courbet’s seascape, the painting becomes imbued with a symbolism that surmounts any in his oeuvre, signifying a deliberate departure from the doctrine of Realism and Courbet’s influence. As such, it becomes a statement of separation; dramatically, it is a visual rebirth of Whistler as a painter, catapulting him into an exploration of paint washes and, later, the figureless, formalist works for which he is most famous: his Nocturnes. *Harmony in Blue and Silver* is the first painting in which Whistler presents his personal vision as a modern artist, one that would usurp Courbet’s previous position as icon of the avant-garde.

Although the terms “modern” and “avant-garde” gain a stronger and more refined connotation in the twentieth century, I use these descriptors in the context of this thesis as relevant to the late nineteenth century, in the manner that such artists operated outside of typical standards as established by the ruling art academies, namely those governing the Paris Salon and
Royal Academy in London. The modern painter reacted to the changing, contemporary world in a highly personalized manner thematically and paired the novel subject matter with anti-academic techniques that highlighted the materiality of the work of art as an object, itself, often revealing the method in which it was created, rather than simply as representation.

To understand fully the role of the Trouville painting in evolution of Whistler’s art, this thesis follows a chronological path from his nascent career to his mature style of the 1870s. Whistler sought notoriety through association with modern art from the start of his professional art career. Whistler was drawn to Realism, which became evident mostly in his etching subjects of the late 1850s. Although he lacked a personal relationship with Courbet, Whistler still emulated the Realist style in some of his earliest oil paintings, as well, and used its leader’s originality and anti-academic stance as the basis for the formation of his own small artist alliance of the Société des Trois. Whistler’s confidence with etching as he engaged with his surroundings led to stylistic and compositional variances while still operating within Realist subject matter. As noted by scholars, primarily Katharine Lochnan, Whistler’s etchings are the first of his works to reveal his admiration for Japanese design derived from woodcut prints. I contend that because of his much more fraught relationship with painting, Whistler did not reach a similarly seamless integration of styles until Harmony in Blue and Silver.

The early-to-mid 1860s were notoriously “essentially wanderjahre” for Whistler, an “era when he was searching around for the formulae which would best suit him and answer to his aspirations.”9 While in London, Whistler vacillated between painting figures surrounded by Eastern objects in his studio, in a conscious effort to form an identity associated with contemporary shifts in the aesthetic climate that was suddenly inundated with Eastern art objects,

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and riverscapes that showed the constantly changing, industrial Thames. Although his painting method varied throughout, Whistler grew increasingly frustrated with his lack of speed of execution, particularly in figural compositions. For the first time since the beginning of his career, Whistler also produced a self-portrait, readily displaying how he was revisiting his self-perception as an artist, in which he featured Asian objects, aligning himself with Eastern aesthetics.

Temporally, Whistler’s stay in Trouville was at the crux of this period of change and experimentation. The setting was untrodden ground for Whistler, who had painted a couple of seascapes in the early 1860s, but never fully explored a purely natural or traditional landscape theme in his own paintings, nor accomplished such a serial production. The novelty of the Normandy coast vista gave Whistler the freedom to vary his framing, subject matter, and modes of representation, allowing him the kind of tabula rasa needed to determine which of his multifarious influences were most pertinent to the creation of an autonomous artistic style. The diversity within the group of paintings, especially considering the short time within which Whistler created them, reveals his frantic search for an idiosyncratic aesthetic. In comparison to contemporaneous seascape painters of the region, Whistler adhered more to the traditional figureless landscape and crucially did not include signifiers of the town’s modernization. Not only did he approach the seascape as an opportunity to explore pictorial design, but he also based two compositions, *Harmony in Blue and Silver* and *Trouville (Gray and Green, the Silver Sea)* (1865; Figure 37), on paintings by other well-known modern masters, Courbet and Manet, respectively. His translation of these canvases cements his incorporation of Japanese-influenced compositional arrangements and the tonal washes he had begun to explore in his Thames paintings.
I argue that Whistler truly synthesized his style in *Harmony in Blue and Silver* in his newfound balance between the influence of Japanese woodblock prints, fluid paint application, and emphasis on suggestion over representation. Paired with his replacement of Courbet’s bravado in *Seashore at Palavas*, in which he is blatantly greeting the sea from atop a rock formation with an enthusiastic wave of his hat, to one stripped of motion and energy, *Harmony* is undoubtedly “a commentary on Courbet’s waning artistic influence” and is especially impactful considering Whistler’s proximity to Courbet when he painted it.10 Likely, Whistler’s statement of repudiation was fueled by Courbet’s description of Whistler during their stay in Trouville as “an Englishman who is my pupil.”11 Standing immobile, the figure similarly looks out to sea. Combined with the aforementioned harmonization of tonal horizontal bands to depict the seascape, Whistler’s visual mitigation of Courbet’s presence is not only turning away from his style, but updating it with newer modes, inspirations, and techniques. Thus, Whistler positions himself as usurper of Courbet’s role as modern art icon.

Historian Howard Isham aptly summarizes the two artists’ divergent interactions with the ocean as subject matter:

As Courbet pursued his examination of the ever-challenging liquidity of the sea and its waves, and Whistler’s experience of the ocean became the immediate inspiration for his creation of objects of visual beauty, a new bifurcation in the aesthetic world of the nineteenth century was created: those who sought to render the truth of nature in art were opposed by those who claimed there is no truth in nature, only in art. Whistler was to write: ‘That Nature is always right, is an assertion, artistically, as untrue, as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted….Nature...is very rarely right….it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong.’ Courbet, renowned for his remark, ‘Show me a goddess and I will paint her,’ believed in the truth of nature and the function of art to reveal it as closely as possible to the eye of the beholder, even though his own images of nature sometimes transcended his own artistic teachings.12

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10 Daniel E. Sutherland. *Whistler: A Life for Art’s Sake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 93. Courbet scholars often describe *Sea at Palavas* along with a quote he had written to Jules Valle at the time: “O sea! your voice is tremendous, it will never succeed in drowning out the voice of Fame as it shouts my name to the whole world!” Isham, 307.


Whistler further concretized his emphasis on facture and a vision distilled from reality in his other figural painting of the group, *Sea and Rain* (Figure 28). In each painting, areas of paint were either applied thinly initially or simply rubbed off afterwards, revealing traces of the darker underpainting; these negative spaces act as reminders of the flatness of the picture plane while visually tying together the composition. Whistler repeated colors throughout, with “the same colour reappearing continually here and there like the same thread in an embroidery [...] the whole forming in this way a harmonious pattern,” as Whistler stated three years later in praise of one of Henri Fantin-Latour’s compositions, shows the influence of Eastern art in his own work in this 1865 painting of the Trouville shore.  

Instead of relying on a stark color contrast as in his etchings and earlier Realist paintings, Whistler began to favor repetition to create a “successful painting as the thrust, movement, counter-movement, and final equilibrium of forms and colors in pictorial space--a fabric of paint, strong and tightly woven” that becomes increasingly evident in his seascapes from this point on and emphasizes the shimmering quality of these scenes. The Trouville paintings are some of the first in which Whistler “sought harmony through a delicate balance of similar tones, shades of a single color,” attributable to his brief friendship with Albert Moore and recalling the scandalous *White Girl* painting of four years earlier.

Whistler certainly recognized the success of the aesthetic shifts noticeable in *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, as they emerge in another group of seascapes he painted during an unexpected trip the following year. Whistler played with the reduction of detail and pictorial design in his addition of thin glazes immersing the vistas in veils of gray and varied his painting method

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15 Sutherland, 109. This tonal painting method would return in paintings following his trip to South America, encouraged by his association with Albert Moore.
throughout. His landscape compositions increasingly rely on horizontals punctuated by a few carefully-placed vertical elements, illustrating how Whistler perpetually returned to this compositional format as his mode of painting veered increasingly toward abstraction; this is particularly noticeable in his Nocturnes. The role of memory grew in importance in his oeuvre as his work further minimized detail in lieu of the creation of an overall atmosphere and tone.

Scholarship on Whistler is vast to say the least. In 2003, Glasgow University digitally granted public access to Whistler’s correspondence, which has led to an eruption of new articles and books, further building upon over a century of productive study. As expected, the 1980 *catalogue raisonné* of Whistler’s paintings by Andrew McLaren Young, Margaret F. MacDonald, and Robin Spencer, with the assistance of Hamish Miles, provides an endless trove of valuable information. However, its authority as a primary source would greatly benefit from an updated edition to further investigate issues of provenance, particularly those I encountered in assessing the groups of paintings created during Whistler’s travels of 1865 and 1866. Because of Whistler’s well-documented polemic and flamboyant personality, as well as his infamous trial against art critic John Ruskin, many monographs focus on Whistler’s biography and controversial Nocturne paintings of the 1870s. An early and often-cited exception to this model is Joseph and Elizabeth Robins Pennell’s lengthy biographical report, published in 1908; the couple were close friends of Whistler’s, and their account is considered one of the most factual, though generally praiseful.

In terms of more specific studies, Ayako Ono’s *Japonisme in Britain* and Yoko Chiba’s examination of western European interactions are enlightening in their discussions of the shifting aesthetic climate of the 1860s in response to the infiltration of foreign, suddenly available objects. Katharine Lochnan repeatedly notes the similarities between Japanese design, as derived
from woodcut prints, in her numerous and extensive writings on Whistler’s etchings, while Margaret MacDonald and Patricia de Montford trace such artistic influence in Whistler’s Thames riverscapes of the 1860s. Generally, art historians such as Jacques Dufwa note Whistler’s direct appropriation of Eastern objects as props and subsequent integration of aesthetic in his Nocturnes as based on Japanese woodcut prints, but do not typically pair it with his own, independent evolution in style and acknowledgement of contemporaneous modern painters.

Interestingly, Lochnan also draws attention to parallels between the paintings of three modern masters in her exhibition catalog, *Turner, Whistler, Monet*, thus emphasizing Whistler’s significant role as waterscape painter. Few publications exclusively explore Whistler’s technique, though Otto Bacher, who met Whistler in Venice, wrote of Whistler’s tutelage and aqueous painting methods in a book published in 1909. More recently, art historians Stephen Hackney and Joyce Hill Stoner examine Whistler’s oil technique, though their scholarship is limited to the facture of Whistler’s Nocturnes. John House and Daniel Sutherland contextualize Whistler’s travels to the coast of France and Chile, respectively.

Scholars typically overlook the trip to Trouville, or only briefly mention it amongst accounts of Whistler’s nascent beginnings as an artist affiliated with Realism, his peripatetic lifestyle, and his uncertain style in the early to mid-1860s. While a comparison of *Harmony in Blue and Silver* with its source material of Courbet’s earlier seascape is remarked upon as critical, few texts have explored the body of work Whistler produced alongside Courbet in Trouville. A typical reference to the trip is exemplified by Denys Sutton:

> The mid-1860s formed a particularly decisive moment in Whistler’s career. He was in the midst of discovering a new and fresh way of handing paint; this freer and more evocative style appeared when, after a trip to Cologne, he and Jo settled at Trouville in August-September 1865, where Courbet, Monet, and Daubigny were established.\(^\text{16}\)

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\(^\text{16}\) Sutton, 51.
Occurring at the formative period in Whistler’s career, the importance of the Trouville sojourn has yet to be fully explored. Donald Sutton and Dennis Holden’s publications of the late 1960s provide formalist descriptions of the Trouville works, but do not elaborate much more beyond their acknowledging them as stylistic experiments. Howard Isham’s *Image of the Sea*, a comprehensive exploration of the sea as aesthetic symbol in the nineteenth century, decidedly notes the importance of this period in each Courbet’s and Whistler’s respective work, in addition to the significance of the sea in their art. Surprisingly, this is the most complete recollection of the stay in Trouville until very recently. Brief but informative sections of the catalog that accompanied the Tate Gallery’s 1994 Whistler retrospective and Daniel Sutherland’s 2014 biography of Whistler describe the trip, and a select few paintings from the group.

Since the commencement of my own interest in the subject, two publications of significance have been released. Suzanne Singletary explores several aspects of the artistic links between Courbet and Whistler, including a subsection devoted to their interactions in Trouville, in *Whistler and France*, and psychotherapist Yves Sarfati published his dramatically titled *L’Anti-Origine du monde: Comment Whistler a tué Courbet*, or “How Whistler killed Courbet,” in the same year, 2017.\(^\text{17}\) Sarfati, though extremely informative in certain aspects, primarily bases his exploration and basis for his claim on each artist’s interaction with Jo Hiffernan, who he claims is the subject for Courbet’s scandalous nude, *The Origin of the World* (1866).\(^\text{18}\)

Other scholarship on Whistler has largely ignored this period, possibly because it was so transitional and short-lived. Scholars typically note Whistler’s letter to Fantin of 1867 as the

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\(^{18}\) Claude Schopp’s 2018 publication, *L’Origine du monde: vie du modèle* (Paris: Phébus, 2018) asserts that the model was not Jo, but instead, a painting of dancer Constance Queniaux commissioned by a Turkish diplomat with whom she had an affair.
decisive, pivotal point at which Whistler abandoned Realism and Courbet’s influence, but, perhaps due to the lack of documentation, have not examined the relationship and intention behind Whistler’s only direct imitation of a canvas by Courbet along with the letter that articulates the dissonance between *Harmony* and *Sea at Palavas*.

Rarely do these seemingly disparate areas of Whistlerian scholarship converge at once, yet elements of japonisme, early depictions of the Thames in etching and painting, emulation of contemporaneous artists’ works, variation in painting, and compositional techniques in response to the changing landscape, all coalesce in the Trouville paintings. This study plans to break new ground in the previously marginalized period of the life and career of Whistler, autumn 1865, by addressing Whistler’s formative years as a modern artist through the lens of the aforementioned topics. The transitional period from representation to suggestion, the crux of which lies in the group of Trouville paintings, generally follows a chronological approach. Although Whistler was known to operate in several media and modes at once, the aesthetic trajectory of his riverscapes and seascapes follows a mostly linear path away from Realism and toward his mature, idiosyncratic style exemplified in his Nocturnes.

Elucidating the roots of change in aesthetics from Courbet’s Realism to the softly-painted, flattened composition of *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, Chapter 1 explores Whistler’s nascent artistic career. Since he was initially trained as an etcher, Whistler is observed according to his early graphic series, many of which were created during periods of travel. His etchings are the first to reflect his experimentation and artistic license to incorporate his newfound interest in Japanese design principles, years before he would assimilate them into his painting style. It is only after his conscious appropriation of Asian art objects in his paintings, followed by his deliberate recreation of scenes in Japanese woodcut prints in his compositions, that Whistler
finally integrates subtle artistic choices that reflect his admiration of the Eastern aesthetic represented in the aforementioned prints. Having assimilated this mode in his own paintings, Whistler quickly identified himself with this novel style in lieu of his previous loyalty to Realism; he explicitly documented the influence of Asian objects in his last work prior to leaving for Trouville, a self-portrait in his studio (1865-1866; Figure 3).

As Whistler no longer adhered solely to the principles of Courbet’s Realism, the symbolism of his representation of Courbet in *Harmony in Blue and Silver* is examined in Chapter 2. The discussion details yet questions the adulation Whistler previously held for Courbet as a sort of mentor, and further compares Courbet’s *Sea at Palavas* and Whistler’s recreation of it. Although Whistler rejected the reading of his work as symbolic, *Harmony in Blue and Silver* may be the one painting in which this kind of interpretation is not only readily accessible, but crucial to the understanding of his emerging individualism as an artist. To clarify Whistler’s shift in his relationship to nature and the stylistic modifications in *Harmony*, this chapter also addresses his earlier seascapes.

Chapter 3 broadens the study of the Trouville paintings to include all six from this period, each a view of the water placing the spectator on the coast. The Trouville scenes embrace increased abstraction and minimization of detail in order to create a more poetic representation of the coast, formally separating them from his former seascapes of the early 1860s that were painted in a more sculptural style reminiscent of Courbet. I investigate Whistler’s modes of working and influences concerning seascapes, particularly regarding the inclusion or exclusion of the figure and other signifiers of modernization in a burgeoning resort town, as well as the potential execution of painting *en plein air* alongside contemporary seascape artist Eugène Boudin, and the possibility of his specific allusion to a seascape by Édouard Manet. Meanwhile,
the indistinct nature of the coastal views forced Whistler to assess the significance of each element in a landscape as one that is part of a balanced design. This chapter also approaches *Sea and Rain*, the only other Trouville canvas that features a figural element, as evolution of the role of the figure within an abstracted landscape.

Finally, Chapter 4 compares Whistler’s newly-incorporated aesthetic choices of composition, palette, painting technique, and subject matter to another group of seascapes he produced during a multi-month sojourn to Chile, and subsequently to his Nocturnes. Whistler sought to redefine his art by severing himself from any formal alignment with other artists by first refuting avant-garde French Realism for contemporary classicism of English painters, such as Albert Moore, and art-for-art’s-sake. I contend, however, that Whistler was largely influenced by J.M.W. Turner, but chose to keep his admiration discreet as he attempted to usurp his role as a modern master of the abstracted waterscape. Whistler’s 1865 seascapes reveal a minimalism and proto-abstraction that become indispensable aspects of his mature work, the formalist focus of which is further accentuated by his musical titles and method of painting. I uniquely trace the trend of titles that describe canvases as “blue and silver” to reveal *Harmony* as a new starting point for Whistler’s mature artistic style. Whistler’s proclamations on the role of nature in art are also explored as they relate to his mature work, unveiling how they originally concretized in Trouville.

The 1860s were “a period of experimentation for Whistler but also one of uncertainty and artistic self-doubt” as he alternated between Realist and decorative, stylized depictions of

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19 Art for art’s sake was coined and popularized by Théophile Gautier in the mid-1850s; Algernon Swinburne then adopted the ideology that claimed beauty as the ultimate purpose of art. Swinburne further stated that art should therefore exist independently of emotion, representation, and message. Although Whistler’s Nocturnes are in concordance within the Aesthetic Movement, or Aestheticism, which combined the art-for-art’s-sake ideology with the recent trends of Neo-Classicism and japonisme. Scholars often cite the inaugural Grosvenor Gallery exhibition of 1877 as the consolidation of the Aesthetic Movement. Aestheticism was extended beyond art and commercialized to extend into interior design and fashion. As with Realism, Whistler later denoted Aestheticism in the mid-1880s.
Whistler definitively found the balance between his previous mode of Realism and his newly incorporated japonisme in *Harmony in Blue and Silver*. Whistler was “painfully insecure,” and would often rework his paintings many years after completing them, destroy canvases, or paint over them altogether.\(^{21}\) For such an extremely self-critical artist, it is imperative that Whistler never altered *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* after its completion in 1865. In 1892, his acquaintance Isabella Stewart Gardner became enamored with the painting, which was not for sale and privately owned by Whistler, upon seeing it in his studio. Whistler found it difficult to part with the painting and continuously delayed sending it overseas; one story even reported that Gardner hired a mutual friend to covertly remove the canvas from Whistler’s studio.\(^{22}\) Regardless of the actual events that took place, *Harmony in Blue and Silver* undoubtedly held personal value for Whistler. The Trouville set of paintings thus reveal a consolidation of the most successful parts of Whistler’s aesthetic explorations of the early 1860s, paving the way for his ultimate signature style of proto-abstraction found in his most famous Nocturnes.

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\(^{21}\) Sutherland, xv.

Chapter 1
Whistler’s Search for Artistic Identity

James McNeill Whistler’s artistic career began officially in 1855, ten years prior to his impromptu trip to the coast of Normandy, France, where he painted alongside Gustave Courbet. Whistler had been drawn to relocate to Paris from the United States in part by Courbet, who was the exemplar of the nonconforming, bohemian artist the young Whistler dreamt of becoming. Whistler’s *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* (1865; Figure 1), a reinterpretation of Courbet’s *Seashore at Palavas* (1854; Figure 2), therefore initially appears as an homage to one of the modern masters who inspired Whistler’s nascent career. The formal changes in composition, palette, and painting technique, however, reveal an aesthetic rejection of Courbet’s Realism and simultaneous concretization of Whistler’s independent style.

The early 1860s were largely a period of thematic and aesthetic exploration for Whistler, despite his professed alignment with Courbet. As finding one’s idiosyncratic method and point of view became increasingly important amongst a generation of anti-academic, contemporaneous painters, Whistler felt pressured to identify himself with an individual style. Since he was already well versed in etching, Whistler’s quickly executed graphic works showed a departure from strict naturalism and incorporation of new ways of depicting the observed vista more readily than his painted works.

In an attempt to mirror overall aesthetic trends, Whistler’s painting eventually shifted from French Realism to a style he gleaned from his study of Asian wares. Japonisme,\(^ {23} \) or the

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\(^ {23} \) This term was only coined in 1872 by Philippe Burty (1830-1890), “used to refer to this remarkable phenomenon which saw, amongst much else, extensive borrowing and absorption of Japanese concepts of art and design.” Rupert Faulkner and Richard Lane, *Masterpieces of Japanese Prints: Ukiyo-e from the Victoria and Albert Museum*
incorporation of “Asian design principles such as flattening, tertiary color, and bold asymmetric patterning,” would emerge as an evolution of the japonaiserie, or direct inclusion of Asian art objects, Whistler had previously employed. The painter would shed the inclusion of Japanese props in favor of integrating the compositional and formal aspects of Japanese prints into his works.  

*Harmony in Blue and Silver* displays Whistler’s full assimilation of japonisme. Immediately preceding his Trouville sojourn, however, he had started a self-portrait, the ultimately unfinished *The Artist in His Studio* (1865-1866; Figure 3), which he had planned to reproduce on a monumental scale and submit to the Salon. Whistler intentionally and successfully married the two divergent aesthetics into one statement that concretely presented him as an artist first and foremost affiliated with Eastern art objects, with a nod to the Western influences of Courbet and Velázquez. In the work of the latter, Whistler particularly admired color harmonies and combination of accurate depiction with a loose painting technique. Velázquez’s naturalism overlapped with Realism’s emphasis on contemporary subject matter, and his influence is especially remarkable in Whistler’s full-length portraits starting in the 1870s.

This chapter explores the integration of the Japanese-inspired elevated horizon line, flattened picture plane, and general reduction of detail in Whistler’s *Harmony*, elements that, surprisingly, appeared in his oeuvre up to seven years earlier in his nascent career. Whistler’s study of the Thames landscape led to the evolution of his etching style from the Realism of his “French Set,” exemplified by *Street at Saverne* (1858; Figure 4), to the flattened perspective and compositional simplicity of the “Thames Set” that is indicative of his burgeoning japonisme. The

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*24 Jan Frederik Heijbroek and Margaret MacDonald, Whistler and Holland* (Zwolle: Waanders; Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1997), 413, n. 81.
trajectory of his assimilation of the aforementioned design principles, a linear development in his etchings, would not come to full fruition in his paintings without the need to depict Asian art objects until *Harmony in Blue and Silver*.

This chapter also discusses Whistler’s fledgling artistic career and concentrates on the emergence of Eastern influences in Whistler’s work, from his compositional variations in his etchings to his appropriation of Eastern objects and recreation of Japanese woodblock print compositions. The aesthetic explorations of his early graphic series and inclusion of Asian decorative art objects in his figural studio paintings ultimately led to a synthesis of Western subject matter portrayed in a Japanese-influenced style featuring skewed perspective, shallow picture plane, harmoniously subdued color, and asymmetrical composition. With oil paint, however, Whistler further explored tonal harmony and the pictorial surface. Throughout this analysis, Whistler’s tenuous relationships with fellow artists, annual exhibitions, and general conflict of self-identity as a modern painter began to loom. The aesthetic changes Whistler made to Courbet’s *Seashore at Palavas* in his *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, which is more thoroughly explored in Chapter 2, reflect the japonisme reached in his Thames paintings of the mid-1860s and, most crucially, in his unfinished self-portrait.

**Whistler Beginnings: Etching as Experimentation**

Whistler entered into the professional art worlds of Paris and London through his successful and well received etchings. Formally trained in drawing from childhood, Whistler honed this skill throughout his life and applied it to etching in his first position of employment producing topographical maps of the Eastern coast of the United States. As his goals shifted toward an artistic profession, Whistler’s graphic work allowed him entry into artistic circles and
quickly gained him notoriety as a modern artist. As he became increasingly proficient in the medium, Whistler freely explored new subject matter, namely the Thames, in tandem with different modes of spatial construction and composition that allude to Japanese woodblock prints. Tracing the evolution of Whistler’s etching style in his nascent artistic career readily shows aesthetic experimentations from his realist beginnings to his awareness and assimilation of Japanese art, and thus reveals the development of a painterly style leading to his trip to Trouville in 1865.

A major impetus behind Whistler’s career choice as an artist was his brother-in-law, surgeon and draftsman Seymour Haden. Haden was an avid collector of Rembrandt’s etchings and cultivated Whistler’s interest in art from his first visit to London in 1844, when he relocated from Lowell, Massachusetts, to St. Petersburg with his family at the age of ten. Whistler was privately tutored in French and drawing while in Russia, though he would constantly visit Haden and his half-sister Deborah in London to convalesce from various bouts of illness. In 1848, Whistler chose to remain there.25 His love of art flourished in England as the Hadens encouraged Whistler’s study and practice of art. Whistler was so impassioned that he wrote to his father in 1849 informing him that he wished to be a painter.26 Shortly thereafter, however, tragedy struck; Major Whistler succumbed to cholera, and Whistler returned to the United States with his suddenly impoverished family.27

Despite being unable to afford art lessons in his new home, Whistler continued his independent studies by drawing. He enrolled in his father’s alma mater, the United States Military Academy at West Point, at the age of sixteen. Although Whistler took pride in this

25 Whistler stayed with the Hadens at their London residence at 62 Sloane Street.
27 Ibid., 16, 18.
lifestyle—he had dreamt of becoming a soldier as a child—he was discharged in 1854 because of poor grades in chemistry, in addition to having numerous demerits.\textsuperscript{28} Regardless, Whistler acquired a position as a draftsman with the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1855 through familial connections, producing “meticulous renderings of coastal profiles and maps;” it is in this role that Whistler became prolific in etching.\textsuperscript{29} The regimented occupation was unsatisfying to Whistler, as he still aspired to make a living as an artist.

Fueled by his love of art and the bohemian lifestyle, Whistler left the United States for Paris in the fall of 1855, at the age of twenty-one.\textsuperscript{30} During the same year, Courbet launched his “Pavillon du Réalisme” in response to the Salon’s refusal of several of his canvases, and thus became known as a central proponent of Realism, which denigrated Classicism and Romanticism in favor of a truthful and democratic art.\textsuperscript{31} Whistler, who appreciated the aesthetic value of each of the three debating schools of art, particularly admired Courbet for his unapologetic individualism.\textsuperscript{32} He dove into his studies by enrolling at the École Impériale et Spéciale de Dessin, but soon left his institutional program to study in the atelier of Charles Gleyre.\textsuperscript{33} Although Gleyre followed classicist conventions, he primarily encouraged his students to cultivate an individual style; Gleyre famously said that nature was “all right as an element of study, but it offers no interest,” since style “is everything.”\textsuperscript{34} Whistler “disdained taking lessons

\textsuperscript{30} Sutton, 19. Whistler had admired Henri Murger’s depiction of Parisian artist life in \textit{Scènes de la Vie de Bohème}.
\textsuperscript{31} Sutherland, 38-39, 42.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 42, 72.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 43.
\textsuperscript{34} Sutton, 22. This was said to student Claude Monet, who would study under Gleyre in the early 1860s.
from anybody” and would often go to the Louvre, which was conveniently located between his lodging and the studio, instead of attending class in order to copy works of the Old Masters.35

It was in the Louvre that Whistler met Henri Fantin-Latour in 1858. With his magnetic and outgoing personality, Whistler easily befriended his expatriate classmates and native French artists, with whom he discussed contemporary art theory.36 He quickly became part of Fantin’s group of friends, all self-identified Realists. The Salon of 1857 had popularized Courbet’s movement, and critics had recognized this “new art” portraying scenes of quotidian life as showing the “human side of art.”37

Whistler gained entry into Fantin’s circle primarily with a set of etchings, Twelve Etchings from Nature, also known as the “French Set,” made in 1857 and 1858.38 While some of its works were created in Paris and London, the majority were the outcome of a short expedition: accompanied by fellow artist Ernest Delannoy, Whistler travelled in France, Luxembourg, and the Rhineland with the intent of creating such a series.39 Whistler selected twelve naturalistically depicted scenes and portraits from the resulting portfolio and dedicated the complete edition to Haden,40 who had initially suggested he work directly from nature.41 These etchings show the influence of Barbizon Charles Jacque in the portraits and choice of pastoral scenes, François Bonvin in the village scenes, as seen in Street at Saverne (1858; Figure 4), and the general interest in seventeenth-century Dutch art, all of which were molded to fit the realist method
Whistler employed in this body of work.\textsuperscript{42} The focus on crisp, clear lines and the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt, whose etchings Haden avidly collected, is similarly remarkable, as is the elimination of detail at the edges of the compositions.\textsuperscript{43} The “French Set” was well received in the 1859 Salon and Royal Academy exhibitions, and was acquired later that year by the South Kensington Museum.\textsuperscript{44}

In 1859, Fantin-Latour and Whistler created an alliance with fellow painter Alphonse Legros, forming the \textit{Société des Trois}.\textsuperscript{45} Drawn together by an admiration of the realism promoted by Courbet, the trio advocated modern subjects as they hoped to shape the “art of the future.”\textsuperscript{46} The group associated itself with the avant-garde circles of both France and England, but hesitated to align itself officially with a particular school of art, prioritizing an appreciation of each artist’s individual style.\textsuperscript{47} Surprisingly, in this same year, Whistler permanently relocated from Paris to London, geographically distancing himself from the artist circles in which he was established. Possibly viewing London as a place from which Whistler could be the harbinger of a new movement in art, English Realism, Whistler saw the metropolis across the English Channel as a chance to differentiate himself and his art while instituting himself as a crucial liaison between the two art centers.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{42} Sutton, 23. Sutton points out the notable resemblance of Jacques’ and Whistler’s etched portraits, in particular.
\textsuperscript{44} MacDonald and de Montford, 10.
\textsuperscript{45} Sutherland, 49.
\textsuperscript{46} Lochnan, in \textit{James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination}, 33.
As an etcher, Whistler’s move to London was timely. Both the Salon and the Royal Academy had increasingly exhibited etchings since the 1850s, which led to the medium’s elevated status as fine art by the early 1860s. Etchings’ popularity in the democratizing art market simultaneously grew, in part due to the burgeoning middle class of industrialists who were increasingly playing a role in the consumption of art, particularly of prints. As advised by Haden, Whistler joined the Junior Etching Club in 1859, and each artist would grow to be recognized as a prominent figure of the “etching revival” in England.

Whistler, inspired by his new surroundings after his move, was immediately drawn to the industrializing Thames. In collaboration with Haden, Whistler planned to create four joint portfolios of etchings, with twelve plates each, showing “The Thames from its source to the sea.” Haden and Whistler would divide the work by subject, with the former depicting rural scenes, leaving Whistler to concentrate on the urban ones. Embracing the modern subject of the urban landscape as promoted by Charles Baudelaire, Courbet and the Société des Trois, Whistler’s plates show the London dockland, a typically unsavory, and thus novel, subject. The etchings are reminiscent of Charles Meryon’s etchings of the Seine in Paris, which Baudelaire had championed, stating, “I have rarely seen the natural solemnity of an immense city more poetically reproduced.” As Meryon had been unable to exhibit his works since the early 1850s, Whistler cleverly attempted to usurp his role in the Salon; he even went to the same Paris-based printer, Auguste Delâtre. Personal issues with Haden caused the pair to abandon “Thames from

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49 Sutherland, 55.
50 Heijbroek and MacDonald, 23. Haden joined the older Etching Club in 1860.
51 Heijbroek and MacDonald, 25.
52 Lochnan, in James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination, 40.
53 As quoted in Ibid., 34.
54 MacDonald and de Montford, 14.
its source to the sea” in 1864. While the plates, as a group, would remain unpublished for several years, Whistler individually printed and submitted images of this set to the academy until 1863.  

“A Series of Sixteen Etchings of Scenes on the Thames,” known as the “Thames Set,” is arguably Whistler’s most universally recognized group of etchings. Fifteen etchings made between 1859 and 1861, and an additional Thames landscape produced in the year of its publication, comprise the set, which was originally printed in London in 1871. Eleven of these represent the titular London riverscapes. Executed en plein air, the etchings show Whistler’s shifting interest toward depicting different atmospheric effects and a move away from his previous Rembrandt-esque chiaroscuro and finesse. True to the Realist doctrine, Whistler placed working-class figures in the immediate foreground, which act as an entry point into the industrial landscape. Whistler highlighted the worker in Black Lion Wharf (1859, first printed in 1861; Figure 5) and composed a tiered composition, where the eye meets the large repoussoir figure, then follows the diagonal waves across the middle-ground to the highest tier, the background row of buildings. Whistler’s meticulously detailed façade of buildings recalls his earlier “French Set” as it similarly focuses on the play of light and dark, yet highlights the pure negative space river’s water in contrast. The untouched representation of water is repeated through the “Thames Set;” the blank areas are central to the etchings and flatten the overall composition, further undermining conventional methods of depicting the recession of space. The structures are also shown in detail, while the fore- and middle-ground are summarily and sketchily rendered.  

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55 Lochnan, in James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination, 40-42. This was partially due to the response of Philippe Burty, a critic who revered Haden’s picturesque vistas and encouraged him to publish his own portfolio, but denigrated Whistler’s realism. By this point, Haden had also entered Paris’s etching circles by way of Fantin-Latour and Legros, and may have thought it no longer necessary for his recognition as an etcher.

56 This uneven focus is also likened to contemporaneous photography. Sutherland also notes that this lack of finish may be attributed to Whistler’s near-sightedness and attempt to portray movement. Sutherland, 56-57.
The “Thames Set” represents multiple, simultaneous explorations of the medium, framing, and pictorial space; ultimately, etchings such as *Old Westminster Bridge* (1859; Figure 6) seem to have directly informed the compositional changes Whistler made in his translation of *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* from Courbet’s *Seashore at Palavas*. The horizontal format Whistler uses in this etching forces a panoramic view, and the space is structured in horizontal tiers.\(^{57}\) The “Thames Set” reveals how Whistler “depicted his subjects as if viewed at a glance, minutely finishing the part in focus while eliminating or barely indicating peripheral detail,” moving toward reductionism in this medium before doing so in his oil paintings.\(^{58}\) Baudelaire, after seeing the plates in 1862, praised their subtlety and called them enlightened.\(^{59}\)

In *Old Westminster Bridge* and other etchings in this portfolio, Whistler began to address the two-dimensionality of the medium and reject traditional depictions of space; he flattens the image, and yet “the illusion of recession is given through the placement of large repoussoir figures in the foreground plane, alternating bands of pattern and void and diagonal directional lines in the middle ground, and the raising of the horizon line in the background.”\(^{60}\) These aesthetic decisions were derived partially from his study of Meryon’s Seine etchings, but also reveal Whistler’s interest in diverging from academic conventions of landscape. The varying ways in which Whistler explores pictorial space in the “Thames Set” suggests his emerging interest in Japanese art as well as his desire to combine divergent influences.\(^{61}\) Although present

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\(^{57}\) MacDonald and de Montford, 63. Thirteen of the sixteen etchings in “Thames Set” are in horizontal format.

\(^{58}\) Lochnan, in *James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination*, 35.

\(^{59}\) Baudelaire, after seeing the plates in 1862, found that these etchings revealed both improvisation and inspiration in their subtlety. Ibid., 38.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 34.

\(^{61}\) Since there is no documentation of Whistler’s first exposure to Japanese woodcut prints, it is impossible to definitively claim that the “Thames Set” was directly influenced by such works, especially since many of the defining aspects of japonisme may have been reached by challenging principles of representation and design as determined by academic art.
in these 1859 etchings, the use of the repoussoir figure, high horizon line, and emphasis of the picture plane do not culminate in Whistler’s paintings until the mid-1860s, most crucially in his 1865 Harmony in Blue and Silver.

Whistler’s etchings, originally grounded by Realist subject matter, portrayed in a traditional style harkening back to Rembrandt’s images, and showed the trajectory towards reductionism of compositional and spatial experimentation, a path that readily revealed Whistler’s incorporation of Japanese design principles in his own œuvre. Congruent with the teachings of Realism, Whistler’s “French Set” gained him entry into the modern art world in the late 1850s. Following his relocation to London from Paris, Whistler found inspiration in his new environment along the Thames. Whistler’s confrontation of the working class and the non-picturesque through his Thames compositions reflected his interest in realism, and the industrial landscape soon replaced the previous emphasis on the figural component in his works. While the reductionism, emphasis on the environment, and compositional choices potentially informed by Whistler’s study of Japanese woodcuts, are clearly observable in his “Thames Set,” a similar, yet less linear, trajectory can be seen in his paintings. Whistler’s confidence in his drafting skills and directness of working _en plein air_ allowed him to experiment with composition and modes of representation as he repeatedly revisited the same subject matter.

As Whistler’s production of etchings had been catalyzed by Haden, it similarly was halted because of his brother-in-law. Haden, who was inspired to start etching artistically after witnessing the success of Whistler’s “French Set,” quickly rose to popularity on both sides of the English Channel and was championed for his traditional approach to etching. His drypoint Thames works were acclaimed by Philippe Burty, whose approval Whistler sought but failed to
In envy, the spirited and competitive Whistler temporarily stopped producing graphic works after the “Thames Set;” he would not produce, or at the very least, publish, any etchings until 1870. Whistler’s distancing from Haden as his mentor foreshadowed his later renouncement of Courbet’s influence in 1867, shaping the beginning of a pattern of behavior and artistic deviation that would continuously propel Whistler to seek an increasingly independent aesthetic in his work and a desire for stardom that set him apart from others. Whistler’s experiments in etching were subsequently synthesized in his oil paintings of the early-to-mid-1860s as he simultaneously appropriated Eastern aesthetics, which I discuss below.

“The Wind Blows from the East:” Eastern Influence on Whistler’s Early Paintings

Whistler’s infatuation with Eastern art started in the late 1850s, as the market became inundated with Japanese wares following Commodore Perry’s expedition that led to the reopening of international trading ports in Japan in 1854, ending an embargo dating back to the mid-1600s. Engraver Félix Bracquemond acquired the series of Katsushika Hokusai woodcuts, “Manga,” from Whistler’s etching printer Delâtre in 1856. Whistler, Degas, Manet, and Fantin-Latour were soon thereafter introduced to the woodcuts by Bracquemond, and quickly became similarly enamored with Japanese art, further circulating prints amongst overlapping artistic circles. London’s Great Exposition of 1862, an International Exhibition that displayed over

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63 Whistler and Haden would officially stop speaking in the spring of 1867.
65 Sutton, 45.
66 Ibid., 45-46. For instance, Whistler introduced W.M. Rossetti to woodcuts prints.
67 Klaus Berger, Japonisme in Western Painting from Whistler to Matisse (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33-34. In 1862, Godwin included Japanese woodcuts in the decoration of his home in Bristol; he and Whistler met in 1863 and had a close friendship, though the direction of influence as far as interest in Japanese aesthetics is difficult to discern.
nine hundred Japanese and Chinese objects ranging from textiles to lacquer ware, prints and fans, fueled widespread European interest in such foreign items as they once again became available to the European market.68

During this period, Whistler was known to frequent Paris’s worldly establishments such as La Porte Chinoise, established in 1862, and London’s equivalent, Farmer & Rogers’ Oriental Warehouse,69 from which he built his own collection of Eastern art and utilitarian objects, from screens and blue-and-white pottery to kimonos and woodcut prints.70 Whistler’s somewhat undiscriminating appreciation of Eastern objects mirrored the diverse and abundant objects displayed in the Great Exposition; he collected items ranging from various regions, eras, and styles, seemingly only for their decorative value and aesthetic impact. In 1863, Whistler returned from a trip to Holland with new inspiration to profit from the craze surrounding Asian art. Incorporating such objects into his own oeuvre, Whistler printed various impressions of his etchings on Japanese paper he had purchased in Amsterdam. Upon his return, Whistler wrote that he had “ruined [him]self in old Japonese [sic] China;” these purchases extended beyond his interest as a collector as he began including Asian porcelain and prints into his paintings.71

During the same year, Whistler’s Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl (1862; Figure 7) established his status as a controversial figure with its exhibition in the Salon des Refusés, the

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69 The Warehouse famously acquired objects that had been exhibited in the 1862 International Exhibition.
70 Ibid., 45, and Berger, 33. Rosalind Birnie Philip, Beatrice McNeill Whistler’s sister, bequest a number of prints to the British Museum and the University of Glasgow by Utamaro, Kunisada, Yeishi, and Kiyonaga. Miss Birnie Philip inherited the works from her sister, who passed away eight years before Whistler, but the prints are considered to have belonged to her husband.

By 1879, Whistler’s had amassed over 300 Chinese and Japanese porcelain objects, the majority of which he was forced to sell in May of that year due to his bankruptcy. Although catalogs were published by Baker & Sons and Sotheby for the two 1879 and 1880 sales, they are not illustrated and contain minimal descriptive information. No complete inventory of Whistler’s collection exists.
exhibition that followed its refusal by both the Royal Academy and the Salon. The painting’s ambiguous subject matter and emphasis on the decorative, along with the figure’s red hair and gaze at the viewer, merged symbols of Whistler’s Pre-Raphaelite fellow artists in London with his newly flattened picture plane, derived in part from his etchings and also from his study of Japanese prints. The nearly monochromatic work, presented without the allegorical, historical, or moral conventions of the Academy, puzzled critics. In response, Whistler initiated his notorious polemics by submitting a rebuttal to the London Athenaeum. With Symphony in White, No. 1, Whistler had reached the artistic reputation that he had so admired in Courbet as an innovative artist with a strong personality and unconventional point of view.

Whistler took advantage of the popularity of Symphony in White, No. 1 as he continued to stray from the realist style he had briefly adopted, and chose instead to focus on the incorporation of Japanese accoutrements in his interior scenes. He included the same model, his mistress Joanna Hiffernan, in a similar white muslin dress in Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl (1862; Figure 8). She is featured with a Chinese blue-and-white vase and a fan, on which Hiroshige’s woodcut The Banks of Sumida River is reproduced. Whistler paired the exotic object with a superimposed Japanese motif of cherry blossoms in the bottom right corner in direct quotation of Asian works. While the influence of Eastern art is primarily illustrated in the physical presence of such objects, the superimposition of the blossoms displays the beginnings of Whistler’s absorption of Japanese motifs in his painting, even if only in the

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72 Originally called The White Girl.
73 Fantin wrote to Whistler of the exhibition: “now you are famous! your picture is very well hung, everyone can see it - you are having the greatest success. I am very happy to be the first to tell you. We thought the whites very good they are superb, from a distance (the best judge) they look very good you cannot imagine the curtain the success is one of distinction everyone thinks it very fine very superior. Courbet calls your picture an apparition, spiritualistic and (this annoys him) he says it is good (it annoys him, he had been sulking).” Henri Fantin-Latour to James McNeill Whistler, [15 May 1863], MS Whistler F12; GUW 01081.
74 MacDonald and de Montford, An American in London, 87.
imitation of two-dimensional Japanese prints. In the reflection in the mirror, included as another decorative element of his domestic setting, is one of Whistler’s Thames riverscapes, and a small etching. *The Little White Girl* therefore is exemplary of the artist’s attempt to negotiate between Eastern and Western influences, as well as between the realistic and the decorative. Whistler’s playful integration of different styles in such formative oil paintings is typical of his desire not to be pigeonholed into one specific aesthetic.

Whistler included Eastern objects in his paintings with the ultimate goal of presenting pure beauty, without a narrative reflection. The presence of Japanese prints had a distinct and consistent precedence in Whistler’s canvases of the early-to-mid-1860s, as seen in *Caprice in Purple and Gold: The Golden Screen* (1864; Figure 9), in which a kimono-clad model observes Hiroshige woodcut prints in front of a Japanese screen. Whistler’s mother wrote on October 2nd of the same year of her son’s decoration of his home with Japanese and Chinese art:

> He considers the paintings upon them the finest specimens of art, and his companions (artists), who resort here for an evening’s relaxation occasionally, get enthusiastic as they handle and examine the curious figures portrayed….He has also a Japanese book of paintings, unique in their estimation. You will not wonder that Jemie’s inspiration should be (under such influences) of the same cast.

Whistler’s insertion of identifiable woodcuts—the “paintings” to which his mother refers—in *The Golden Screen* and *The Little White Girl* revealed specific sources of inspiration for the artist while identifying him as a modern painter. He reflected contemporary aesthetic interests, imbued with subjectivity as he framed them within the context of his own oeuvre and his domestic environment.

Whistler’s formal assimilation of Japanese art is explicitly apparent in *The Golden Screen* (1864), *The Lange Lijzen of the Six Marks* (1864), *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine* (1863-

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76 Anna Matilda Whistler to James H. Gamble, 10–11 February 1864, MS Whistler W516; GUW 06522.
1865), and *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony* (1864/1870),\(^{77}\) four canvases with compositions directly derived from Japanese prints.\(^{78}\) Through this embrace of Japanese woodcuts, Whistler attempted to create his own version of Eastern art, possibly in response to its popularity in the art market. Complete devotion to the Westernized reproduction of Japanese woodcuts, from elements within his works and to the works themselves, cemented Whistler, “without a rival, as the first and for the time being the only painter who could draw inspiration from Japanese art.”\(^{79}\) Three of the four aforementioned paintings, with the exception of *The Balcony*, accentuate the decorative aspect of the Eastern art to which the Western audience was drawn; they depict a solitary figure in a kimono surrounded by a mélange of Chinese and Japanese objects in a Western recreation of an imagined scene in the Far East. In *Variations in Flesh Colour and Green: The Balcony* (1864/1870; Figure 10), however, Whistler crucially merged the industrial landscape of the Thames with his source material, an eighteenth-century woodcut series in his collection by Torii Kiyonaga, “Minami Juni-Ko” (c. 1783; Figure 11), and possibly a Katsushika Hokusai, *The Sazaido of the Gohyaku Rakanji Temple* from “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji” (c. 1830-32; Figure 12).\(^{80}\)

Whistler portrayed the misty Thames in combination with Japanese accoutrements and woodcut-derived composition in the single scene of *The Balcony*. The dual presence addressed the concurrent changes in his paint handling and palette. Whistler subsumed the Realist depiction of the industrial Thames by conflating it with an idealized setting, revealing his interest in

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\(^{77}\) Whistler altered the painting in 1870.

\(^{78}\) Sutherland, 83-84.


creating an aestheticized scene. Whistler imitated the structure of Kiyonaga’s woodcut by flattening the picture plane, particularly with his inclusion of an unmodulated expanse of teal that dominates the foreground, on which he placed his cherry blossom decoration; the quotations from Japanese prints are reiterated by his signature and the ambiguous perspective. While the foreground’s concentrated hues contrast the soft tones and outlines of the atmospheric industrial landscape in the distance, an overall use of thin paint, showing the careful and economical marks of the artist’s hand, is observable throughout the canvas. Despite the apparent focus on the Japanese elements of this composition, Whistler’s departure from a realistic depiction of landscape is similarly pronounced. The misty distant bank of the Thames is framed by the post and railing of the balcony, which acts as a visual reminder of the fantastical aspect of the scene.

With his newly discovered genre, Whistler’s portrayals of women amongst the trappings of fashionable Eastern wares gained him popularity in his blooming career as a painter. In his figural paintings of 1863 and 1864, Whistler’s conscious imitation of Japanese woodcut compositions and incorporation of Eastern art objects show the artist’s increased interest in creating a general aesthetic of beauty. Whistler attempted to distinguish himself from academically-trained artists by deliberately imitating his understanding of the aesthetic of Eastern art, while also addressing the overall trend amongst Pre-Raphaelite artists of prioritizing beauty and the art for art’s sake dictum. Already distancing himself from the yoke of realism while drawing inspiration from the scenery around him, Whistler opted to “devote himself, in

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81 Whistler’s cartouche signature with the butterfly was likely added in 1870.
82 Although the paintings were criticized for a lack of finish, they were generally well-liked by the public.
83 In a letter to his family on November 12, 1864, Rossetti referred to Whistler as the “Japanese artist.” Sutton, 48.
comparative isolation, to figurative painting with Japanese principles of color and design,” which would later also be “informed with a strong element of classicism.”

These canvases, however, show a kind of tension that is not reflected in Whistler’s contemporaneous portrayals of the Thames. They reveal a novel approach in Whistler’s oeuvre as he explored the limits of an immediate aesthetic, reflecting his perception of Eastern wares. His lack of academic training in painting the figure, however, made this a frustrating process.

During his work on Lange Lijzen, Whistler complained to Fantin:

I should like to talk to you about myself and my own painting - But at this moment I am so discouraged - always the same thing - always such painful and uncertain work! I am so slow! - When will my execution be quicker when I say execution I mean something quite different - you understand - I produce very little, because I scrape off so much […] There are times when I think I have learned something - and then I am altogether discouraged […] Oh Fantin I know so little - things do not go quickly?

Not only was the portrayal of the figure a source of intense self-criticism for Whistler, but, ultimately and profoundly, the human figure did not cooperate with his “search for a radically new kind of vision.”

**From Icon to Index: Whistler’s Japonisme**

Whistler’s initially introduced Asian objects in his work by deliberately appropriating such items within a Western setting. As the aesthetic accents doubled as symbols of modernity in vogue with contemporaneous trends in collection, Whistler’s paintings became exemplars of japonaiserie, in which Eastern objects, though present within the setting, are largely used as ancillary decorations. Whistler was one of the first European artists to treat Asian art objects as

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84 Spencer, in *Whistler: A Reexamination*, 54-55.
86 Holden, 14.
87 Japonaiserie is largely considered the initial recognition of Japanese, and often also Chinese, art objects in European art, which frequently would evolve into japonisme, or the assimilation of design principles derived from the study of Eastern art objects. Yoko Chiba claims that all Western artists associated with japonisme previously included elements of japonaiserie in their oeuvres.
elements of his own compositions; Édouard Manet’s 1868 portrait of Émile Zola (Figure 13) includes several Japanese prints hung on the wall of the background, while Claude Monet’s unabashed appropriation of Japanese fans appeared with a kimono-clad model in his 1876 La Japonaise (Figure 14), likely based on Whistler’s Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine (1863-1865; Figure 15). Although this japoniserie encouraged Whistler to continue to reject the academic preference for narrative or didacticism in his paintings in favor of the overall aesthetic, it is in his Thames paintings, created around the same time, that Whistler fully embraced Japanese aesthetic principles in a way that would be sustained in his oeuvre.

Japonisme soon replaced Whistler’s previous japoniserie, as the painter would shed the inclusion of Japanese props in favor of the compositional and formal aspects of Japanese prints.\(^88\) In an undated publication on Hiroshige, The Colour Prints of Hiroshige, author E.F. Strange remarks that Whistler collected works with “lighter, more delicate colors,” instead of the more popular brightly-hued, high-contrast prints typical of Hiroshige.\(^89\) As a result, Whistler’s paintings, particularly those of the Thames that were produced concurrently with his figural works, began to show a congruent interest in Japanese aesthetics in his compositions, uncertain perspective, and lighter, more harmonious palette. Although Whistler similarly drew inspiration from the subject matter and compositional format of Japanese woodblock prints for these paintings, the subject of the Thames more readily allowed a synthesis of Japanese design principles within Whistler’s art.\(^90\)

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\(^89\) Heijbroek and MacDonald, 413, n. 81.
\(^90\) Sutton, 49.

\(^90\) Whistler returned to Japanese woodblock prints as inspiration for his *Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Old Battersea Bridge* (c.1872-1875), but otherwise did not base his compositions on such prints after the 1860s.
As Whistler familiarized himself with the Thames as a subject for his paintings starting in 1862, his discovery of “the beautiful in all conditions and in all times” and his attempt to “create romance out of industry” become increasingly apparent. His forays into doing so proved successful; by 1863, with three such paintings sold to the Greek patron Luke Alexander Ionides, Whistler’s paintings grew more profitable than his etchings. This newfound confidence in the medium allowed him to focus exclusively on his painting and temporarily abandon etching in 1863. With this shift in medium, Whistler was able to begin to explore tonal harmony fully as a mode of expression in his works.

Whistler’s use of japonisme, which formulated in his Thames paintings circa 1863, is first remarkable in his etchings, as with many of his artistic deviations. The “Thames Set” elucidates Whistler’s initial concerns in depiction of the general atmosphere, noticeable in his gestural depiction of the sky, which was formerly left untouched in his graphic works. In Old Westminster Bridge, and especially in Early Morning, Battersea (Battersea Dawn) (Cadogan Pier) (c. 1863, Figure 16), Whistler lightly applied sweeping lines in various directions in drypoint to create the illusion of a misty and shifting atmosphere. Although the faint lines do not cover the surface of the entire image, the directional strokes appear to encompass the scene, inundating the vista as though it were seen through a veil of color. This tonal addition to Battersea Dawn is comparable to Whistler’s choice of a harmonious, muted palette in his Thames paintings, which create a similar effect of a haze over the image. By excluding figures

92 Heijbroek and MacDonald, 25. The paintings were Grey and Silver: Old Battersea Reach (1863), Chelsea in Ice (1864), and Battersea Reach (c.1863). Whistler also acquired patrons Frederick R. Leyland, a London-based merchant, and banker William C. Alexander around this time. MacDonald and de Montford, 10.
93 While many of Whistler’s early canvases were based on his previous etchings, the relationship between the media is reversed here, as Whistler emphasized the tonal over the linear in Early Morning (Battersea Dawn) (Cadogan Pier).
from the composition, and by mitigating the emphasis on recognizable landmarks, Whistler concentrated on the overall effect of the scene. As one of his last etchings prior to his Trouville trip, *Battersea Dawn* emphasizes Whistler’s interest in conveying the essence of the landscape through tone as he minimized detail and realism.

Whistler further explored atmospheric effects in his Thames paintings, with an increased awareness and confidence in the medium. His Thames paintings of 1864, most notably *Harmony in Grey: Chelsea in Ice* (1864; Figure 17), emphasize their mode of creation. The overall technique includes “areas of creamy or smoothed or scumbled paint applied with energetic brushwork” as opposed to his previous mode of painting which involved thick applied paint with a palette knife, as inspired by Courbet.94 The lack of modeling renders the foreground elements of figures and balustrade on the same visual plane as the sky and ice on the river, and only the fading edges of the silhouetted Battersea factories across the water and indiscernible high horizon provide visual cues to a recession of space. The tactility of the surface of the canvas is amplified in this manner, which allows each component of the painting to be construed as a design element, almost becoming independent of its significance within the riverscape. Details therefore nearly become obsolete; only their color and placement within the composition are stressed.

The technical experiments in *Chelsea in Ice* contribute to a surprisingly abstract depiction of the scene. The application of paint creating a misty effect is also visually reminiscent of the washes of paint used in Japanese woodblock paintings, conjuring this influence without reproducing the prints themselves, as a noticeable shift in his way of working. The Japanese influence is often stated in Whistler’s work to have been equally inspired by the natural

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94 MacDonald and de Montford, 91.
environments and conditions the artist observed; after Whistler moved to Chelsea, and closer to the Thames, in 1863, the river can also be seen as a source of inspiration for horizontality, subtle color gradations, hazy atmosphere, and a lack of true depth, since the horizon simply presents a simultaneous illusion of infinite space and a symbolic end to the space. Whistler would later describe one of his contemporaneous canvases as painted “in one go and consequently...not much impasted.”

The visible quickness of execution in the fluidity and simplified forms of *Chelsea in Ice*, which would be more fully explored in his Trouville seascapes including *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, gives the painting a sense of effortlessness that is also absent in Whistler’s previous Japanese-inspired paintings.

Whistler’s early 1860s portrayals of the Thames were largely based on observed scenes, either produced *en plein air* as with his etchings or from his window overlooking the river. While his acknowledgement of Japanese woodcuts’ washes and design principles are noticeable, Whistler’s simplification of form may also be attributed to theories shared within the Société des Trois. Fantin-Latour and Legros had a friendship that spanned a decade dating to their early days as art students under Lecoq de Boisbaudran. Boisbaudran’s theories centered on the importance of memory as a source of inspiration, as it would stimulate the imagination, and thus, artistic innovation. Crucially, Boisbaudran felt that the ideal work of art would link representation with suggestion, a direction in which Whistler’s art would increasingly evolve. Whistler’s shift away from Realism and toward the evocation of a mood is evident in his Thames paintings of 1863 and 1864 as he mitigated details by reducing foreground elements to their silhouettes and

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95 MacDonald and de Montford, 85. Whistler was specifically referring to *Battersea Reach* (c.1863), a painting which includes a greater amount of detail than the Chelsea Wharf and Westminster Bridge paintings.
96 Sutton, 22. Boisbaudran’s theories were published in 1862, but Whistler undoubtedly would have been familiarized with his concepts through his friendships with contemporaries. The importance of memory in Whistler’s work will be further explored in Chapter 4 of this thesis.
97 Sutton, 23. Art historian Henri Focillon has also claimed that this theory may have led Whistler to accept more Japanese principles in his art.
blurring recognizable structures. These canvases therefore merge contemporary aesthetic theory with Japanese-influenced facture, mirroring the combination of Western and Eastern influences apparent in Whistler’s contemporaneous interior scenes, but in a subtler and more integrated manner.

Whistler remained reluctant to omit the japonaiserie of his earlier paintings completely for the following few years, even following the Trouville trip. Nevertheless, the japonisme that is evident in the flattened picture plane, high horizon line, and compositional reduction, implemented in modulated, subdued tonal washes of color emphasizing the mode of creation, became increasingly apparent in his canvases, foreshadowing the changes he would adopt in Harmony in Blue and Silver in 1865. Instead of concentrating on his previous literal inclusion of Eastern art in his own work, Whistler alluded to its aesthetic in his early Thames landscapes, and in so doing, emphasized the painted surface while moving towards reductionism.

A Visible Search for Artistic Identity: Whistler’s Self-Portrait

In the summer of 1865 and immediately preceding his trip to Trouville, Whistler was actively revising his public image in a self-portrait. Although he had executed several self-portraits in the 1850s when he initially arrived in Paris, producing five, The Artist in His Studio (1865-1866, unfinished; Figure 3) was the first of his works to return to this subject in his art in several years. Whistler’s previous self-portraits, such as his earliest Self-Portrait with a Hat (1857-1859; Figure 18), were modelled largely after those of Courbet. Whistler did not only mimic the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt and confident expression of Courbet as noticeable in his Self-Portrait with a Black Dog (1842; Figure 19), but he also aligned himself with the typical

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98 Two nearly identical studies are extant, though this argument features the one housed in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.
bohemian dress of the artist. In another self-depiction in 1865, however, he is dressed as a dandy. Shunning the uniform associated with the working-class status of the Realist artist, Whistler’s 1865 portrayal showed him as an urban flâneur.  

Whistler significantly represented himself as unquestionably linked with japonisme in his 1865 rendering. In a letter to Fantin-Latour, dated August 16, 1865, he spoke of his enthusiasm for the canvas:

I have done a sketch of it which is really good - it shows the interior of my studio - porcelain and all. You are there, and Moore, the white girl sitting on the couch, and the Japanese girl walking along! An apotheosis therefore of everything to outrage the Academicians, the colours I have chosen are charming - Me in light grey - Jo's white dress - the flesh-coloured dress of the Japanese girl (seen from behind) you and Moore in black - the studio background grey - It's upright, and will be about ten feet high, and six or seven wide.

This painting never came to fruition in its monumental format, though in its conception, Whistler clearly attempted to rival Courbet’s own grandiose statement of self-promotion, *The Painter’s Studio.*

*The Painter’s Studio, A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of my Artistic and Moral Life* (1854-1855, Figure 20) was the centerpiece of Courbet’s seminal *Pavillon du Réalisme* of 1855, in which he “demonstrated how the realities of the artist’s daily life, his shifting aesthetic allegiances, the position he hoped to secure for himself in the Paris art world, could all be marshalled [sic] to contribute to a complex, monumental and yet deeply personal image.”

Courbet featured himself at the center of the nineteen-foot-long canvas, oblivious to, yet surrounded by, two distinct groups. On the left are characters signifying the trials of everyday life, and hence the subject of his Realism. They are countered on the right by individualized

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100 James McNeill Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, 16 August 1865, Library of Congress, PWC 1/33/1; GUW 11477.
persons at the foreground of the Parisian art world, including art critics Baudelaire and Champfleury, in addition to Courbet’s patron, Alfred Bruyas. Courbet included allusions to traditional and academic art, as in the forgotten still life objects on the ground and the nude figure that he ignores in favor of his large canvas. Mocking academic rules of genre hierarchy with history painting at its pinnacle, Courbet literally and figuratively aggrandized the subject of landscape, not only with the centralized canvas, but also in the faint, wall-sized landscapes in the background. As a “manifesto of Realism,” Courbet said of this painting, “I simply wanted to draw forth from a complete acquaintance with tradition the reasoned and independent consciousness of my individuality.”

In comparison, Whistler’s 1865 description of his self-portrait reveals a similar goal; Whistler aspired to create another scandalous work that would rival his own Symphony in White No. 1, while cementing his self-image and aesthetic. Conceptually, the painting appears to be in dialogue with Courbet’s The Painter’s Studio, as Whistler intended to include Fantin-Latour and Albert Moore, representing the art world, in duality with the subjects and inspiration of his art in the two models. The Artist in His Studio also addresses traditional influences in its inclusion of a Rembrandt print on the rear wall to Whistler’s right, and to his left, a mirror that recalls Velázquez’s masterpiece, Las Meninas, especially in combination with Whistler’s outward gaze as he pauses in his work. Unlike Courbet’s The Painter’s Studio, however, Whistler primarily included his influences and excluded allusions to the academic art he rejected.

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102 Noon and Riopelle, 41.
104 Whistler planned to submit the finished canvas to the Royal Academy show of 1866.
105 Whistler met Moore in 1865 and quickly adopted his view of art for art’s sake.
106 Courbet’s 1855 The Painter’s Studio was also inspired by Velázquez’s self-portrait, though Whistler borrows more extensively from the Spanish master in the depiction of his own studio. Champfleury, in his writings on the 1851 Salon, had stated, “Only those who know Velázquez can understand Courbet.” As quoted Tinterow and Lacambre, 41.
Whistler’s *The Artist in His Studio* shows him at work in his No. 7 Chelsea Row residence. Atypically uncluttered for the Victorian era, the ambiguous, self-constructed space acts both as domestic environment and workspace, and suggests Whistler’s complete immersion in his identity as an artist. He carefully displayed his foremost source of inspiration, Eastern art, in the form of blue-and-white Chinese porcelain displayed on five shelves, three hanging Japanese scrolls, and the standing, kimono-clad model in the center of the image.\(^{107}\) Paired with this figure is a quotation of his earlier *Symphony in White, No.1*: a reclining model on the sofa, dressed in white. Both figures are painted so thinly that they appear translucent, and their sheerness indicates that they are “figments of the artist’s imagination, embodiments of the aesthetic influences constantly in dialogue when he paints,” thus also reinforcing the fantastical aspect Whistler attributed to his contemporaneous figural compositions.\(^{108}\) Whistler’s new mode of painting with thin washes of muted color, as the result of his japonisme, reveals the artist’s hand. The combination of this method with a shallow recession of space contributes to a fairly flat rendering of the scene.

Whistler borrowed from his previous controversial *Symphony in White, No. 1* to remind the viewer of his notoriety within the art world and encompassed Asian objects to show himself as a fashionable, worldly, and progressive figure. As he abandoned his original idea of including peers Fantin-Latour and Moore, Whistler’s perceived artistic identity is independent of contemporary artists and unique in its combination of Eastern and Western aesthetics. His gaze, directed at the viewer, seems to imply that this deliberate culmination of japonisme and


\(^{108}\) Singletary, 38.
innovative painting style are reminders of his avant-garde status in the art world. These informed his own self-perception, as well as the image he wished to cultivate and project as a painter.

Whistler’s formulation of his self-image culminated in The Artist in His Studio, which revealed the artist’s aesthetic allegiances as distinctly separate from his Realist beginnings. His progress on this painting, which started in the summer of 1865, was crucially halted by Whistler’s sojourn in Trouville. Whistler’s attempt to balance his recent infatuation with Eastern art, his beginnings as a draftsman inspired by Old Masters, and the impact of his alliances with contemporary artists is clarified as these are all elements that comprise his self-image.

Conclusion

“As for Whistler, the European masters do not suit him or no longer suffice for him: he has exhibited a pastiche of Chinese painting [...] this painting is but a decoration for a screen,” critic Louis Auvray wrote in response to Whistler’s La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine exhibited in the 1865 Paris Salon.109 As the young Whistler was still forming an artistic identity in the late 1850s and early 1860s, he vacillated between creating graphic and painterly works, independent and collaborative projects, plein-air naturalism and fantastical studio depictions, attempting to enter the avant-garde artist circles of both Paris and London. Throughout all of the iterations of Whistler’s aesthetic in his fledgling career, elements of japonisme remained a constant in his œuvre from their initial integration in the later 1850s. Whistler’s response to Eastern objects precedes any significant, similar aesthetic shift in the works of his contemporaries, thus earning him the title of the “Japanese artist.”110

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110 See note 38 above.
Whistler’s competitive earliest foray into a professional artistic career in etching readily shows a correlation between the progression of his compositional style and that associated with japonisme. His initial interest in Japanese art was first shown in the compositional cropping and spatial organization apparent in the “Thames Set,” particularly in the vertical stacking of perspectival depth and asymmetrical composition epitomized in his etchings in Black Lion Wharf. Once introduced to his canvases, however, the combination of figural painting with a definitive intent to reference Asian aesthetics, was soon followed by the use of Japanese prints as compositional templates, exposing a deliberate and methodical approach to his incorporation of Eastern art. Finally, Whistler achieved the more allusive aspects of integrated japonisme in his Thames riverscapes, seen in his flattening of space, emphasis in horizontals and diagonals, diffused light, and reduction of detail. The Artist in His Studio seemingly reflects the stages of japonaiserie and japonisme; he visually inserts an array of Asian items and achieves a synthesis of his Western subject matter in his allusion to the self-portrait of Courbet.

While both the Trouville canvas and The Artist in Studio are reactions to Courbet’s past works, Harmony in Blue and Silver bluntly addresses and reimagines Courbet’s Seashore at Palavas, borrowing its basic compositional structure and subject. His homage to Courbet ultimately turns into a rejection of his influence. The Artist in his Studio focuses on the construction of Whistler’s public image, signaling Whistler’s self-identification as an artist primarily influenced by Eastern art and immediately preceding the Trouville sojourn. Whistler’s visual statement of stylistic independence, no longer tethered to Realism, is examined in the following chapter.

111 This etching resurfaces in the background of Whistler’s Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1 (Portrait of the Artist’s Mother), 1871, and was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1859, along with four other of his graphic works and At the Piano, 1858–1859.
Chapter 2

Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville: Statement of Departure and Critique of Courbet

“Courbet! and his influence was odious!” Whistler wrote to fellow artist Fantin-Latour in 1867; “[i]t’s not poor Courbet whom I find loathsome, anymore than his work - As always I recognize the qualities they have - I am not complaining either about the influence of his painting on mine - there was none, and you will not find it in my canvases.”\(^{112}\) Decrying Courbet’s Realism, Whistler denounces his former mentor’s emulation of nature and straightforward interpretation of it: “All he had to do was to open his eyes and paint what was there in front of him! beautiful nature and the whole caboodle! that was all there was to it!”\(^{113}\) In his reinterpretation of Seashore at Palavas (1854; Figure 2), Whistler transcribes the Realist seascape into a painting showing its essence, and simultaneously, one in which he affronts Courbet and his doctrine. In the same sentence, Whistler states that the viewers who were drawn into exhibitions featuring Courbet, then “saw - the piano, the White Girl, the Thames pictures - the seascapes ... canvases produced by a nobody puffed up with pride at showing off his splendid gifts to other painters - qualities which only required strict education to make their owner the master he really is - not a degenerate student.”\(^{114}\) Whistler’s incessant exploration of various styles in his art of the 1860s reaches a harmonious culmination in his 1865 seascapes, the paragon of which is Harmony of Blue and Silver: Trouville (Figure 1). With this canvas, he illustrated that he had surpassed Courbet’s painting style. In combination with his 1867 rejection of Courbet’s influence altogether, Whistler aggrandized his own innovations in painting.

^{113}\) Ibid.  
^{114}\) Ibid.
Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville, painted in the fall of 1865 alongside Courbet, is the most well-known work to result from the artists’ several-month stay on the Normandy coast of France. Although Whistler would paint four to six additional canvases during this Trouville trip, this particular seascape is especially revealing of his changed perception of Courbet and his waning influence, exemplifying a solidification of Whistler’s personal aesthetic.115

Harmony in Blue and Silver gains weighty significance when considering the expatriate’s initial assimilation into the nineteenth-century European art world. Although explorative in his early career, Whistler formally aligned himself with Realism in the late 1850s, lauding its champion, Courbet, in his establishment of the Société des Trois along with Fantin-Latour and Alphonse Legros. By the mid-1860s, Whistler had grown increasingly frustrated with Realist subject matter, such as figural components, which proved strenuous for him to execute in painting. Harmony strays from the doctrine of Realism as Whistler imbued his painting with Japanese aesthetics in a refined palette. The resulting image flirts with abstraction, signaling a new direction in Whistler’s oeuvre, a novel formal introduction to his mode of painting, which is explored on various levels in the remainder of his 1865 Trouville works. As such, Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville serves as a pivotal work in the formation of Whistler as a mature painter, not only as a departure from Realistic artistic principles, but also from standard subject matter.

In this chapter, I focus on Whistler’s previous approaches to the seascape in order to highlight his trips to the French coast as a source of artistic inspiration and emphasize the

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115 Scholars are unsure as to how many were completed during the trip; as six of the seven total canvases thematically and temporally fit the Trouville paintings, this thesis will presume that each of these six was at least begun during the time Whistler spent in Trouville and completed within a period of time that allows them to be viewed as akin to a series painted in autumn 1865. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Whistler’s other Trouville paintings.
innovations undertaken in *Harmony in Blue and Silver*. I also discuss the impact of Whistler’s friendship with Fantin-Latour, since it elucidates the fledgling artist’s disenchantment with his former idol, Courbet. Whistler refuted Realism entirely in his copy of Courbet’s self-portrait by the sea; these revisions of such a personal subject, especially while working in close proximity to Courbet in Trouville, openly disclosed Whistler’s criticism of his former mentor and announced the arrival of his concretized artistic style, set up in opposition to Courbet’s Realism. Although Whistler was not yet asserting himself as a central proponent of the avant-garde, he symbolically dethroned Courbet as icon and leader of modern art.

**Whistler’s Seascapes of the Early 1860s**

Whistler painted his first seascape in September 1861 on the coast of Perros-Guirec, in northwestern France. The artist was joined by his model and mistress Jo Hiffernan, with whom he had settled in London at the time, seeking warmer weather to convalesce from a bout of rheumatic fever. *The Coast of Brittany* (1861; Figure 21), Whistler’s largest canvas to date, highlighted the iconic bright, clear sky and rocky shoreline of the Brittany province. Displayed in the Royal Academy in 1862 as “Alone with the Tide,” Whistler depicted Jo in a state of isolated relaxation amongst the rugged rocks of the shore. The subject matter of a reposing woman in traditional regional costume, a topic that strays from the more conventional and popular picturesque views of the small coastal villages at the time, appeals to a Realist interpretation of the scene, and is similar to the works of François Bonvin and Legros in its emphasis on the rural dress. The monumental presence of the stacked rocks recalls the cliff-faces of Courbet’s
Franchise-Comté landscapes of the previous decade.\textsuperscript{116} Whistler also imitated Courbet’s impasto paint application to texturize the sand and the distant sliver of the sea.\textsuperscript{117}

While \textit{The Coast of Brittany}’s subject matter is readily observable as Realist, Whistler further neglected academic formulas. An unusual, wide expanse of sand initially greets the viewer in the foreground of the composition, allowing negative space to occupy nearly a third of the composition. Shadows are nearly nonexistent, rendering the light source ambiguous and isolating the scene from time. A closer observation of the rocks reveals inconsistent modelling that suggests multiple viewpoints. Whistler flattened the picture plane and alluded to the aesthetic explorations of the “Thames Set,” as influenced by Japanese woodblock prints, by tilting the perspective of the composition, guiding the eye upward rather than deeper within the picture.\textsuperscript{118} The resulting image is composed of tiers, with minimal recession in space.

Already in this initial seascape, Whistler established visual tropes for the construction of many of his Trouville seascapes; especially in \textit{Harmony in Blue and Silver}, the horizon line is high, the sandy shore is depicted so that it reads as a flat plane, and the figural element is placed in the lower left corner as a point of entry for the diagonal movement of the beholder’s eye to the top right corner of the canvas. Material elements are carefully clustered in order to create an expanse of negative space, drawing one’s attention to the contrast of mass and void, while areas of darker forms anchor the composition to create an ultimately static and balanced image.

Whistler returned to the coast of France the following year, again with Jo, this time to the Basque region, where he created his second seascape, \textit{Blue and Silver: The Blue Wave, Biarritz.}


\textsuperscript{117} Whistler’s biographers, the Pennells, found \textit{The Coast of Brittany} so similar to Courbet’s work that they claim Courbet could have signed it. Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell. \textit{The Life of James McNeill Whistler}, Vol. I (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott Company, 1908): 94.

\textsuperscript{118} For a discussion of Whistler’s “Thames Set” etchings, see Chapter 1.
(1862; Figure 22), which shows a tumultuous sea reminiscent of sublime images of the chaotic and primordial body of water.\textsuperscript{119} The tonal shift in his interpretation of the coastal view from the calm to the dramatic is intricately tied to Whistler’s experience of the tempestuous conditions. During his stay in Guéthary, neighboring Biarritz, Whistler wrote to Fantin-Latour of the ever-changing sea, which stayed so “huge” and full of “diabolical strength” that three people were led to their demise among the reefs. Whistler himself had been engulfed by the waves, swept away from shore and nearly drowned as he helplessly swam against the mountainous waves fifteen to twenty feet in height.\textsuperscript{120} It was only after crying out and resurfacing numerous times that the spectators on the shore realized his predicament and came to his rescue. The breaker he portrayed in \textit{Blue and Silver}, while remaining loyal to the weather conditions he observed and experienced, shows the ominous force and unpredictable quality of the ocean typically seen in early nineteenth-century paintings.

\textit{Blue and Silver} removes human presence from the composition to confront directly the viewer with the sea, relaying Whistler’s first-hand observation of the scene as he painted it \textit{en plein air}. One month into his stay on France’s west coast, Whistler wrote to fellow artist Fantin-Latour of his frustration with the uncooperative weather impeding his progress.\textsuperscript{121} He mentioned that he was working on several paintings at once, including a large canvas featuring Jo with several other figures; however, of the seascapes, only \textit{Blue and Silver} remains extant. Since Whistler’s description of the figural seascape detailed his attempt to capture the “breakers that seem to be hewn from black stone” that crash upon two boulders in the water in the middle

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} The trip, like the one to Brittany in 1861, was prescribed by a doctor, this time for Jo to recover from a persistent cough.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Whistler to Fantin-Latour, 14/21 October 1862, Library of Congress, PWC 1/33/6; GUL 08028.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Whistler to Fantin-Latour, 1 / 5 October 1862, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Pennell-Whistler Collection, PWC 1/33/3, GUL 07951.
\end{itemize}
ground, it is likely that Whistler simply painted out the figures to create *Blue and Silver*, his first pure seascape.\(^{122}\)

As of 1862, Courbet’s seascapes were limited to his oil paintings of the tranquil Mediterranean coast. While Courbet repeatedly painted wave studies starting in the late 1860s, Whistler’s *Blue and Silver* preceded his compositions of breakers by several years.\(^{123}\) Whistler’s scumbled and thickly painted passages over a dark ground in *Blue and Silver* recall Courbet’s painting style, but the image does not achieve the sculptural solidity of Courbet’s later wave paintings. The central focus of *Blue and Silver*, a large wave that curls over the horizontally striated, foreground boulders, appears two-dimensional. Rather than casting the inner curve of the wave in shadow, Whistler shaded the breaker from left to right, rendering its form concave. The foreground sea and shore are spatially shallow and uncertain due to Whistler’s ambiguous use of light and shadow. In contrast, Whistler amplified the painterly nature of the sky and the calligraphic depiction of the surf as it disperses amongst the rocks; one can trace the sinuous path of his white-paint-laden brush over the textured boulders.

Whistler’s letters to Fantin in October 1862 repeatedly stated his dissatisfaction with painting *en plein air*:

> My picture my dear Fantin, is dragging; I am not working quickly enough! I seem to learn so little! Apart from that these paintings in the open air from nature can only be large sketches, there is nothing for it! a piece of floating drapery - a wave - a cloud - it’s there for a moment - and then it’s gone for ever! you put down a pure colour tone you catch it in the air - and the public demands finish!\(^{124}\)

\(^{122}\) Ibid. Entry numbers 40 to 43 of the *catalogue raisonné* for Whistler are listed as seascapes created in Guéthary, which suggests that Whistler abandoned two or three of these compositions. Andrew McLaren Young et. al, *The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1980): 21-23.

\(^{123}\) Despite the correlation in subject matter, it is unlikely that *Blue and Silver* inspired Courbet to paint his own wave studies. However, Whistler’s Trouville seascapes may have affected Courbet’s depictions of the same vista in his lightened palette and “pure” seascapes.

\(^{124}\) Whistler mentions seascape painter James Clarke Hook, whom he considered exemplary for his finish, in his letters to Fantin. Hook’s paintings typically include locals in the foreground and may have served as inspiration for Whistler’s unfinished paintings of Guéthary. See Robin Spencer, “Whistler and James Clarke Hook,” in *Gazette des*
Whistler’s concern for a refined composition likely prevented him from completing the majority of his Guéthary seascapes. The disparate styles of paint application and inconsistent modelling in *Blue and Silver* reflect Whistler’s struggle with portraying the ephemeral nature of the pure seascape. Whistler’s complaint to Fantin, “I have waited in vain for [the sea] to be the same colour as the one I started on,” further explains the lack of cohesion in the image. Despite Whistler’s frustration, he continued, “It’s strange how I feel nailed to this spot - We shall probably stay here for another month or two.”

Whistler’s early seascapes unearth his concern with representing subjects from the world around him; he depicted a Breton peasant woman in *The Coast of Brittany* and directly portrayed the sea before him in *Blue and Silver: The Blue Wave, Biarritz*. In each, Whistler rejected traditional depictions of space as he displayed an increased concern with the mode of creation and formal structure of the paintings. Whistler’s compositional choices expand on the japonisme explored in his “Thames Set” etchings in which he flattened the pictorial space, emphasized the diagonal, diffused the light source, and reduced detail. Although artistic production was not the impetus behind either of his stays on the coast of France in 1861 and 1862, each sojourn lasted two to three months. Whistler’s trips to the French coast prompted new aesthetic innovations in his painted oeuvre, which he was unable to resolve in his seascapes until his creation of *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*.

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125 Whistler to Fantin-Latour, 14/21 October 1862, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Pennell-Whistler Collection, PWC 1/33/6, GUL 08028.

126 Ibid.
Realism and Whistler: Initial Rifts from Courbet

As an emerging young artist in the late 1850s, Whistler was drawn to Courbet’s innovative and rebellious Realist credo and anti-academic stance, as exemplified by Courbet’s 1855 Pavilion of Realism. He and artist friends Fantin-Latour and Legros formed the Société des Trois in 1858; the primary intent behind this alliance was to promote an individual approach to the quotidian instead of the narrative in art, thus seeking truth in art by portraying the world around them. Under the umbrella of Realism, they shared Courbet’s interest in Netherlandish and Spanish art, diluting from these traditions an emphasis on everyday subject matter and limited palette, combined with an evident means of creation of the artist’s hand, signaling their modernity.

Whistler, Fantin-Latour, and Legros were three of five young artists featured in François Bonvin’s 1859 exhibition of works rejected by the Salon of that year. Bonvin deemed this show the “Atelier Flamand” in tribute to the common thread of the influence of seventeenth-century Netherlandish genre scene painting amongst the exhibited works. Upon first meeting him at Bonvin’s studio, Courbet applauded Whistler’s At the Piano (1858-1859, Figure 23), a portrayal of his half-sister and niece in their London residence. Although Whistler was operating within a clearly Realist aesthetic in his early canvases by emulating Courbet’s portrayal of the poor and highlighting his own bohemianism in his self-portraits of the late 1850s, the domestic scene of

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129 Yves Sarfati claims that two of Whistler’s paintings and one of his etchings created between 1855 and 1859 were directly derived from Courbet’s works. Yves Sarfati, L’Anti-origine du monde: comment Whistler a tué Courbet (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2017), 91.
middle-class subjects in *At the Piano* surprisingly departed from Whistler’s concern with the depiction of the contemporary urban landscape.\(^{130}\) However, the scene still reflected a quotidian event, and is marginally related to Realism; artists such as Bonvin advocated artists’ familiarity with one’s subject, which was thought to imbue the resulting work with authenticity.\(^{131}\) Congruent with the remainder of the “Atelier Flamand” works, *At the Piano* represented a glimpse of contemporary life, with no overarching moral or narrative motive. Whistler, pleased by the approval of Courbet, repeatedly praised him to Fantin, calling him “a great man.”\(^{132}\)

Whistler and Courbet had limited contact beyond their initial interaction, partially due to Whistler’s move to London from Paris in 1859. Despite the distance, Whistler still nurtured his relationship with fellow Parisian artists, and served as a liaison between the art worlds of Paris and London. He was acquainted with many of the prestigious painters, writers, and theorists also residing in France, as evidenced in Fantin-Latour’s *Homage to Delacroix* (1864; Figure 24).\(^{133}\)

Largely considered a “manifesto of the French avant-garde,” Fantin’s canvas prominently includes Whistler, who stands flanking the central portrait of Delacroix along with Manet, possibly signifying their high status as controversial figures of the Salon des Refusés, held the previous year. Fantin-Latour, in white, is seated to the left of Whistler, and Legros stands behind him. Six of the nine persons featured were exhibited in the Salon des Refusés.\(^{134}\) Courbet, however, is significantly omitted from this masterpiece.\(^{135}\)

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\(^{130}\) Whistler fashioned at least one early self-portrait after those of Courbet; see Chapter 1.
\(^{133}\) Lois Marie Fink. *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Washington, D.C: National Museum of American Art, 1990), 78. Fantin-Latour exhibited a second group portrait of French artists featuring Manet and Whistler, the latter clad in a Chinese robe, in 1865 titled *The Toast!*; though now destroyed, a partial portrait of Whistler has been salvaged and is housed in the Freer Gallery of Art.
\(^{134}\) Sutherland, 90.
\(^{135}\) Although he painted this canvas in a Realist style, Fantin-Latour no longer associated himself with Courbet as of 1863. Patrick Noon and Christopher Riopelle, *Delacroix and the Rise of Modern Art from Cézanne to van Gogh* (London: National Gallery Company in association with the Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2015), 35, n.2.
Fantin’s painting is not so much a tribute to Delacroix’s painting style as his influence; Duranty had urged contemporary artists in 1859 “not to copy him, but to emulate his life and learn how to disengage from the common herd.” Fantin-Latour, in this dedication to the memory of Delacroix, did not attempt to recreate the Romantic painter’s style. Instead, he showed the weave of the canvas in a “new version of anti-academic facture.” Whistler’s prestigious position in the group portrait identified him as non-conforming artist contributing to the progress of art, having achieved the status he had once emulated in Courbet. Despite Fantin-Latour pictorial declaration of Whistler as Courbet’s successor as a leader of modern art, Whistler continued to champion Courbet, defending Realism as late as 1864, despite his gradual formal departure from the style.

Fantin-Latour, who interacted with Courbet regularly at the Café de Bade and surely updated Whistler on their contact, slowly grew disillusioned with their former idol. In a letter to Whistler in 1859, Fantin related his concern that Courbet was wasting his talent when he saw him indulging in drinking and socializing, with “ineptitude flourishing.” Regardless, Fantin worked alongside Courbet in 1861, when the latter opened his studio in response to a call for a school of Realism from students of the École des Beaux-Arts. However, Fantin did not maintain a friendship with Courbet after 1861. In 1863, Fantin’s letter to Whistler revealed that he thought that the two Courbet paintings accepted to the Salon of 1863, a hunting scene and a portrait of a woman, were “shameful” for the Société des Trois, especially the fact that viewers

136 As quoted by Riopelle in “Afterlife: Delacroix’s Posthumous Fame,” in Noon and Riopelle, 65.
138 Fantin-Latour also mentions that he told Courbet that Whistler would respond to his recent letter. This letter has not been found or identified, which suggests that it may have been destroyed. Henri Fantin-Latour to James McNeill Whistler, 5 August 1859, MS Whistler F5; GUW 01074.
139 In 1861–1862, Courbet ran a school for six months. Fantin-Latour attended the school shortly after returning from London, where Seymour Haden encouraged him to explore paint and color through still lifes.
were “laughing at them;” oddly gloating, Fantin stated that Courbet “would like to be with the Rejects.”

Two weeks later, Fantin proudly wrote to Whistler about *Symphony in White, No.1*, “Courbet calls your picture an apparition, spiritualistic and (this annoys him) he says it is good (this annoys him, he had been sulking).”

Already in 1861, however, Whistler was concerned about Courbet’s potential reaction to his canvas, *Wapping* (1860-1864; Figure 25), a Realist painting done *en plein air* that contains several figures. The right side of the horizontal composition appears to be derived from one of Whistler’s etchings, *Rotherhithe*, of the “Thames Set,” and also executed in 1860 (Figure 26); they share the location, foregrounded figures, and level of detail in the depiction of the unglamorous London docks. In a letter to Fantin, Whistler described the early iteration of the canvas, in which Whistler revealed his growing interest in the decorative and ornamental in his depiction of Jo, and was proud to have accomplished “an expression” on Jo’s face, the crux of a complicated narrative of two men arguing over her services. Presumably with the prospect of creating a Realist masterpiece, Whistler repeatedly told Fantin, “Hush! Not a word to Courbet!” in an effort to hide the work, fearing Courbet would steal his idea. In the same letter, Whistler notes that *Wapping* is the most difficult painting he had ever created and expressed incessant frustration in his efforts to complete the work.

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140 Courbet had also submitted as third painting to the Salon, *The Return from the Conference* (1863, now disappeared), that he was not allowed to display at the Salon des Refusés. Henri Fantin-Latour to James McNeill Whistler, 1 May 1863, MS Whistler F10; GUW 01079.
141 Ibid.

It appears that he later changed the “arabesques” and “flowers” on a “white jacket” that Jo wore in a version of the painting. Robin Spencer believes that Whistler did not want Courbet to know of this canvas in fear that Courbet would steal his idea, as its particular Realist subject of the riverside had not yet been popularized in France. Robin Spencer, “Whistler’s Subject Matter: ‘Wapping’ 1860-1864,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts (October 1982): 131-142, 136. Katharine Lochnan. *Whistler in his Circle: Etchings and Lithographs from the Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario* (Ontario: Art Gallery, 1986), 32.
Whistler obsessively reworked the painting over the next few years; he wrote to Fantin in 1864, lamenting his sluggish progress:

But at this moment I am so discouraged - always the same thing - always such painful and uncertain work! I am so slow! - When will my execution be quicker when I say execution I mean something quite different - you understand - I produce very little, because I scrape off so much.\textsuperscript{143}

Whistler’s choice to paint the river \textit{en plein air} was not exclusively the cause of his arduous work on \textit{Wapping}; the background riverscape was never altered. Whistler had also completed the canvas \textit{Thames in Ice} (1860) in three days, observing the scene from his window. Rather, Whistler’s translation of the Realism he previously reserved for etching to \textit{plein-air} painting, in combination with his focus on the figures and his brazen initial narrative of the “fallen” woman’s interactions, proved to be an unsolvable combination. Whistler ultimately erased his implication of the sexually tense conversation by covering Jo’s original \textit{decolletage} and reworking her expression, neutralizing the image so that its subject matter would be more readily accepted in the Royal Academy of 1864.

Since Whistler had originally intended for \textit{Wapping} to be a paragon of Realism, the laborious process of finishing the canvas signaled his now unavoidable frustration with naturalism. As he became increasingly interested in the Thames riverscape and simultaneously produced successful studio paintings of solitary models, Whistler abandoned the need to create a narrative in his canvases, and would later mitigate the prominence of figures in his landscapes. \textit{Harmony in Blue and Silver}, painted the following year, concretely shows Whistler’s rejection of Courbet’s Realism and true assimilation of the japonisme he had begun to explore in his Thames riverscapes.

**Trouville, 1865: Blurring Boundaries**

Whistler wrote to Fantin-Latour from his London home in September 1865, complaining of his debt as he planned to leave the following day to escort his mother to Germany with his brother.\(^{144}\) He claimed that he would then finally have the chance to see Fantin in Paris and that they would subsequently return to London together.\(^{145}\) It is unknown whether Whistler visited Paris; the lack of the usual primary sources—Whistler left a large collection of letters, but none include planning for the trip—have led to an uncertainty in discussing Whistler’s time in Trouville, and whether he expected to find Courbet there. Seascape artist and local resident Eugène Boudin wrote of making the acquaintance of Courbet and Whistler, whom he called “an English painter who is well known in Paris,” at the end of the tourist season on October 18.\(^{146}\) He also noted Whistler’s departure before that of Courbet, on November 13.\(^{147}\) Only three extant letters were written by Whistler during his stay on the Normandy coast of France, the first on October 20 and the last six days later.\(^{148}\) Likewise, Courbet sent four letters from Trouville, two in early September and two in mid-November, mentioning Whistler to his family in a November 17 report, a couple of days before he left Trouville.\(^{149}\) Although there is no documentation of Whistler’s arrival in Trouville, his production of several canvases during the one-to-two-month period far exceeds the rate at which he was painting in London, which implies that the subject

\(^{145}\) Ibid.  
\(^{147}\) Ibid., 102. (letter I, 26). Whistler’s interactions with Boudin are discussed further in Chapter 3.  
matter provided new opportunities for him to reassess his own style as he freed himself from the yoke of Realism and fully integrated japonisme in his oeuvre.\textsuperscript{150}

The scarcity of primary sources has led to conflicting views on the intention of Whistler’s stay in Trouville. Whistler, who had only painted a handful of seascapes in a Courbet-influenced Realist style, may have assumed that such subject matter would cause his paintings to sell well, therefore relieving his debt. Delacroix’s posthumous sale, held early 1864, for instance, included many landscape studies, in oil and watercolor alike; his \textit{Sea at Dieppe} (1852) sold for an especially high price. It presumably inspired Monet and Bazille to visit Honfleur to paint marine scenes later that year, showing the resurgence of the trend of seaside painting produced during short sojourns.\textsuperscript{151} Whistler’s previous etching expeditions and trips to the seaside had proved successful, as well. In 1863, Whistler sold \textit{The Coast of Brittany} and \textit{Blue and Silver: The Blue Wave}, which fetched the largest sums for his canvases to date. Although by 1865 Whistler made a greater profit from \textit{Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks} (1864), \textit{Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl} (1864), and especially \textit{Wapping} (1860-1864), his seascapes were the most financially valuable, non-figurative works in his oeuvre.\textsuperscript{152} Whistler likely aimed to recreate the success of his previous excursions with his newfound limited palette, delicate color, and employment of Japanese design principles.

Despite the dearth of concrete information to chronicle Whistler and Courbet’s overlapping time in Trouville, several facts can be assembled from their writings. Courbet arrived before Whistler in Trouville, as his first, though incomplete, letter was dated September

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{150} Presumably without Japanese prints to reference, Whistler would have worked from his memory of Japanese techniques he had studied, and thus was freer to employ them in new ways.  
\textsuperscript{151} Noon and Riopelle, 243. This tendency to visit the coast on painting expeditions throughout the nineteenth century, in Normandy, especially, are explored in Chapter 3.  
\end{footnotesize}
8; in it, he states that he had just finished a portrait of a Hungarian princess, and was already receiving numerous portrait requests and visits from upper-class women in the seaside resort town, therefore implying that he had been painting there at least since early September, if not mid-August.\textsuperscript{153} It is possible that he may have been traveling between the coastal resort towns of Deauville and Trouville in order to fulfill his commissions, but he penned his September letters from Trouville and visited seascape painter Boudin there, as well.\textsuperscript{154}

Unlike Whistler, Courbet’s primary artistic intention did not concern seascapes in Trouville, but portraits of women vacationing at the resort. He boasted about this demand, as well as his camaraderie with fellow artists, claiming, “I have doubled my reputation and have made the acquaintance of everyone who can be useful.”\textsuperscript{155} As he had done in Montpellier, where he had painted his first seascape in 1854 with his patron Alfred Bruyas, Courbet saw the potential to associate himself with members of high society in Trouville. Frequenting the emerging seaside resorts of the Normandy coast brought him in proximity of the novelties of leisure time and travel, and a burgeoning clientele.

Still boasting of his immense success as a portrait painter in Trouville, Courbet wrote to Urbain Cuenot on September 16 about being given a room at the Casino overlooking the beach; however, he had plans to leave by October to go to his childhood home of Ornans.\textsuperscript{156} He had just started a painting featuring the sea, merging his previous subject of women with the Trouville environment in \textit{Podoscaphe}, and had been commissioned to paint a second seascape, as well.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{153} Chu, 267. (letter 69-15)
\textsuperscript{155} Chu, 268. (letter 69-16)
\textsuperscript{156} Chu, 267-268. (letter 69-15)
\textsuperscript{157} Courbet later renamed \textit{Podoscaphe}, to \textit{The Woman in a Podoscaphe}. The seascape, commissioned by the count of Choiseul, is believed to be \textit{Dunes at Deauville}, finished in 1866. Chu, 267-268. (letter 69-15)
In his only extant letter to Whistler, written in the last year of his life, Courbet mentions that the two had concurrently stayed at the Casino, implying that Whistler had already arrived by mid-September before the two artists and Jo had relocated as a group to l’Hôtel de la Mer, where all three enjoyed moments of respite by bathing in the sea and eating luxurious meals.\textsuperscript{158}

Whistler wrote to his art dealer, Lucas Ionides, on October 20:

\begin{quote}
This is a charming place [...] I am staying here to finish two or three sea pieces which I wish to bring back with me - I believe they will be fine - and worth quite anything of the kind I have ever done - This is a charming place - although now the season is quite over and every one [sic] has left - but the effects of sea and sky are finer than during the milder weather.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

Courbet appears to have shared Whistler’s preference for the off-season. Although he initially complained of his constant visitors, Courbet had become so enthralled with Trouville that as the tourist season succumbed to the changing weather conditions, leaving emptier beaches, and possibly more time for Courbet to focus on his art outside of portraits of the elite, he wrote to his family, “As usual I went to Trouville for three days and stayed for three months.”\textsuperscript{160} Whistler’s last letter from Trouville, written three weeks before Boudin claims he left, states that he considered the canvases he made there “important pictures.”\textsuperscript{161}

At the end of his stay, two days after Boudin stated Whistler left Trouville, Courbet mentioned Whistler in a letter to his parents, erroneously yet purposefully calling him “an Englishman who is my student.”\textsuperscript{162} Courbet undoubtedly would have been aware of \textit{Harmony in Blue and Silver}, and presumably made this assertion based on its use of \textit{Seashore at Palavas} as a template. The proclamation, though in keeping with his ego, was nevertheless uncharacteristic of

\textsuperscript{158} Sutton claims that the three were so close during this trip that they “enjoyed a free-and-easy relationship” with Whistler’s mistress, to the extent of them “[a]t times the three of them probably simultaneously shar[ing] the same bed.” Jo was featured in several of Courbet’s paintings during this trip and afterward. Sutton, 112.
\textsuperscript{160} Chu, 268. (letter 69-16)
\textsuperscript{162} Chu, 269. (letter 69-16)
Courbet. Even when he temporarily opened his studio to students in 1861, he published a letter clarifying his desire for a communal atmosphere:

I cannot teach my art, nor the art of any school whatever, since I deny that art can be taught, or, in other words, I maintain that art is completely individual, and is, for each artist, nothing but the talent issuing from his own inspiration and his own studies of tradition [...] I am, therefore, unable to open a school, to form pupils, to teach this or that partial tradition of art. I can only explain to some artists, who would be my collaborators and not my pupils, the method by which, in my opinion, one becomes a painter. ¹⁶³

Courbet’s claim of Whistler as his pupil thus undermines Whistler’s originality, and may have been in rebuttal to Harmony in Blue and Silver’s aesthetic shift from its original pictorial source. Courbet therefore likely recognized the painting as a critique of his own work, and retaliated by mitigating Whistler’s prominence in the art world. On the subject of Whistler’s seascapes, Courbet later publicly said, “he has talent, little Whistler does, but he always makes the sky too low, or the horizon too high.”¹⁶⁴

A Pivotal Point: Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville as Symbolic

Whistler, when he originally compiled a list of his works in 1886, had called Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville the more descriptive title, Courbet -- On the Seashore.¹⁶⁵ In 1895, the artist referred to it as “[t]he only painting by me of Courbet.”¹⁶⁶ The fact that Whistler would continuously refer to this figure as Courbet, even after severing all aesthetic ties to the artist, suggests that his treatment of the figure, often viewed negatively in comparison to the original, is deliberate in this depiction. In reading his alteration of the figure, Whistler’s criticism of Courbet is threefold, attacking his artistic relevance, painting style, and ego.

¹⁶⁴ As quoted in Howard Isham, Image of the Sea: Oceanic Consciousness in the Romantic Century (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 305.
¹⁶⁵ Young et al., 37.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid.
Courbet’s *Seashore at Palavas* shows him standing atop a boulder in the foreground of a calm seascape, enthusiastically greeting the sea. Though diminutive in size, Courbet’s figure confidently and dramatically raises his hat, his arm fully extended. With his head tilted backwards, Courbet mimicked the angle at which the artist portrayed himself somewhat disrespectfully confronting patron Bruyas in *The Meeting (Bonjour Monsieur Courbet)* (1854; Figure 27), which he painted during the same stay in Montpellier. Whereas there is a clear lack of interest in interpersonal relations with the aristocratic gentlemen he meets along the countryside road in *The Meeting*, Courbet appears to have more of an appreciation for the sea’s grandeur in the *Seashore*, though he remains equally egotistical in both paintings. Courbet showed a level of concern with distinction through solidity of his own form in the two works. When *The Meeting* was exhibited, critics commented on Courbet’s self-importance, noticing, “Neither the master nor the valet cast their shadows on the ground; there is only a shadow for M. Courbet: he alone can stop the rays of the sun.”\(^{167}\) Thus, Courbet presented himself as undaunted by social or natural grandeur.\(^{168}\)

In comparison, Whistler’s reinterpretation of the painting in *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* replicates the basic format of Courbet’s canvas, with crucial changes. The overall seascape is minimalist in detail and range of color as it is reduced to horizontal bands and painted in a uniform fashion with little impasto. Whistler tipped the perspective, raising the horizon and flattening the image. The figure of Courbet observes the vista before him, but does


\(^{168}\) The figure in *Seashore at Palavas* is sometimes seen as a double portrait of Courbet and Bruyas, due its similarity in the dress to that of Bruyas in *The Meeting*; as such it would simultaneously have been “intended to celebrate the independence and optimism of the creator in the face of the infinite possibilities of the visible world, and the visionary and unfailing commitment of his main patron.” As Whistler’s reinterpretation of this painting depicts Courbet, specifically, this thesis addresses this figure as that of Courbet. Dominique Font-Réaulx et al., *Gustave Courbet* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art), 272.
so passively, and appears to float on the sand, unanchored by the rocks Courbet included. His
gaze prompts the eye to move diagonally to the boats on the water. The general tone of the
painting is one of quiet contemplation that invites the viewer to join the figure watching the
seascape, rather than a theatrical declaration of ego.169

The reinterpretation of Courbet’s composition by Whistler at first appears “playful” as it
replaces the “trim figure [...] jauntily saluting the sea with a wave of his hand” with “a chunkier,
apparently older man, though clearly meant to be Courbet, standing immobile and well back
from the water.”170 Whistler strips the figure of its energy and solidity by visually integrating it
with its environment with a uniform wash over the canvas. He also eliminates the rocky
formation, thus removing the autobiographical element of the original painting that may have
alluded to Courbet’s mountainous home region of Ornans. In so doing, Whistler emphasizes the
horizontal striations of the paint and its various thicknesses throughout the painting, sometimes
so thinned that the ground and weave of the canvas are visible. In the layering of thin paint in
strokes parallel to the bottom of the canvas, Whistler replaces Courbet’s characteristic use of the
palette knife and opaque, impasto paint application. Whistler therefore makes a statement in
replacing the sculptural style of his former mentor with a Japanese-influenced painting method
that accentuates the surface of the canvas. In acknowledgement of Japanese prints, Whistler also
relocates the horizon; instead of cutting the composition in equal halves, it demarcates the upper
third of the canvas.

169 Michael Fried describes the anti-theatrical as “absorption,” a feature that aids the viewer in perceiving the
painting as an object in itself, a quality that he ascribes to Manet and the members of the Société des Trois. Michael
Fried, “The Generation of 1863,” in Manet’s Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s (Chicago:
170 Sutherland, 93. Whistler’s depiction of Courbet also reflected Courbet’s changed physique from 1854 and may
have been criticizing this, as well; see photographs of Courbet by Victor Laisné, c.1852, and Étienne Carjat, 1860.
As a response to *Seashore at Palavas, Harmony in Blue and Silver* undermines the former’s sculptural physicality, and the individuality of Courbet’s image, showing a rejection of Courbet’s “rugged” painting style and personality and replacing it with another, newer artistic individuality.\(^{171}\) While Courbet’s self-portrait looks out to an empty sea, presenting himself as a pioneer, Whistler’s Courbet is a passive bystander. Contrasted with the infinite expanse of the sea, Courbet’s immobility makes him insignificant and finite.\(^{172}\) Whistler inverts Courbet’s anthropocentric image and proclamation of mastery over nature as he unifies the seascape under a veil of gray. As a result, the figure of Courbet almost seems to fade into the sand, no longer master of nature, but subsumed by it.

The primary way in which Whistler displays both his independence from Courbet and reveals himself as a modern painter in *Harmony in Blue and Silver* is in his combination of paint application, composition, and muted palette. Whistler’s paint appears like “silk,” giving texture to the paint without relying on an impasto technique.\(^{173}\) Whistler therefore replaces Courbet’s Realism for his newfound, independently reached method of painting, partially informed by japonisme. The broad sweeps of the brush show the process through which the work was created, giving the painting an air of effortlessness. At the same time, the thin washes of paint that blend into each other to create a continuum of softened hues seemingly reveal a quickness of execution. The ghost-like figure of Courbet, combined with Whistler’s aqueous paint, are a “commentary on Courbet’s waning influence,” and thus, his relevance to Whistler, and likely, in the art world.\(^{174}\) Whistler’s new painting style, comparatively, is a more novel, modern painting technique, and promotes him as an innovative artist, supplanting Courbet as a leader of the

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\(^{171}\) Callen, 136.
\(^{172}\) This change also coordinates on Whistler’s dislike of the figure and interest in the landscape.
\(^{174}\) Sutherland, 93.
avant-garde. Courbet is no longer at the edge of the water nor of the art world, defiantly greeting it with exuberant enthusiasm, but instead is left on the shore, observing the sailboats that presumably move out to sea and new horizons.

The seascape in *Harmony in Blue and Silver* simplifies the figure of Courbet to such an extent that it loses its role as a portrait and any narrative function it had in Courbet’s painting, becoming a mere compositional element. Its spatially ambiguous depiction, as the hat and the figure itself appear to be facing nearly opposite directions, further flattens the overall image.175 Along with the discernible brushstrokes that compose the tiers of the composition, Whistler represented the two boats on the water simply as a series of brushstrokes; the closer vessel is formed by a gray, diagonal mark that intersects a thick vertical white stripe, while the boat on the horizon is little more than a dot. The simplification of form is later verbalized by Whistler, who told a fellow artist, “A stupid painter out there complained that I had not made out what kind of ship it was; but I said to him, ‘To me it is not a ship but a tone.’”176 *Harmony in Blue and Silver* thus reveals Whistler’s shift in aesthetic, highlighting design above content. Whistler negated a detail-oriented, realistic portrayal of the scene that would identify the specific location and person depicted; instead, he captured its essence. In so doing, Whistler disclosed his budding interest in finding the irreducible in painting and in the Aesthetic Movement’s dictum of art for art’s sake. Whistler’s reduction of the seascape using horizontal, modulated tones within a restricted palette, though composing a representative scene, enforces a more objective view of

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175 Édouard Manet’s *The Absinthe Drinker* (c.1859) was also heavily criticized for a similar portrayal in which the cloaked subject’s legs were at an awkward angle to his torso. Whistler undoubtedly would have been aware of this painting, which was in the Salon des Refusés, and perhaps purposefully made the visual allusion.

the painting as an autonomous object, showing an intentional stray from realism toward abstraction, in which Whistler “distills from nature, rather than transcribes it.”

Conclusion

Whistler’s early professional career mirrored the influence of Courbet, not only in his Realist style, but also in his controversial status; already in 1859, the Société des Trois was criticized for being brash and self-aggrandizing, and was described in a similar manner as Courbet when he exhibited The Meeting:

In their enthusiasm, in their love of art, they have inaugurated the painting of the future [...] no sooner had these gentlemen set out on their path that they thought they had arrived; they believed success was theirs; they paraded their future glories from atop the pedestal they had erected on the ruins of modern art, they looked down upon the poor floundering wretches like us, who had no share in their sun. One could only prostrate oneself in silence before their superiority and all those who dared utter the slightest objection were crushed, wiped out, in an assault of scathing, I would even go so far as to say revolting mockery.

By 1865, in Whistler’s Harmony in Blue and Silver, Courbet became subject of this “mockery.” Whistler was only able to verbalize his rejection of Courbet’s influence in a letter written two years later, in which he claimed that his own painting style was more personal than the Realist’s one. As such, the changes he made from Seashore in Palavas to Harmony in Blue and Silver deliberately reflect his irreverent perception of his elder while asserting the full integration of japonisme in his art. The reinterpretation of his former mentor’s canvas deliberately reduced the figure to a mere simplified form, scarcely recognizable as an individual, negating the independent and egotistical statement Courbet had originally intended. This statement is replaced with a similar one Whistler makes about himself as a modern artist, found in Whistler’s emphasis on the creative act of painting that is shown in his traceable brushstroke, and precludes a Realist

178 Letter from Férlet to Ludovic Barrié [Legros’s uncle], 6 January 1859. As quoted in Berry, 35.
depiction of the seascape. By concentrating on color in an arrangement of flat planes and simplified forms, Whistler was among the “earliest to emphasize artistic decisions and formal manipulation of design elements upon the painted surface in order to reassert the work of art as a two-dimensional object with its own integrity,” moving away from illusionism toward a near abstraction of the seascape.179

In 1867, Whistler denied having ever emulated Courbet; denouncing Courbet’s influence was likely the single strongest statement Whistler could have made at the time to identify himself as an independent artist at this formative point in his artistic career. However, his dissent of Courbet also reflected years of unsuccessful attempts to be recognized as a Realist painter, as best exemplified in Wapping, as well as a disillusionment with Courbet that was initiated by Fantin-Latour. Whistler’s trips to French coastal towns consistently inspired new modes of painting when confronted with the neutral subject matter, and Whistler’s trip to Trouville likely was an intentional attempt to formulate his artistic vision. Chapter 3 explores Whistler’s varied compositional structures and paint application throughout the handful of canvases he produced in Trouville, demonstrating his search for a balance between Realism and his interest in Japanese aesthetics. He ultimately was able to integrate the latter into his oeuvre with Harmony in Blue and Silver, assimilating its influence in a manner that was unprecedented in his paintings while denouncing the Realist adherence to nature as direct subject matter.

Chapter 3 explores the context in which Whistler painted in Trouville and compares his work to that of contemporaneous depictions. Whistler ultimately excluded symbols of the town’s modernization in lieu of undisturbed vistas of the sea; however, his experimentation with paint application and compositional arrangement led to his discovery of a unique, anti-academic style.

179 Curry, “Total Control: Whistler at an Exhibition” in Whistler: A Reexamination, 71.
that identified his technique and viewpoint as modern, exemplified in his two figural seascapes of 1865, *Harmony in Blue and Silver* and *Sea and Rain* (Figure 28).
Chapter 3
Whistler, his Contemporaries, and Trouville in 1865

*Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* (Figure 1), painted on the Norman coast town in 1865, serves as a visual metaphor for Whistler’s rejection of Courbet. In the representation of his former mentor, Whistler reduced the original, vivacious Courbet, as seen in Courbet’s version of the same subject, to a stationary figure looking out to sea and fading into the seascape, and he essentially reinterpreted the image in a painterly style distilled from his study of Japanese woodblock prints. *Harmony*’s overt dismissal of Realism, especially that practiced by Courbet, is a catalyst for the subsequent five canvases produced by Whistler during his 1865 stay in Trouville, in which he explored different modes of representation in search of a style uniquely his own. Throughout the group of paintings, Whistler varied his brush stroke, viscosity of paint, level of detail, framing, and compositional arrangement. Consistent in the six canvases, however, are a shallow pictorial space, limited palette, and visible means of production. Whistler directly addressed the seascape in a frontal view in each depiction, focusing on the elements of sky, sea, and shore, visually punctuated by sailboats, rocks, or, in two instances, solitary figures.

In 1865, Trouville was a burgeoning resort town, immensely popular as a vacation destination for urbanites and artists alike. Whistler’s seascapes, however, are largely barren of signifiers of this modernization. The Trouville seascapes only include sailboats, although steamboats ferrying passengers between nearby resort towns were ubiquitous. The expected sight of beachgoers and the presence of vacation paraphernalia, such as bathing tents and newly built resort structures, is negated in the reductionist scenes represented by Whistler. Although many contemporary artists typically followed the example of early nineteenth-century depictions of the
coast by showing isolated views of the seaside, Whistler’s decision to do so contrasts his established Realist emphasis in his prior compositions; his Thames riverscapes of the early 1860s, for instance, proudly feature its industrial nature and crowded waters. Whistler’s choice of the Trouville seascape as subject brings his work into dialogue with Normandy painters. A tense and uncertain relationship with elements of modernity is revealed while modernism is more readily embraced in Whistler’s facture as he strayed from the realistic portrayal of the seascape.

As Whistler experimented with various painterly styles in this short period, it is notably in his two figural compositions of this 1865 trip, Harmony in Blue and Silver and Sea and Rain: Variations in Violet and Green (Figure 28), that the roots of his mature style and aesthetic theory become evident. Although Whistler called Harmony “the only painting by me of Courbet,” Sea and Rain features a silhouette that has also been identified by historians as Courbet.\(^{180}\) The two compositions share the placement of the figure in the lower left corner of a simplified seascape, but Sea and Rain drastically summarizes the composition to the extent that it is nearly abstract. One finds that these two paintings, out of the six, represent the most paraphrased representations of the seascape. The figures, therefore, extend beyond their purpose as compositional accents to guide the viewer’s eye, both elucidating the vista and lessening the drastic aspect of such minimalist rendition. While Harmony was the first to show a distinct dismissal of Courbet’s Realism, Sea and Rain further incorporates a limited palette, thin and smooth paint application, and minimization of compositional and technical detail, thus revealing a newfound, truly independent direction in Whistler’s painting. Although he would not completely return to the

proto-abstract style used in *Sea and Rain* until his mature paintings in the form of his Nocturnes in the early 1870s, *Sea and Rain* asserts Whistler as a modern painter.\textsuperscript{181}

This chapter elucidates the extent of the aesthetic forays in Whistler’s Trouville paintings of 1865. In his couple months’ stay on the Normandy coast, Whistler sought a balance between his early Realism and newfound interest in Eastern design principles. As the coast of Normandy became an increasingly enticing subject matter for artists and writers, it also grew in popularity as a tourist destination, therefore attracting developers as well as visitors. Remote depictions of the Normandy coast remained instituted, despite the growth of commercialism in the region; Whistler’s work in 1865 reflected his aesthetic choice to exclude the symbols of its modernization and adhere to the tradition of the post-Romantic calm seascape.\textsuperscript{182} His style diverged from that of previous seascape artists of the region as he used the setting as a subject through which he could experiment with different styles. Whistler’s visual exploration in the group of Trouville paintings also includes deliberate recreations of the compositions of Courbet and Manet, but these only amplified Whistler’s aestheticized vision. His painterly and compositional experiments in the Trouville group of paintings finally find a stable style in technique and vision in *Sea and Rain* (1865), which signals his mature aesthetic.

**Tourism, Trouville, and Artistic Portrayals**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the few seascapes Whistler had painted prior to his trip to Trouville were created over two short sojourns to isolated villages along the French coast.

\textsuperscript{181} Used in the context of this thesis, “modern” is used to describe an individual aesthetic beyond that of academic conventions, primarily one in which the painting surface is acknowledged and the painting is viewed independently as art object rather than simply as a window into a reproduction of a scene.

\textsuperscript{182} Whistler certainly would have also known of Turner’s abstracted seascapes; see Chapter 4.
Trouville, in contrast, was a burgeoning resort town by Whistler’s visit in 1865. The Normandy region had been growing steadily in popularity with beachgoers since 1847, when the city of Le Havre was directly linked to the capital via railway, allowing the urban populous to reach the coast in less than a day’s travel.\(^{183}\) Trouville was linked to Paris by way of Lisieux in 1863 as its own railroad extension was being completed. While the permanent population averaged approximately 5,000 inhabitants, the summer flooded the resort town with over 20,000 visitors; Trouville was favorably known as the “jewel” of the Normandy coast.\(^{184}\) Artistic portrayals across media surged as the province offered accessible, diverse vistas that appealed to bourgeois and affluent buyers. Rejecting the Romantic vision of the sea as dangerous and primordial, artists mirrored the domestication of Normandy in their tranquil seascapes. The original views of a pristine scene seemingly discovered by the viewer permeated the genre with few exceptions, even as this private experience as a tourist became increasingly rare.

Whistler’s choice of Trouville as a travel destination, especially as one for artistic production, is therefore initially puzzling. However, Whistler’s arrival at the end of the vacation season allowed him to omit aspects that otherwise reveal the town’s modernization, which could have generated the newfound reductionist technique he demonstrated in his Trouville paintings. The reverse cause-and-effect relationship, in which Whistler’s experimental painting style justified his exclusion of signifiers of the growing resort town, is also possible. As Whistler presented an isolated landscape for four of the six canvases, he circumvented the portrayal of bourgeois vacationers and their presence in the seascape, but maintained a dialogue with the established artistic trope of the calm sea.


The central region of northern France, Normandy, borders the English Channel; its coastline grew exponentially in popularity between the first and second quarters of the nineteenth century after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The Normandy region’s popularity among urbanites and artists was heavily encouraged through visual and written depictions, stemming from both independent and government-sponsored endeavors. Eugène Delacroix and Richard Parkes Bonington, who took artists’ excursions to the Normandy coast in 1813 and 1817, respectively, were two of the primary catalysts for the ongoing trend of sojourning in this area. Charles Mozin was considered to have discovered Trouville’s potential as a painterly destination in the 1820s. He was joined shortly thereafter by Eugène Isabey and Paul Huet, though sites within the larger Normandy region were also the subject of paintings by Johan Barthold Jongkind, Charles François Daubigny, and Jean Baptiste Corot. The influx of artists along the coast was remarkable, to the extent that Alphonse Karr’s 1836 novel, *Le Chemin le plus court*, featured a painter who gained unprecedented success at the Paris Salon due to his seascapes of the small coastal town of Étretat. Naturally, this novel and its fame propagated artistic interest in the seascape as subject.

Generally, early depictions of the Normandy coast either featured the sea itself or scenes of the quotidian life of locals, emphasizing the picturesque aspect of what was considered a simpler, if harsher, way of life that was intricately tied to its setting. Artists such as Isabey followed the Romantic trend, painting sublime seascapes that showed the crashing waves of

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185 Charles Mozin was the most popular artist who exclusively worked in Trouville in the mid-nineteenth century and held a municipal council set in the town from 1843 to 1852. While some of his scenes chronicle the evolution of Trouville into a resort town, the majority of his paintings were Realist depictions of the original buildings and population, while his larger body of work included drawings of boats and ships. He was particularly revered for his skies. He passed away in 1862, and a posthumous sale of over two hundred of his works was held shortly before Whistler’s stay in Trouville, in April 1865, auctioned by Hôtel Drouot, Paris.


187 Ibid., 15. Undoubtedly, artists may also have found the seaside alluring in that it could serve as both a place of vacation and one of work.
tempests under ominous skies or the medieval ruins and sites of pilgrimage along the coast. Scenes of calmer weather, meanwhile, were painted by the aforementioned Huet, Bonington, and Corot, who included solitary figures. The undramatic depictions, especially those by Jongkind, often structurally evoked seventeenth-century Dutch harbor scenes. Both seascape traditions remained common throughout the nineteenth century and idyllically showed few figures to highlight the isolated coastal vista.

As the calm, uninhabited seaside was becoming increasingly rare in the mid-nineteenth century, its representation as such in art was inversely proportional. The remote views were so desired that they were pervasive in travel writing and visual culture, from literature to guide books, and lithographs to paintings, perpetuating the erroneous perception that the coast remained unpopulated and pristine. In revealing these idyllic, secluded seascapes, artists posed as discoverers of these vanishing areas. The allure of experiencing the view themselves motivated tourists to seek out these locations. A paradox of tourism evolved, wherein the depicted solitude figure as seen in painted seascapes lured more visitors, and thus resulted in commercial development and the loss of a solitary experience.

The majority of the works Whistler painted in Trouville are congruent with the post-Romantic trend; his seaward views show a relatively placid body of water in all six of the canvases, all but two of them uninhabited. Like his seascape predecessors, Whistler constructed scenes in which the viewer could imagine themselves isolated in a moment of respite as they

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gazed upon a private vista. Landscapes, as with seascapes, were preferred by the general public to be unpopulated in the early-to-mid-1860s. For instance, in 1861, Maxime Du Camp wrote:

> The painters of landscapes and marines do not generally realize how much they harm their pictures by loading them with useless little people. What one loves in the forests, in the meadows, by the edge of the sea, is the absolute solitude which allows one to be in direct communication with nature; if a peasant or sailor appears, the spell is broken, and one is grasped again by the humanity one had wanted to escape; what is true in reality is also true in fiction; a landscape only has grandeur if it is uninhabited. 189

It is apparent that Whistler attempted to create a visual refuge in his Trouville paintings, as well. The only figural elements present in the Trouville group, in his two compositions, *Harmony in Blue and Silver* and *Sea and Rain*, are unobtrusive as they visually meld into their surroundings. As contemplative figures, one a mere silhouette, they are not the locals Du Camp identifies as the figures that would detract from the viewing experience, and thus fall outside typical Realist subject matter. Other than the natural elements of sand, sea, and sky, Whistler’s only additions throughout the Trouville paintings are sailboats, which activate the compositions to varying degrees.

Notably, Whistler wrote to Fantin-Latour in August 1865, approximately a month before the commencement of his stay in Trouville, that Daubigny had paid him a visit in London. 190 Widely exhibited, Daubigny popularized the open-air painted sketch. Daubigny seldom painted figures into his vistas, or minimized them in a manner reminiscent of Watteau, and was admired by critics for his unmediated view of nature. By the 1860s, Daubigny was considered one of the primary painters of the Normandy coast, particularly for his portrayals of the town of Villerville, six kilometers north-east of Trouville. 191

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190 James McNeill Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, 16 August [1865], Library of Congress, PWC 1/33/1; GUW 11477.
191 Courbet and Daubigny had spent time together in Trouville in 1865, as well, though Whistler does not appear to have met Daubigny there. *Letters of Gustave Courbet,* ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 644.
As Daubigny was revered for his works despite their lack of finish, a quality for which Whistler had been heavily criticized concerning his *Symphony in White, No. 1*, Whistler may have interpreted his common theme of the uninhabited seascape as a potential new subject that would allow him to work quickly and without need for extensive refinement, though he would often revisit and edit the compositions in the studio.\(^{192}\) In addition, the seascape also did not necessitate a narrative, nor figures, as it became increasingly conflated with the tourist propaganda of unmitigated nature.

Whistler’s representations of the Trouville coast only include sailboats or the occasional figure, aesthetic selections that cater to the overall proclivities of contemporaneous seascape painters like Daubigny. Working in the off-season, Whistler deliberately excluded visual reminders of the village’s transformation into a resort town, such as villas and hotels, steamboats that travelled the length of the Normandy beaches, and remnant bathing tents and tourists from the warmer months. The Trouville canvases thus explicitly reflect Whistler’s adherence to popular contemporaneous seascape depictions and simultaneous departure from the faithful representations of Realism.

By the mid-1860s, Trouville and the surrounding Normandy beaches were known as “the summer boulevard[s] of Paris.”\(^ {193}\) As the trips from cities to the coast grew in affordability and facility with the spread of the railway, urban vacationers simply transposed their everyday lives onto this new setting. The vast majority were technically not regarded as tourists, as they tended to visit one specific location and remain there, rather than seek new sights and activities. Few artists depicted the incipience of resort culture. Eugène Boudin and Claude Monet, who had both

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\(^ {192}\) Daubigny also popularized riorscapes as observed from the center of the river from his famous floating studio, a boat called the *Botin*. He may have equally informed Whistler’s mature Nocturnes, painted from evening boating excursions with the Greaves brothers.

lived in the coastal Norman city of Le Havre for the majority of their lives and would grow to be championed as modern painters, traced the change from rural community to fashionable resort towns in their paintings, discussed below.\textsuperscript{194}

In the mid-1860s, Boudin was specifically celebrated for his observations of holiday scenes on the beach that reflected their changing status and function.\textsuperscript{195} Familiar with the coast’s atmospheric changes and entrancing landscape, and with the numerous artists who were similarly drawn to this subject, Boudin encouraged his colleagues to visit Le Havre and paint alongside him, including Monet and Jongkind, who studied under him, in the fall of 1862. Boudin’s subjects, vacationers enjoying a day on the beach, were also his audience, and therefore facilitated Boudin’s work to rise in popularity and simultaneously promoted the Normandy coast as a holiday destination. Although he had been painting coastal scenes since the 1840s, Boudin executed his initial Trouville canvases in 1862 and generally varied between a handful of motifs for these beach scenes.\textsuperscript{196} His most popular, \textit{plein-air} Trouville paintings, contemporaneous with Whistler’s, show vacationers in full, formal dress, grouped along the beach, often seated as though in the sidewalk cafés of Paris. Figures are arranged in clusters in Boudin’s seascapes, as in \textit{The Beach at Trouville} (1865; Figure 29), wherein the figures appear as a frieze. Within the horizontal seascape format, they compose another tier, one that mostly obscures the sea—thus replacing it—despite its ostensible importance in a coastal painting. The figures’ placement in the

\textsuperscript{194} Both Boudin and Monet would later choose to focus on the atmospheric aspects of the seascape, abandoning the previous focus on figures, and were both featured in the initial exhibition of Impressionists in 1874. Like Boudin, who became his teacher in the 1850s, Monet exhibited a couple of acclaimed seascapes in the Salon of 1865: \textit{La Pointe de la Hève at Low Tide}, 1865, and \textit{The Mouth of the Seine at Honfleur}, 1865. Both of these canvases show picturesque scenes that do not allude to modern developments. Monet also studied under Charles Gleyre, and though his time in the studio did not overlap with that of Whistler’s, he likewise idolized Courbet in his early career as a painter and met him at some point on the Normandy coast.\textsuperscript{195} One of Boudin’s formative mentors was Isabey, whom he met in the 1840s.\textsuperscript{196} Boudin is noted for his invention of the “scène de plage” as a subject. He primarily painted such scenes from 1861 to 1870.
middle distance of the painting presents them as an intrusion, preventing the traditional view of the isolated seaside, while also alienating them from the viewer. Boudin therefore documented the social interactions of urbanites more than the seascape itself. The sea, though present, is relegated to a small area of blue. Revealing the changed status of the seascape from vista of authentic experience to mere setting for social activity, most of the figures ignore the water altogether; Boudin’s visitors are typically so self-absorbed that they could be placed into any city scene. Although *Beach at Trouville* is indicative of Boudin’s work in the mid-1860s, the painter’s oeuvre also traced the holidaymakers’ interaction with the water as a perceived place of leisure. *Crinolines sur la Plage* (1865; Figure 30), though still dominated by a group of figures on the beach, shows bathing tents and several miniscule bathers and persons canoeing. Instead of the typical sailboat, a distant steamboat is placed on the horizon. Despite these symbols of modernity that capture the new resort identity of Trouville, Boudin also features a couple, on the margins of the crowd, looking out to sea, thus recalling the original appeal of the coast.

Monet, having observed the transformation of the Normandy coast over the course of his life, reconciled past and present as he highlighted the dichotomy of the sea as place of work and one of leisure, as perceived respectively by villagers and visitors, in *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse* (1867; Figure 31). The foregrounded fishermen are turned away from the sea, while a bourgeois couple actively watches it through a telescope in the middle ground. As depicted in this and the aforementioned canvases, the idea of viewing the seascape as a vista was intricately tied to Normandy tourism. Prior to the region’s acclaim as holiday destination, windows rarely looked out to sea since locals regarded the water as a “harbinger of danger.”

197 The leisure class brought new developments that purposefully framed the seascape in an apparent effort to recreate the

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works of the art that escalated its popularity. Aside from the fashionable casinos and hotels with windows overlooking the sea, freestanding wind walls that contained windows were also physically erected on the beach (Figure 32); the seascape was therefore undeniably and repeatedly framed, and presented as a two-dimensional image even to viewers who were able to experience it first-hand.

By producing calm seascapes, Whistler acknowledged the newfound, domesticated view of the coast. Perhaps in an effort to cater to the tourist market, Whistler’s views from the coast conflated the idealization of the pristine, mostly isolated seaside with familiar perspectives. The scenes are observed from the shore or floating above the water, as though referencing sailing or swimming. Although Whistler essentially replicated the holidaymakers’ view with his direct address of the sea, the artist exploited the seascape’s simple format to experiment with paint viscosity, style, and composition. He limited compositional accents to rocks, sailboats, and, for two of the canvases, a solitary figure. Whistler’s Trouville seascapes are some of the first undeniable instances of his distilling and framing views of nature, essentially marking the inception of one of his famous quotes on art:

> Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result be beautiful--as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he brings forth from chaos glorious harmony. To say to the painter, that Nature is to be taken as she is, is to say to the player, that he may sit on the piano. That Nature is always right, is an assertion, artistically, as untrue, as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted. Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong: that is to say, the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy a picture is rare and not common at all.

The Trouville canvases show Whistler’s increasing awareness of facture and stylized forms, eschewing his prior concern with the depiction of reality.

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198 Whistler often engaged in bathing in the sea, along with Courbet, in Trouville.
As Whistler and Courbet stayed well into the autumn of 1865, past the tourist season, both may have simply portrayed the area as they experienced it, vacated of the summer’s holidaymakers. However, neither artist showed evidence of resort culture, as though denying the infiltration of the leisure class in this area. For Courbet, this shift contrasts with his commissioned portraits of women from earlier during his stay on the Normandy coast that year, but it also implies that the “pure” seascapes he produced in the company of Whistler were the result of a personal interest in painting them; Courbet’s 1865 seascapes mark the beginning of his lifelong affinity for depicting coastal vistas. Both Courbet and Whistler painted straightforward views of the seascape in 1865, and each did so in varying styles, demonstrating that the seascape as subject matter permitted the artists the freedom to explore compositions and methods of painting. While Courbet experimented with a lighter, more harmonious palette, flattened forms, and a depiction of atmosphere, Whistler’s own interest in working through different aesthetic and compositional issues within a simplified format becomes apparent. Whistler’s resulting paintings are therefore not necessarily modern in their subject matter, but rather, in their execution.

**Visual Exploration: Whistler’s Figureless Trouville Canvases**

Between August and November, 1865, Whistler painted several seascapes in Trouville, six of which were indisputably created during this sojourn. A seventh painting, *Symphonie en argent et émeraude*, has been attributed to this 1865 trip to Trouville due to the date on the stretcher, but its date of creation continues to be debated. As such, this chapter only addresses the six canvases that have been recognized as painted in Trouville with certainty.
self-portrait. These specific changes vary throughout the group of paintings as Whistler sought a resolution to his desire to distance his work from Realism during his search for a new mode of expression.

An overview of the group as a whole reveals that the two Trouville paintings that include a figure, *Harmony* and *Sea and Rain*, are more conceptually refined, and thus ultimately act as formative examples of Whistler’s aesthetic concerns. Along with the thinly-painted, shoreless composition of *Trouville*, the three canvases are cohesively indicative of Whistler’s mature style. The remaining three figureless compositions, *The Sea, Blue and Silver: Trouville*, and *Crepuscule in Opal: Trouville*, elucidate Whistler’s desperate search for a unique artistic style when confronted with the new subject matter of the seascape. While they differ in composition and brushwork, each of these three paintings reveals the artist’s hand in the application of pigment. Courbet’s contemporaneous seascapes, with their low horizon lines and emphasis on the depiction of the sky, most resemble Whistler’s figureless depictions of the sea from Trouville.

*Blue and Silver: Trouville* (Figure 33) displays the most traditional progression of space within the Trouville group. Viewed from the sandy shore, the sea and sky dominate the canvas in their assorted blue and white pigments, and a darker horizon line demarcates the lower third of the canvas. The foreground monochromatic shore is anchored by boulders that recede into the shallow water. Thickly dragged strokes of paint, applied at regular intervals, form the semblance of lapping waves; their slight diagonal tilt, along with the rocks and three sailboats, accentuates the recession of space toward the horizon. The overall image, however, is fairly flat, especially
when compared to Courbet’s *The Beach* (Figure 34). Both artists emphasized the windswept sky and juxtaposed the emphatic brushstrokes of thin paint with summarily rendered fore and middle-grounds. However, Whistler’s facture is consistent throughout his painting, while Courbet deliberately varied his paint handling depending on the element he depicted; he softly painted the sky with brushes and used a trowel and palette knife for the tactile sand and water. Courbet created depth through his multi-layered application of paint, particularly in his use of navy, while Whistler’s use of a dark primer, without incorporating it into the applied image, only saturates the limited colors and emphasizes their opacity. The perspectival depth in Whistler’s *Blue and Silver* is further undermined by the visible brushstrokes of the masts of the two closest boats, which are equal in width despite their supposed planar difference.

Titularly, *Blue and Silver: Trouville* and *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*, the second of which was renamed to include the musical reference in 1892, invites a comparison of the two canvases. The difference between distinct hues and orderly brushwork of the former with the fluidity and unifying grey wash of the latter amplifies the disparate styles Whistler investigated in his short stay. The two canvases share the repetition of tones in horizontal layers, the colors woven together; however, while *Harmony* is stagnant and calm, evoking contemplation through the use of flat planes of color, the variation in brushstroke of *Blue and Silver*, from the scumbled sky to the hatching on the boulders, presents the painting as an overworked sketch. The dynamic, almost naturalistic sky strongly resembles Courbet’s treatment of the same subject. In comparison, *Harmony* appears especially effortless, achieving the

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201 Courbet’s contemporaneous paintings, however, as also noticeably less impasted and painted in a lighter palette than the rest of his oeuvre, implying that, in a reversal of roles, was stylistically influenced by Whistler during the Trouville sojourn.

202 Whistler officially renamed this canvas *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* after Isabella Stewart Gardner purchased it from his studio in 1892. However, a few months earlier, in June of that year, Whistler had called it *Sea and Sand*. Young, 37.
appearance of the speed of execution that Whistler felt he lacked with his 1864 Thames and Eastern-inspired paintings.\textsuperscript{203}

Whistler’s use of opaque and bright pigments, mixed with white and applied to a dark ground, lends to a luminosity in \textit{Blue and Silver} that mimics the daylight glow of the seaside. He achieved a similar effect in \textit{Crepuscule in Opal: Trouville} (Figure 35). Whistler reduced the ocean to a single, thick swipe of the palette knife in a dazzling white, the edges of which remain partially unrefined to accentuate the mode of creation, which resembles Courbet’s treatment of the sea in his seascapes prior to and including the trip to Trouville. Although not as sculptural as Courbet’s use of paint, the sea’s silver tone, placement in the center of the composition, and more voluminous depiction highlights it as the prominent aspect of the canvas and visually asserts its simple rendition, allowing it to rise to the foremost visual plane as though superimposed onto the canvas. The horizon line, therefore, is somewhat obscured and uneven as a result, further abstracting the compositional space. In contrast, the sky and shore present fluctuating colors almost seamlessly, softened by paintbrush, while the foregrounded boulder is sketchily rendered in one color, as though drawn with paint onto the canvas. Whistler emphasized the materiality of paint in \textit{Crepuscule}, as he used a differentiation of paint viscosity to demarcate elements in the painting, rather than relying solely on color. He thus incorporated both Courbet’s palette knife method and his own use of fluid, layered, translucent paint. Whistler also portrayed an ambiguous time of day, either twilight or dawn, but softened the tones to harmonize the colors. The sandy shore is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue that mirrors the

\textsuperscript{203} See Chapter 2. While Whistler sought an ease and quickness of execution, it was not in an effort to capture the fleeting light or impression of the landscape, as was the goal of the later Impressionist group. Whistler felt that his less meticulously rendered paintings were more impactful in their design and beauty.
sky and visually unifies the composition; the general effect is that of a captured mood that precedes a realistic depiction of the seascape.

Whistler minimized the core elements of a composition by playing with forms rather than paint application in _The Sea_ (Figure 36). The composition is made of two horizontal bands, to which Whistler added numerous details to identify them clearly as sea and sky. By emphasizing the diagonal motion of the wind in the waves, clouds, and foregrounded sailboat, Whistler energized the composition. The effect of the windswept scene alludes to its possible _plein-air_ creation as it depicts a spontaneous moment. Quickly painted, the cresting waves and clouds mimic each other’s visual wistfulness in their movement. The foaming, crashing waves are represented in white impasto, differentiating them from the deep olive water, while the sky is composed of a mixture of thin pigments applied with a brush on a wet surface, later revisited with a dry brush. The reductive parallel bands of the sea and sky appear to be precursors to the minimal arrangement of horizontal tiers in _Harmony in Blue and Silver_. In combination with the stylized, twisted sail of the boat, a notable departure from realistic depiction in both canvases, this identifies _The Sea_ as a possible precursor to _Harmony_.

Of the Trouville canvases, _The Sea_ most readily displays Whistler’s experience as a viewer who directly engaged with the seascape, as it immerses the viewer in the vista. Significantly, however, _The Sea_ uses illusionistic effects within an idealized composition; the rectangles that form the visual base for the water and sky, distinct in hue and accentuated by a severe horizon line, in addition to the traceable figure-eight

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204 Robin Spencer states that there are only three 1860s paintings by Whistler that were created _en plein air_: _The Thames in Ice_, an unfinished canvas started in Guéthary in 1862, and the 1864 _Chelsea in Ice_, painted from his window. However, I assert that Boudin’s correspondence later in this chapter clearly shows that Whistler worked outside in Trouville, meaning that some Trouville canvases may have been started _en plein air_. Robin Spencer, “Whistler, Manet, and the Tradition of the Avant-Garde,” in _James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination_, ed. Ruth E. Fine (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 47-64: 56.

205 The serpentine lines used to create the sail might be a nod to William Hogarth’s “line of beauty.” Whistler admired Hogarth throughout his life.
of the sailboat, reveal this canvas to be a simultaneous experimentation with forms, application of paint, and representation of a scene, independent of Whistler’s previous application of Japanese design principles to the seascape.

In the three aforementioned seascapes, Whistler’s disparate stylistic experiments are readily observable; his figureless seascapes of 1865, therefore, display Courbet’s continued, yet uncertain and limited, influence on the young artist and his simultaneous desire for a novel approach to painting. Although Whistler’s use of the palette knife reflected Courbet’s impasto style in *Crepuscule*, he began to experiment with visible brushstrokes, as well. He also either subtly incorporated the familiar knife work, as in the white foam atop a cresting wave, or utilized the tool in a novel way to create more linear rather than haptic marks.

Throughout this trio, Whistler alternated between painting methods and composition styles, but never included a figure. Without need for concern for proportion or placement of figures, Whistler had liberty to vary his painting technique and to address issues of framing, realism, and paint application. As a result, the canvases distinctly began to show a mixture of natural observations and distilled, reductive images. Upon reaching a more cohesive style with the remainder of the Trouville paintings, Whistler would reintroduce the figure in his two most minimal representations of the Trouville seascape, as though he felt the canvases were too abstracted to be interpreted as landscapes otherwise.

Whistler’s visual explorations in the Trouville canvases culminate in his refusal of Realism through *Harmony in Blue and Silver*. However, Courbet’s more lasting impact on Whistler was perhaps the role of the artist. As David Sellin claims, “Illusion of reality is always

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206 Observed *pentimenti* of the figureless composition reveals that Whistler originally included two figures on the shore of *Blue and Silver: Trouville*, possibly implying that he had attempted to create a greater illusion of the recession of space. His final erasure of these figures shows a potential first step toward a simplified representation of the seascape. Young et al., 39.
admired by the layman, but Courbet was a painter’s painter. It is this more than anything else that Whistler got from his friendship with Courbet.”

A Different Emulation: Whistler Alludes to Manet

Along with *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, the two Trouville seascapes, *Sea and Rain* and *Trouville (Grey and Green, The Silver Sea)*, reveal Whistler’s initial adoption of painting with diluted pigments. In 1865, the thinned medium—a “sauce” he created by adding mastic varnish and turpentine to his oil paint—was applied *alla prima* to create translucent layers that retained a slight sheen and showed Whistler’s use of various brushes. While *Harmony in Blue and Silver* is an indisputable revision of Courbet’s 1854 *Sea at Palavas*, one additional painting Whistler created in Trouville in 1865 alludes to a fellow artist’s work, which he translated in his newfound method of painting. *Trouville (Grey and Green, The Silver Sea)* (Figure 37) cannot be discussed without mentioning the contemporaneous works of Édouard Manet. Unlike the juxtaposition of the Courbet painting and Whistler’s reimagining of the scene, which reveals an unfavorable view of Courbet’s Realist teachings in that it shows a clear departure from them, *Trouville* appears to be a more direct translation of the Manet seascapes created the previous year and exhibited both inside and outside the academy’s Salon. *Trouville* specifically mirrors the placement of the horizon line, empty foreground, shoreless view of the flatly rendered sea of Manet’s 1864 seascape, *Steamboat Leaving Boulogne* (Figure 38). The dialogue that emerges between the two canvases shows a mutual interest in Japanese woodblock prints, lack of clear

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narrative, and interest in reductive, nearly abstract painting. Instead of the criticism Whistler deployed in *Harmony* through stylistic reinterpretation, the similarities between *Trouville* and *Steamboat* disclose Whistler’s admiration for his contemporary avant-gardist. By aligning himself with Manet, Whistler further cemented his image as a modern painter.

Manet and Whistler, who met in 1861 and remained friendly until Manet’s death in 1883, were both deemed part of the group Michael Fried refers to as the “generation of 1863,” acknowledged as forbearers of modernism in painting even during these formative years in their respective careers.\(^{209}\) The term stems from their highly controversial presence in the Salon des Refusés in 1863, each criticized for their sketchy renditions of what the crowds found to be confusing subjects with no clear moral or story.\(^{210}\) Whistler and Manet were also prominently featured in Fantin-Latour’s *Homage to Delacroix* (1864), flanking the central portrait of the modern master, and were thus identified as the forerunners of modern art in their stylistically individualistic portrayals of naturalist subjects. Although the young artists had emerged onto the art scene under the umbrella of Realism, their works as seen in the Salon des Refusés did not uniformly or strictly adhere to specific schools of aesthetic thought.

While noted for their respective depictions of urban life, both Whistler and Manet repeatedly painted seascapes, but not landscapes, possibly because of the greater potential for the abstraction of this subject. Manet’s first seascape, *The Battle of the U.S.S. “Kearsarge” and the C.S.S. “Alabama”* (1864; Figure 39) depicts a naval, American Civil War battle between a Union merchant ship and Confederate privateer in the English Channel, off the coast of Cherbourg, France. The canvas was heavily criticized for its lack of an easily readable narrative.

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\(^{210}\) Whistler’s *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1861-1862) and Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* (1863) were included in the Salon des Refusés.
When exhibited in the Salon of 1872, the battle scene was called a fragment, and the expanse of water was mocked as a “vertical slice of the ocean” that allowed viewers to see the reactions of the fish to the events occurring above them.\textsuperscript{211} Manet recycled the inspiration for this painting in three additional marine paintings he created later that summer, including its most minimalist iteration, \textit{Steamboat Leaving Boulogne}.\textsuperscript{212} The boats are rendered in such a way that they are practically silhouettes rather than three-dimensional objects, and show no impact on the immediately surrounding water. Despite their billowing sails, both the ocean and steam from the ferry on the right side of the canvas appear placid and motionless.

Whistler undoubtedly would have come in contact with Manet’s seascapes shortly before his Trouville trip; Manet’s controversial \textit{The Battle of the U.S.S. “Kearsarge” and the C.S.S. “Alabama”} was exhibited by Cadart, one of Whistler’s print publishers, while the remaining marine paintings were on view in February 1865 at Martinet’s gallery.\textsuperscript{213} While Manet’s paintings maintain a narrative and political subtext, Whistler would have noticed their aesthetic quality. Manet had created these during the summer of 1864, spent in Boulogne, a small town that, like Trouville, rests on the English Channel.\textsuperscript{214}

The similarities in Whistler’s \textit{Trouville (Grey and Green)} and Manet’s idiosyncratic depiction of the marine scene in \textit{Steamboat} reveal a deliberate, westernized conception of Japanese \textit{ukiyo-e} prints, loosely translated as “floating world,” which both artists collected at the

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\textsuperscript{213} Singletary, 64. Manet correspondence with Martinet claiming that eight marines would be included in a February show in 1865 is cited in Hanson, 335. No exhibition catalog appears to have been published to accompany the show.
\textsuperscript{214} Manet would return to Boulogne repeatedly throughout his life, but his later compositions are more concerned with port scenes. Although he may have worked \textit{en plein air}, Manet also worked from popular prints, as well as his own sketches and memories.
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time. The view of the seascape in each is tilted toward the viewer, raising the horizon line so that
the sea comprises the bottom two-thirds of the canvas. The unembellished visual entry into the
composition foregrounds the negative space of the scene and further negates a recession in space.
Whistler accomplished a flat surface by diluting the pigment in more medium, allowing for fluid
application. Other than the striated surface evidently produced with long, horizontal strokes
across the picture plane that recall the grain observable in certain Japanese woodblock prints,
Whistler placed calligraphic accents in the clouds, leaving the marks made by the brush intact
and thus emphasizing the means of creation and the surface of the canvas. The later addition of
the sailboats onto the simplified composition of *Trouville* is evident as the horizon can be seen
through their sheer sails. Although superimposed onto the original, abstract seascape, the four
sailboats are painted in a gray tone that reflects the nuanced colors of the sea, sky, and glimpsed
underpainting of the canvas. As visual accents, the sailboats energize the composition and their
strategic placement connects the sea and sky, their vertical masts linking the two distinct
elements. In contrast, Manet’s opaque, solid boats appear dissonant within the expanse of blue
sea and sky, an effect that is accentuated by the boats’ perceived immobility. Manet’s choice of
bright, concentrated hues punctuated by the dark shapes was directly derived from the depiction
of forms in woodblock prints. Whistler instead chose to assimilate the compositional design
elements of the prints depicting a “floating world,” while simultaneously forging his own
exploration of harmonious color and viscosity of paint. As a result, *Trouville* is a pastiche of
various influences: the contemporary reference to Manet’s canvas, the representation of the
Trouville vista, and an incorporation of Japanese two-dimensional compositional design, unified
through Whistler’s painting technique and limited palette.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Whistler produced several similar paintings the following year during an impromptu trip to help revolutionaries
in Chile, which are discussed in Chapter 4.
The visual echoes of Manet’s modern painting style reveal Whistler’s assimilation of japonisme in his own art, especially in relation to the seascape. While Whistler’s *Trouville* showed an undistilled resemblance to the compositional aspects of Manet’s, Whistler then fully incorporated the newfound combination of a tilted perspective, high horizon line, planes of color, tonal accents, and flatness of form in *Harmony*. Whistler’s loyalty in his translation of Manet’s canvas reflected an alignment with a controversial, avant-garde contemporary, and the visual language shared between the two canvases notably was used as a template for the way in which Whistler, in turn, recreated Courbet’s *Seashore at Palavas*. Thus, Whistler clearly chose the aesthetic of japonisme over Realism, and supplanted it for Courbet’s style. However, in both *Trouville* and in *Harmony*, Whistler transformed the structural elements into his own style with his use of a limited, subdued palette, and thin paint, and economy of brushstroke.

*Sea and Rain: A Modern Painting*

Two canvases painted by Whistler in Trouville in Courbet’s company include a figural component: *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* and *Sea and Rain: Variations in Violet and Green* (Figure 28). The latter, unparalleled in the Trouville paintings in its monochrome rendering of the seascape, features a silhouette in approximately the same location as Courbet in *Harmony*, situated in the lower left of the composition. Originally, the two works shared similar titles, as Whistler referred to *Harmony* as “Sea and Sand,” amongst other titles, as late as 1892. The presence of the figures in their respective canvases, especially considering that these are the only paintings of the Trouville group to have a human element, invites an interpretation of both figures as Courbet. Considering that *Harmony*, as a reimagination of

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216 Young, et al., 38.
Courbet’s earlier self-portrait by the sea, is Whistler’s snide commentary on his elder’s stature in the contemporary art world, *Sea and Rain* expands on this sentiment while accentuating Whistler’s independent contributions to modern art. It displays a number of formal characteristics that define Whistler’s later Nocturnes; thus, this canvas was the culmination of Whistler’s painterly experiments throughout his 1865 stay in Normandy, as exhibited in its minimal detail, smooth and thin painting technique, and tonal harmony. The combination of the aforementioned characteristics was previously unseen to this extent in Whistler’s oeuvre.\(^{217}\) *Sea and Rain* can therefore be regarded as an endcap to Whistler’s Trouville paintings, in which his aesthetic exploration reached a resolution that both furthered the statement of separation from the artistic influence of Courbet and truly presented Whistler as a modern painter in his own right.

*Sea and Rain* is compositionally comparable to Courbet’s 1865 *Low Tide, the Beach at Trouville* (Figure 40). Both canvases were painted during the Trouville sojourn, and the discrepancies between the two show the artists’ differing perspectives and divergent styles in the autumn of 1865. Each depiction shows the distant expanse of water, sliver of land, and closer tide pools, with a large sky that occupies the upper two thirds of the canvas; they are similar enough to assume that Whistler and Courbet may have painted their respective works alongside each other *en plein air*.\(^{218}\) However, the works lack a strong resemblance overall. Courbet’s painterly depiction of the water revealed his use of the palette knife and dark ground, yet the

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\(^{217}\) *Chelsea in Ice*, 1864, discussed in Chapter 1, comes closest in aesthetic to *Sea and Rain*, but was still painted with greater variation of tone and paint application, and achieved greater perspectival depth.\(^{218}\) Boudin’s letter of November 13, 1865, quoted below in this chapter, confirms that Whistler painted outside alongside Courbet and Boudin on November 12. Intriguingly, Whistler signed *Sea and Rain* in the same, bottom right corner that Courbet did on his own canvas in a script that bears a similarity to the latter’s semi-calligraphic block lettering. Although *Trouville* is also signed by Whistler, *Sea and Rain* is the only 1865 canvas that is both signed and dated by the artist.
portrayal of the seascape still maintains a realist approach. Courbet’s sky revealed his astute study of atmospheric effects, and his sculptural painting mimicked the patchiness of the sandy shore. Courbet emphasized the reflective nature of the water through his use of color, and simultaneously drew the eye to the center of the canvas with deep ultramarine tones over a nearly black ground, suggesting its depth and distance. The infinite horizon is accentuated: details in its proximity fade into a harmonious collection of the softened blues of atmospheric perspective. A silhouetted, distant figure, carrying a fishing pole and accompanied by a dog, nostalgically harkens back to Realist depictions of locals on the shore. Miniscule, they visually describe the expansive breadth of the seascape.

Whistler’s Sea and Rain, in contrast, barely distinguishes the sky from the water and shore. A figure, though closer, is composed of three touches of color, clearly superimposed on a tonal wash of blue-grays and beiges. Due to its addition to the still-wet surface with an extremely diluted medium, the figure melds into the overall, seemingly uniform “skin” or layer of paint. The paint is thinned with turpentine to the extent that the fine weave of the canvas remains visible. Rather than visually distilling the seascape into horizontal tiers as in Harmony, Whistler depicts the sea and sky in the same muted tones in Sea and Rain. The shore is rendered amorphous as the translucent gray paint, seemingly representing tidal pools or reflective wet sand, reaches the foreground. Whistler’s originality and true departure from the tactility of Courbet’s style is observable; the limited use of color, translucency and liquid application of

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219 Whistler’s 1864 Thames painting, Thames in Ice, was painted in the same manner, showing that the younger artist was still emulating Courbet’s style less than a year before the Trouville sojourn.

220 Hackney claims that this alla prima technique may have been initiated with the sketchy, thinly-painted Symphony in White, No. 3, in which the marks of individual bristles of the hog hair brush Whistler used are observable. Hackney, 188. Whistler used the term “skin” in reference to the picture surface of his paintings. Lance Mayer and Gay Myers, American Painters on Technique, 1860-1945 (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, c2013), 159.

221 Whistler would also add mastic varnish to this paint thinner and oil mixture, so that the paint would not be too matte. Hackney, 189.
paint, as well as the ambiguity of form, reveal his attempt to evoke within the viewer the sensation of the scene.\textsuperscript{222}

The minimalist detail and use of \textit{alla prima} technique Whistler used in \textit{Sea and Rain} may have been the result of a quick execution of the work, possibly due to it being painted outdoors. It is widely accepted that Whistler, in the mid-1860s, was primarily a painter who worked in the studio; several of his biographers believe that only three of his canvases of this decade were executed \textit{en plein air}. Although not documented by Whistler or Courbet, Boudin wrote that he worked alongside them both on the beach of Trouville in 1865. In a letter of November 13, he claims that the three “faced the great outdoors and worked bravely outside” together the previous day.\textsuperscript{223} Whistler likely would have been familiar with two of Boudin’s canvases exhibited in the Salon of 1865, \textit{Un concert au Casino de Deauville} (1865; Figure 41) and \textit{La plage de Trouville, à l’heure du bain} (1864; Figure 42), while Courbet had met and spent time with Boudin in Le Havre in 1859.\textsuperscript{224} Upon seeing his own canvases in the Salon, Boudin noted that they were “too blue, too blue,” and wrote himself a reminder to attempt to paint smaller figures with more space, and to use warmer gray tones to achieve a more balanced image.\textsuperscript{225} Perhaps this concern was articulated to Whistler, who fully explored neutral tones in \textit{Sea and Rain} and further reduced

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\textsuperscript{222} Whistler’s thinning of oil paint to resemble watercolor might relate to his earliest works--Whistler was praised for his watercolors while at West Point, mentioned in Richard Dorment and Margaret F. MacDonald, \textit{James McNeill Whistler} (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994), 14. The use of oil paint like watercolor also emphasizes Whistler’s concern with speed of execution.


\textsuperscript{224} Entry numbers 252 and 253 in the Salon checklist. Whistler’s \textit{La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine} was in the same Salon. \textit{Explication des ouvrages de peinture et dessins, sculpture, architecture et gravure, des artistes vivants, exposés au Palais des Champs-Élysées, le 1er Mai 1865}. (Paris: Charles de Mourgues Frères, 1865), 34, 289.

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the size of the figure in comparison to that in *Harmony in Blue and Silver.*\(^{226}\) The visual correlation between the seascapes depicted in Courbet’s *Low Tide* and Whistler’s *Sea and Rain* is unique amongst the bodies of work each artist produced in this season, and implies that the two canvases could have been concurrently created *en plein air.* Instead of using the bright chromatic palette of Courbet, Whistler essentially used the same pigments to create a harmonious, nearly monochromatic image.\(^{227}\) Boudin’s 1865 canvases do not share a similar perspective, though he did paint a scene with a solitary figure, an anomaly in his oeuvre of the mid-1860s.\(^{228}\)

Whistler’s incorporation of the rudimentary figure in *Sea and Rain* presents its multifarious purpose. Its simplistic rendition, which rendered it as a translucent silhouette, could be a continuation of the reductionism of *Harmony,* and therefore, the effacement of the figure could allude to a complete erasure of Courbet’s figure and a metaphor for his fading relevance to Whistler.\(^{229}\) Whistler’s use of a silhouetted figure in *Sea and Rain,* and in some of his earlier Thames compositions, also precedes its popularity in the French vanguard art of the 1880s and 1890s. The lack of modelling and cast shadows allowed silhouetted figures to denote the presence of a person without betraying the abstract nature of a composition.\(^{230}\) Whistler therefore may have utilized the figure as a visual guide for the art-viewing public to understand the minimalist composition. Both *Sea and Rain* and *Harmony* include a repoussoir figure featured

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\(^{227}\) Nesta R. Spink. “Sea and Rain: Variations in Violet and Green,” in *Eighty Works in the Collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art: A Handbook,* by Stephen Addiss et al., entry 62. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1979. Spink states that Whistler’s color palette only included the following colors, mixed with either calcium carbonate or lead white: iron-oxide yellow, vermillion, cobalt blue, and bone black. Whistler’s reductionist Nocturnes of the 1870s also included the aforementioned pigments.

\(^{228}\) Boudin would later concentrate solely on the seascape and ships, employing the occasional repousoir figure in the late 1880s and 1890s.

\(^{229}\) See Chapter 2.

\(^{230}\) Nancy Forgione, “Shadow and Silhouette in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris,” *The Art Bulletin* 81.3 (September 1999), 490-512: 492.
in the foreground and observing the same vista as the viewer, which can be regarded as instructional additions. By imagining oneself in the position of the isolated figure, the viewer is welcome to gaze and contemplate the image before them. At the same time, as viewed independently of *Harmony*, however, the figure in *Sea and Rain* serves as little more than a tonal addition, and it reflects Whistler’s comments on a canvas he painted eleven years later (Figure 43):

> The vast majority of English folk cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell. My picture of a “Harmony in Grey and Gold” is an illustration of my meaning—a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern, I care nothing for the past, present, or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted at that spot. All that I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis for the picture. Now this is precisely what my friends cannot grasp.  

Regardless of Whistler’s intent, the silhouetted figure in *Sea and Rain* fulfills numerous functions as possible interpretation of Courbet, as an instructional trope for the audience, and as a visual punctuation that adds interest to the otherwise minimal image.

In 1867, *Sea and Rain* was the first of the Trouville canvases to be exhibited, and the only one to be displayed at a Royal Academy exhibition. For such a minimal composition, the canvas was well received. Intrigued critics who wrote of *Sea and Rain* did so in almost poetic prose as they attempted to describe the painting; Philip Gilbert Hamerton wrote,

> We wish to describe Mr. Whistler’s picture, but the difficulty is that there is so little to describe. Gray sky, gray sea, gray wet sand. Some touches of white to indicate breakers, some birds, a figure lightly indicated. Materially there is nothing in it…

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232 Whistler presented four of his Trouville seascapes to Rossetti in March 1867, who suggested that Whistler submit the largest, *Sea and Rain*, “which he regards which predilection, of a grey sea and a very grey sky,” to the Royal Academy. Whistler’s *Battersea* (1863; later renamed *Grey and Silver: Old Battersea Reach*) and *Symphony in White: No. 3* were also included in this exhibited. The latter was the first painting Whistler displayed with a musical title. Young et al., 38. And Sutton, 102.

Another review in the *Daily Telegraph* applauded Whistler’s unifying wash representing the “streaming pour of rain,” which “smooth[ed] out all form [...] almost all substance away from everything.” With *Sea and Rain*, as well as *Harmony*, Whistler instituted two characteristic, juxtaposed painting techniques that he would increasingly use in his future works: a unifying, neutral wash over the image that caused it to appear as a single layer, and a “positive one-stroke method with paint on canvas” in which elements are depicted in a minimal fashion and the artist’s hand is clearly visible. It is initially in *Sea and Rain* that Whistler’s mature opinion on paint application, that “Paint should not be applied thick [...] it should be like breath on the surface of a pane of glass,” is clearly illustrated in his paintings.

**Conclusion**

In the summer of 1865, in response to the Salon, *Le Charivari* published Honoré Daumier’s caricature of landscape artists (Figure 44). The image portrays two painters *en plein air*, with the first looking in the distance as he applies a stroke to his canvas, and the second fervently spying on his companion’s progress as he copies his work. Daumier’s lithograph highlighted the controversial, perceived originality of the landscape motif, considered by some as mere reproduction, while accentuating that the landscape as a work of art has as much of a relationship to the nature depicted as it is in dialogue with other works of art. Despite basing

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234 *Daily Telegraph* 31 May 1867, as quoted in Young et al, 38.
236 Ibid., 31.
237 Andrea Callen, *The Work of Art: Plein-Air Painting and Artistic Identity in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2015): 57–58. Daumier’s lithograph also appears to comment on the increasing ubiquity of the landscape within the art market due to their mass appeal, an impetus causing artists to turn to the landscape as subject and to essentially create them at a quick pace.
two of his 1865 Trouville paintings on the compositions of other artists, Whistler proved himself to be much more than an imitator of nature and of his fellow artists during his stay in Trouville. *Harmony in Blue and Silver* and *Trouville (Grey and Green, the Silver Sea)* both reveal Whistler’s deliberate separation from Realism and simultaneous assimilation of Japanese compositional devices in his oeuvre through the high horizon line, spatial ambiguity, striated brushstrokes, and flat, visually stacked areas of color. Whistler reinterprets Courbet’s canvas as a statement against Realism, in lieu of the mutual interest in Japanese woodblock print aesthetics Whistler shared with his controversial contemporary, Manet. In each, however, Whistler uniquely thinned his paint, lightened the palette, stylized forms, and used unifying washes to harmonize the compositions.

Taken as a whole, the Trouville canvases are stylistically discordant and indicative of his uncertainty as Whistler strived to find a distinct individual style. Apparent throughout, however, is Whistler’s quest for formal reduction, both in paint application and representation in an attempt to force the viewer to look at the picture, rather than through it. The culmination of Whistler’s search for his own aesthetic is ultimately revealed in the minimalist *Sea and Rain*, a painting that he may have based on his own *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, but in which he no longer needed to rely on his interpretation of japonisme. Whistler instead found an independent mode of expression that catalyzed his mature style, as seen in his Nocturnes started in the following year, and his lifelong aesthetic theory, which are both explored in Chapter 4. Whistler’s quote of his “Ten O’Clock” lecture seems to reflect accurately the conclusion he reached during his trip in Trouville, “The holiday-maker rejoices in the glorious day, and the painter turns aside to shut his eyes.”

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Chapter 4

“Blue and Silver” -- Seascapes to Nocturnes

Whistler returned to London in November 1865 from an autumn sojourn in Trouville on the Normandy coast of France. As already observed, Whistler’s Trouville paintings are a pivotal point in his oeuvre; not only did Whistler fully integrate japonisme into his aesthetic without his former reliance on Eastern objects as props, but also he achieved a reductionist compositional style and paired it with a freer application of diluted paint in a restrained palette, thus laying the foundation for his mature works, the Nocturnes.239

Upon his return to London, Whistler adopted an aestheticist style that prioritized beauty and that was inspired by Albert Moore, and started to formulate and solidify his views that art “should be independent of all clap-trap.”240 Shortly thereafter, in February, Whistler again abruptly left his home, this time to South America, where he would stay until September 1866. In both situations, Whistler left little documented reasoning for his extended periods of absence, but each interlude led to his creation of a small group of seascapes displaying forays toward a new aesthetic based on tonal harmony and formal minimalism. The latter group crucially included his inaugural Nocturne.

Whistler’s seascapes of 1866 maintain the aesthetic achieved in the two figural, yet most minimal works created in Trouville, Harmony in Blue and Silver and Sea and Rain (1865; Figure 28). Whistler adopted a restrained tonal palette, diluted paint, and flattened perspective in the both aforementioned Trouville works. The stylistic combination would heavily feature in his

239 See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Whistler’s artistic interaction with Asian art objects.
Nocturnes, but was initially integrated in his oeuvre in 1866, as it is apparent throughout the group of works created in Valparaíso, Chile. The artistic liberties taken by Whistler are a definite severance from his roots as a follower of Realism and cement the basis for his aesthetic theories. Nature, though necessary as source of inspiration, depended on the artist to transform and harmonize it: “In all that is dainty, and loveable, he finds hints for his own combinations, and thus is Nature ever his resource – and always at his service – and to him is naught refused.”

This chapter discusses Whistler’s concretization of an individual aesthetic in landscape painting. His voyage across the Atlantic revealed Whistler’s continued grappling with the balance between japonisme and representation that was present in Trouville. While Whistler had directly drawn inspiration from canvases by Courbet and Édouard Manet in his Trouville paintings, he quickly realized in the later 1860s that this method of thematic and stylistic exploration, which he had continued in his imitation of the work of Albert Moore, prevented him from properly forming an idiosyncratic point of view and mode of working for himself. Although I assert that Whistler’s Nocturnes were likely initiated by his emulation of another modern master, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Whistler’s discretion toward this source of inspiration was more personalized in the absorption of his method and aestheticized to succeed in finding an individual style. Woven throughout are the links between Whistler’s two progressive and idiosyncratic canvases of the Trouville sojourn, *Harmony in Blue and Silver* and *Sea and Rain*, and his mature work of the Nocturnes, reinforcing their significance in the creation of his artistic style and identity. Since the mature work of the Nocturnes visually represents Whistler’s views on nature and art, Whistler’s aesthetic theories are also discussed throughout this chapter; although he was unaware of it, Whistler had already achieved a similar combination of facture.

and proto-abstraction, emphasizing the work of art itself over the scene it represented, on the coast of France in 1865.

**Whistler and a New Search for Beauty**

Prior to his thematic breaks from his typical studio works and depictions of the industrial Thames, Whistler had come into contact with a new group of influential acquaintances in London who were associated with the Pre-Raphaelites. His friendship with painter Albert Moore, in particular, blossomed shortly before his stay in Trouville, and his espousal of art-for-art’s-sake inevitably contributed to Whistler’s changing aesthetic. Undoubtedly, he was drawn to an art that opposed the observational and social aspects of Courbet’s work as he sought to further himself from realism. Courbet, in his Realist Manifesto of 1855, had declared the following:

> I have studied, outside of any system and without prejudice, the art of the ancients and the art of the moderns. I no more wanted to imitate the one than to copy the other; nor, furthermore, was it my intention to attain the trivial goal of art for art’s sake. No! I simply wanted to draw forth from a complete acquaintance with tradition the reasoned and independent consciousness of my own individuality.  

Whistler, without having synthesized a recognizable style of his own by the mid-1860s, imitated both “the ancients” in his emulation of Moore’s classicist aesthetic, and “the moderns” in select seascapes of 1865, before ultimately creating a personal style cemented in his Nocturnes of the 1870s and aligned with the juxtaposition of Courbet’s Realism, art-for-art’s-sake.  

Whistler met Moore in May 1865, shortly after Moore’s exhibition of a purely decorative, classicist composition in the Royal Academy. He held him in such high esteem that he planned to include Moore in his studio self-portrait begun that summer prior to leaving for


\[243\] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Whistler’s *Harmony in Blue and Silver* as a recreation of Courbet’s seaside self-portrait, and Chapter 3 for a comparison of *Trouville (Grey and Green, the Silver Sea)* with an 1864 seascape by Manet.
Later that year, Whistler would replace Alphonse Legros with Moore in the Société des Trois. Moore channeled classicism as an exemplar of beauty in the same fashion that Whistler appropriated Asian objects in his own work. Whistler recognized Moore’s success with such subjectless paintings and briefly chose to adopt his style. Although he would not exhibit the painting until 1867, Whistler started his work on Symphony in White, No. 3 (c.1865-1867; Figure 45) in August and felt liberated by his sole concern of balance of color and form within the composition. Combined with his friendship with prominent Pre-Raphaelite artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, and with his predisposition to anti-academic thoughts on art, Whistler’s aesthetic viewpoint veered toward an autonomous art, free of the burden of narrative, moral, or historical associations.

The direct stylistic influence of Moore and the Pre-Raphaelites did not extend beyond Whistler’s figural compositions. Whistler attempted to incorporate Moore’s classicism in his oeuvre until 1870, but ultimately was unable to balance it with his japonisme. His experiments with the style, however, had lasting effects. From Moore, Whistler learned a softer paint application and the furrowed ‘ribbon’ brushstroke, a limited and muted palette, and an emphasis on an arrangement of forms in horizontal registers. The focus on idealized beauty aided in Whistler’s rejection of Courbet and formed the basis of his view of art as superior to nature, as preached by Swinburne.

Symphony in White, No. 3 was the first of Whistler’s works to bear a musical name, alluding to the abstract arts of music and poetry. In part a provocative title, as well as one that

244 See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Whistler’s unfinished The Artist in His Studio, 1865.
245 See Alastair Grieve. “Whistler and the Pre-Raphaelites,” Art Quarterly 34.2 (Summer 1971), 219–228, and John Sandberg, “Whistler Studies,” The Art Bulletin 50.1 (March 1968): 59-64, for more information on Whistler’s interactions with the Pre-Raphaelite circle.
246 Whistler’s unfinished Six Projects series are evidence of this. Whistler also wrote a letter to Moore in 1870 stating his fear that their aesthetics had become too similar. See James McNeill Whistler to Albert Moore, 12/19 September 1870, Glasgow University Library, MS Whistler M436; GUW 04166.
would suppress the importance of the subject to instead highlight the composition and color, Whistler most likely chose this titular format from a review of the scandalous first painting of the series in 1863, in which a critic called it a “symphony in white.”\textsuperscript{247} Whistler’s future works would carry musical titles, or nominally reflect the predominant one to two colors in the composition. Although fitting for his work, Whistler’s choice of title was heavily informed by the language critics had used to describe his paintings. Using musical terminology to wax poetic about art was not unusual; one of the foremost art critics of his time, John Ruskin, for instance, had often described Turner’s works in such vocabulary; Turner and Whistler’s marine paintings share some formal similarities, on which I elaborate below.\textsuperscript{248} Musical terms alluded to pure aesthetic experience, which Whistler hoped to conjure in the viewers through his works. Therefore, while Whistler undoubtedly benefited from the ability to title his paintings in a way that would force the public to interact with them directly as ‘pure’ works of art, he was perhaps also catering specifically to critics as he operated within the confines of their descriptions of images. Whistler would maintain his use of musical titles throughout his career and would compare visual and auditory arts to instruct his audience on how to approach his work. In his “The Red Rag,” a written and published piece on his opinion on art, Whistler declared, “As


\textsuperscript{248} It may seem ironic to use Ruskin’s praise of Turner to defend Whistler’s musical choice in titles, considering Whistler’s libel suit against Ruskin in 1878. Whistler sued Ruskin following the latter’s published review of the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition of 1877, in which he stated that it was an obscene show of “Cockney impudence” for Whistler to charge two hundred guineas for his \textit{Nocturne in Black and Gold, the Falling Rocket} (c.1875), essentially “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.” Whistler won the trial (though a hollow victory) primarily by proving that artistic style was a matter of taste. Ruskin championed Turner’s late work, in particular, in his \textit{Modern Painters} (originally published 1843-1860), including a canvas that was famously criticized as a work that could have been created “by throwing handfuls of white, and blue, and red, at the canvas, letting what chanced to stick, stick.” Ruskin, seemingly as enraged by the superficial similarities between the paintings of Turner and Whistler as he was by their ideological and technical differences, likely thought the comment more appropriate for Whistler’s painting. Many Whistler scholars, including the Pennells, thought Ruskin had personal and/or moral reasons for his dislike of Whistler, despite their inaquaintance. Linda Merrill, \textit{A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin} (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press in collaboration with the Freer Gallery of Art, 1992), 47-52, 55.
music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of colour.” Thus, aided by the stance of art-for-art’s-sake as promoted by Moore, Whistler started to regard art as something that should be divorced from reality and transcend mere representation.

Another Hiatus: Whistler in Chile

In 1866, Whistler made an impromptu trip to South America. As with the previous year’s sojourn in Trouville, Whistler did not preemptively state his intent, although evidence has recently come to light of Whistler’s possible attempt to engage in a weapons deal to aid Chile in its war against Spain. Regardless, Whistler made all arrangements for an extended stay and potential consequences to the possibly dangerous scenario within a few hours. Such an impulsive and political decision was highly irregular for Whistler, who even found the socialist roots of Realism distasteful.

Whistler presumably welcomed the opportunity to distance himself temporarily from a somewhat tumultuous situation in London. Coalescing with grueling artistic frustration, Whistler’s personal affairs and finances were strained. Constant experimentation in his art, in the hope of striking a personal aesthetic that departed from his Realist roots and incorporated his admiration of Eastern art with his newfound interest in classicism, caused Whistler’s failure to cement an individual style. Although Whistler’s reputation had grown and improved, he was struggling to sell his works outside of his circle of acquaintances. He also began to quarrel with artist friends Legros and Haden, with whom he would stop speaking in 1867. In added stress,

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Whistler’s mother had recently come to live with him in London, requiring Whistler to find another apartment for his mistress and model Jo Hiffernan. His younger brother, William, who served as a Confederate surgeon, joined them in early 1865.251

Whistler, perhaps to assuage his guilt for not participating in the Civil War, enthusiastically accepted a position to provide information for an acquaintance of William’s, a weapons dealer who sought to provide Chile with torpedoes in an effort to end Spain’s blockade of their port.252 Whistler set sail for Chile on February 2, 1866. When he arrived in March, eight Spanish ships in the Valparaíso harbor were being supervised by naval vessels of various countries, including the United States and Great Britain, as Chile and Spain sought a truce. The only combat Whistler observed was a bombardment of Valparaíso by the Spanish on March 30.

As they had been forewarned, civilians, and Whistler, vacated the city prior; the fleets left shortly thereafter. The torpedoes did not arrive until long after the conflict had dissipated. Whistler, however, stayed until September, and told his biographers that he painted five canvases, two of which were ostensibly lost at sea.253

Of the six paintings now attributed to this period, three horizontal compositions directly address the open water and stylistically resemble Whistler’s Trouville paintings, though they vary in technique as Whistler continued to explore methods of working. *Symphony in Grey and Green: The Ocean* (1866; Figure 46) most adheres to the aesthetic experiments of the Trouville

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251 William had served as a Confederate surgeon under Robert E. Lee, whom Whistler had personally known and admired as a student at West Point where Lee was superintendent. Though Whistler was born in Massachusetts, his mother had roots in the South, as did William’s wife, with whom he lived in the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, and to whom Whistler’s mother tended until her demise in 1863.

252 Whistler’s childhood dream had been to become a soldier, and his biographers, the Pennells, recount Whistler’s telling of his adventures in Chile with several quotes in which he pridefully speaks of being a West Point man. Daniel E. Sutherland. *Whistler: A Life for Art’s Sake* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), 5, 7.

253 Young et al. list six paintings that they attribute to this period in the *catalogue raisonné* of Whistler’s paintings. Andrew McLaren Young, Margaret MacDonald, Robin Spencer. *The Paintings of James McNeill Whistler* (New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies of British Art by Yale University Press, 1980).
works, and may have been Whistler’s first depiction of the scene in Chile. Although today it includes a cluster of branches in the foreground and Whistler’s signature in cartouche form, these Orientalizing elements were added in London, presumably as Whistler prepared the canvas for exhibition in 1872. However, the reference to Japanese woodcut prints was considered too blatant, and *The Times* criticized the two additions for being “intrusive as well as imitative.” Without these elements derived from prints and the anchoring addition of the corner of a pier, *Symphony in Grey and Green* greatly resembles *Trouville (Grey and Green, the Silver Sea)* (1865; Figure 37). Aside from the nearly identical use of harmonious color and high horizon line, traces of Whistler’s earlier realism remain in details of the crashing waves in the lower left, and the diagonal striations of color in the water. The directional brushstrokes in each composition add movement to what otherwise would be a placid rendering of the sea and sky as two rectangles, the composition paired down to an essential design.

*Nocturne: the Solent* (1866; Figure 47) has a more dubious identification as a canvas from Whistler’s 1866 sojourn, as it was identified posthumously, a declaration justified by claiming it was one of the two canvases Whistler had never recovered from a porter during his travels. The title could either allude to the ship on which Whistler traversed the Atlantic, or the name of the Solent strait, where he boarded the vessel at the commencement of his adventure. If regarded as a canvas created within the brackets of this time period, it reveals a decidedly minimal depiction of the seascape as an evolution of the aforementioned *Trouville*, and it

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254 Whistler adapted D. G. Rossetti’s use of the monogram, with which he signed his work since 1857, to his butterfly signature. There are conflicting accounts of whether Whistler or Rossetti first relayed an interest in Asian art to the Pre-Raphaelites, but a common interest in Japanese woodcut prints and competitive collecting of blue-and-white porcelain was shared amongst them. Sutherland 2014, 73.


represents Whistler’s inaugural Nocturne. The painting also expands on the use of silhouette and translucent paint application apparent in another Trouville canvas, Sea and Rain (1865; Figure 28). The monochromatic tone of Nocturne: the Solent is variegated through thickness of paint, sometimes applied so thinly that it reveals the ground layer of the canvas, and visual interest is accomplished in delicate points of light on the boats and shoreline, each reflected in a single vertical line in the water.

Similar parallels are readily observable between another couple of works of 1865 and 1866: Whistler’s Crepuscule in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso (1866; Figure 48), and Crepuscule in Opal: Trouville (1865; Figure 35). The affinity between these two canvases rests in the multitude of luminescent colors in a thick application of paint, achieving a creamy texture, particularly in the sky of each painting. While both reveal the extent of Whistler’s varied depictions of the seascape as he searched for an individual style, they fall outside of his japonisme-driven trajectory toward the proto-abstraction and monochromatic painting seen in his contemporaneous works. However, Whistler continued to question traditions of chiaroscuro, line, and planar perspective in Crepuscule in Flesh Colour and Green; one acquaintance noted that “one could cut it into 3, 4 or 5 pieces and each piece would be a picture.” It is also one of the earliest accounts of Whistler’s full preparation of his palette prior to completing the canvas “in a single sitting,” thus achieving a fluidity and ease of execution he had struggled to find in his London studio.


258 Whistler as quoted in Arthur Jerome Eddy, Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeill Whistler (Philadelphia; London: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1903): 23. See also Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, which mention Whistler’s frustrations with his slow progress in painting.
Whistler referred to *Crepuscule in Flesh Colour and Green* and *Symphony in Grey and Green* as two of “the three Valparaiso pictures that are known,” the “known” canvases being the only three exhibited in his lifetime. Rounding out the trio is a vertical composition. Although now a recognized Nocturne, *Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Valparaiso Bay* (1866; Figure 49) is presumed to have left Chile as a depiction of a daytime scene, which Whistler altered into one shrouded in darkness once back in London, circa 1874. Because of its myriad alterations, the painting appears overworked, especially in comparison to the effortlessness of paintings from the same period such as *Symphony in Grey and Green*. The canvas is nearly identical to two other paintings made in Valparaíso, implying that Whistler was intentionally forming a short series of the same view seemingly observed from his window (see Figures 50 and 51). Notably, Whistler tilted the perspective of the foreground pier, creating the same strong diagonal and high horizon line in each depiction, a compositional device he adapted from his study of Japanese prints. The replicated view across three canvases is previously unseen in Whistler’s oeuvre and demonstrates his need to solve an uncertainty with the amount of detail to portray; the basic composition is recreated across the three works, but the ships and figures are either sketchily rendered or partially erased. As the daytime views of the harbor employ a wide array of colors in the bright hues reminiscent of Hokusai’s prints, the palette departs from the restrained, harmonized colors of other Trouville and Valparaíso works. Whistler’s modification of one into a Nocturne shows that veiling the composition in darkness was perhaps the unifying factor he sought.

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259 Young et al., 42.
260 Whistler wrote of his continued work on a Valparaíso painting; Young et al. believe that this is the canvas in question, which may have been re-worked more than once between the date of its creation and 1897. Young et al., 45.
Whistler’s group of works produced during his Valparaíso trip is primarily recognized for its inclusion of two Nocturnes. Critically, however, the provenance of *Nocturne: the Solent* is debatable, and *Nocturne in Blue and Gold* only became a night scene eight years after its creation. What is certain, however, is that Whistler’s Valparaíso works show a continuation of his integration of japonisme in his seascapes using techniques he had initially begun to synthesize in Trouville, with an affinity to Japanese compositional design and muted, harmonious color palette. The continuity between the seascapes of the two trips reveals Whistler’s formulation of an aesthetic that solidly distanced his work from Realism toward a more personal interpretation.

Although Whistler may have sought adventure in Chile, as well as an escape and change of scenery, he did not represent much of the naval conflict, the supposed reason for his presence there. Despite being one of the only artists with the ability to document the bombardment first-hand, Whistler’s paintings do little to inform the viewer of the events that took place. None of Whistler’s Valparaíso paintings shows much of the context or location; his scenes instead evoke tranquil contemplation of their nuanced color and luminosity. Whistler instead built on stylistic and pictorial foundations discovered in Trouville, and his seascapes of 1866 seem more self-referential than reflective of his surroundings. Therefore, they pictorially reiterate the importance and impact of the Trouville canvases. The paintings of both trips reveal Whistler’s interest in style over subject matter, and thus show his disinterest in narrative and preference for variations in technique. In Valparaíso, Whistler initiated his advance preparation of his palette, allowing for a quicker execution and a more harmonious result. However, the self-doubting artist continued to experiment for another couple of years upon his return to England, possibly, and in part, due to

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261 Édouard Manet’s marine paintings of 1864, showing a naval battle of the American Civil War in Channel waters, are similar in their removal of context; see Chapter 3.
his closeness with Moore and related commissions by patrons. The distinct style on which he finally settled, concretized in his Nocturnes, built on the reductionism, lack of depth, and study of color that originated in his seascapes of 1865 and 1866.

A Return to the Thames and the Possible Influence of Turner

Whistler’s return to landscape painting followed a period of failed experiments in which he tried to emulate Moore’s classicist aesthetic. With his inaugural Thames Nocturne in 1871, however, Whistler proved that he would no longer deliberately imitate the styles of his contemporaries. In the intervening period between his last seascapes in 1866 and the early 1870s, Whistler happened upon a stark yet impactful template in portraiture, successful in its minimal amount of detail, narrow range of color, and common composition. Between the portraits and his Nocturnes, Whistler finally found his personal style, and consequently painted over seventy works between 1870 and 1875. In this surge of productivity, Whistler created the majority of his thirty-two known Nocturnes.

Whistler’s Nocturnes may have been partially inspired by Pre-Raphaelite landscapes. One of his close acquaintances, George Price Boyce, had painted two night riverscapes of the Thames in 1862, and William Holman Hunt, a founder of the Brotherhood, had also painted a monotone night scene of the Thames, punctuated by the yellow lights of Chelsea reflecting on the water. That Whistler did not become interested in the subject until 1871 speaks to the poetic effect he independently discovered in obscuring the landscape through mist and fog in Trouville and Valparaíso, especially since the group was largely disbanded by then. It was only after these

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262 Sutherland, 2014, 115.
artistic experiments within the seascape motif that Whistler chose to obscure the Thames more thoroughly, and therefore render it almost abstract, under the shroud of night.

Whistler’s ambiguity of form and light is reminiscent of the work of Turner. The 1856 Turner Bequest to the National Gallery of London also included a nocturnal scene, *Moonlight, A Study at Millbank* (1797; Figure 52), painted one year after a marine night scene gained Turner his first exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1796. One of Whistler’s Nocturnes, the only one to include a celestial body, suggests his familiarity with the aforementioned Turner painting. *Nocturne: Blue and Gold--Southampton Water* (1872; Figure 53) mirrors Turner’s *Moonlight* in the placement of the moon, silhouetted line of distant buildings, and use of boats to create movement in the composition and as a vertical aspect visually unifying the water and sky.

Whistler initially encountered Turner’s works in London in 1848, through his brother-in-law, Seymour Haden. In 1855, he copied a chromolithograph owned by his brother of Turner’s watercolor, *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) to Warn Steam-Boats of Shoal Water* (Figure 54), shortly before leaving America permanently to commence his career as an artist. Whistler had been adept in watercolor painting since his art lessons in Russia, and his technique of layering washes and scraping the pigment off the surface of the paper would reappear in his later experiments in oil painting. Of note in this initial marine of Whistler’s is the presence of foreground figures and abstract nature of water, which are observable traits of Whistler’s Trouville seascapes, though the dynamic movement of the sea in the Turner would be stylized into horizontal registers in Whistler’s works.

Aside from the Turner Bequest to the National Gallery in 1856, Whistler assuredly would have encountered Turner’s works in the Manchester Art Treasures exhibition, which Whistler

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visited in September 1857; the large show included eighty-three of Turner’s watercolors accompanied by two dozen of his oil paintings.\textsuperscript{264} Although Whistler might not have decided to follow in his footsteps during his nascent artistic career, he undeniably would have been aware of Turner’s methods when he returned to the Thames as inspiration for his Nocturnes.

Whistler’s 7 Lindsey Row house, to which he moved in 1863, overlooked the same stretch of the Thames Turner had seen daily, though its industrial development had transformed the view his elder would have known. As Whistler strayed from a Realist toward an aestheticist mode, he increasingly obscured these vistas with mist and darkness, mitigating his previous emphasis on signifiers of the Thames’s industry. Whistler based his Nocturnes on his view from Lindsey Row and nightly trips on the Thames, working from memory only aided with minimally descriptive sketches, as discussed below. His neighbors, the Greaves brothers, rowed Whistler along the river from dawn to dusk; their father had done the same for Turner.\textsuperscript{265} Whistler’s initially titled the resulting paintings “Moonlights,” as Turner had done for his own nocturnal scenes.

While there is no evidence of Whistler intentionally modelling his Nocturnes on the example set by Turner, an obituary stated that Whistler “was not a devotee of Turner, but he yielded to no man in appreciation of certain of the works of that painter.”\textsuperscript{266} In 1867, however, Whistler was recorded as speaking against Turner, asserting that his predecessor’s landscapes were neither natural nor decorative enough. The statement was made the same year that Whistler renounced Courbet’s influence; it is therefore likely that Whistler purposefully refuted the

\textsuperscript{265} Whistler first became acquainted with the Greaves brothers when he moved to 7 Lindsey Row, with Jo, in 1863; the brothers resided in 9 Lindsey Row. He moved to 2 Lindsey Row in 1867. Evidently, Whistler was close with the brothers; they often worked as his studio assistants, and in return, Whistler taught them to paint.
\textsuperscript{266} New York \textit{Tribune}, 26 July 1903, as quoted in Eddy, 56.
conscious influence of any artist altogether. Whistler’s attempt to distance his art from that of others was so pervasive that the aforementioned obituary reported that he “was not lavish of praise where his contemporaries were concerned;” Whistler also repeatedly said that “England never produced but one painter, and that was Hogarth.” The Greaves brothers stated that Whistler had always “reviled Turner,” yet one can assume, based on Whistler’s public polemics and calculated controversial opinion, that he simply did not want to be associated or compared with other modern masters, particularly ones whose work would bring his own originality into question. Since John Ruskin, whose published slanderous critique of Whistler’s Nocturnes led to an infamous lawsuit in which Whistler sued for libel in 1878, was a famous champion and biographer of Turner, Whistler plausibly formed a negative opinion of Turner more out of hatred for Ruskin than for Turner’s art. During the trial, Ruskin had stated that Whistler’s Nocturnes “nearly approached the aspect of willful imposture,” possibly referring to their affinity to Turner’s works.

The superficial similarities between Turner’s and Whistler’s oeuvre extend to the summary description of the seascape into horizontal bands of color. Part of the Turner Bequest is a compilation, *Three Seascapes* (c.1827; Figure 55), of oceanside vistas. Turner represented two seascapes stacked vertically, with one additional, inverted view, creating an abstract design comprised of three seas and two skies. Although Whistler would not be as bold in his own departure from realism, his paintings of the early 1870s such as *Symphony in Grey: Early Morning Thames* (1871; Figure 56), catalyzed by *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville and Sea*.

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267 Ibid., 55-56.
268 Pennells. Volume II, 178. It is tempting to say that Whistler may have also been pleased at the coincidence of his own initials now matching those of Turner, thereby usurping his role in name, as well; Whistler changed his second name from “Abbott” to “McNeill” in 1866, prior to leaving for South America. If nothing else, his name change reflects Whistler’s continued search for an identity by which Whistler could define himself.
269 As quoted in Merrill, 52. Whistler’s rebuttal to Ruskin’s critique included a comparison of his work to Turner’s late watercolors.
and Rain, operate with the same shallow depth and disregard for the illusion of perspectival space to instead emphasize his paintings’ facture and pictorial design. Early Morning Thames also accentuates Whistler’s extreme dilution of paint in the 1870s; the burnt umber ground of the painting, seen through each layer of the composition, unifies and flattens the image. Whistler employed horizontal tiers of color, organized in subdued, recurring tones to create a pattern. By then replicating the composition in another painting, Whistler furthered his works from their original subject matter. His Nocturne in Grey and Silver, The Thames (c.1872-1874; Figure 57) removed the identifiable structures of the distant riverbank in Early Morning Thames.270 Although the reduction of detail and site specificity can be partially attributed to Whistler’s replacement of the obscuring qualities of mist with those of darkness, Nocturne in Grey and Silver shows a conscious decision to simplify and stylize the landscape. Whistler’s stray from representation was summarized by critic George Moore, who wrote that the series of washes formed a composition that was simply comprised of “a shadow in the middle of the picture—a little less and there would be nothing.”271 The comment reflected earlier interpretations of Sea and Rain; upon its exhibition in 1867, The Saturday Review of the Royal Academy called it “the extremest excess of tone-painting, the kind of painting in which tone is the first aim, and detail considered altogether insubordinate.”272 Although the critic claimed that the canvas showed the least manual labor of any picture ever exhibited, the review declared that the mental “impression

270 Nocturne in Grey and Silver, The Thames has been attributed to Whistler since 1945; its earliest provenance is that it was in the collection of E.A. Clarke, who knew Whistler and his biographers. The painting also bears a butterfly signature that appears to be Whistler’s, and its exhibition history includes a Grosvenor Gallery exhibition. Several of Whistler’s Nocturnes in Young et al., though described as “Grey and Gold,” have not been located and could easily represent this canvas. See The Lyrical Trend in English Painting (London: Roland, Browse & Delbanco, 1946), 3.
271 As quoted Lochnan, 157.
272 Philip Gilbert Hamerton, “Pictures of the Year,” The Saturday Review, June 1, 1867, 691. Whistler’s own clipping of this review was annotated, next to the comment on the labor involved, “utterly and stupidly false.”
of infinite dreariness” evoked by the painting was so effective that it surpassed art as object of beauty, and instead conjured Whistler’s subjective impression of the scene.\(^{273}\)

The lack of visible brushstrokes due to Whistler’s \textit{alla prima} technique, mimicking the effect of watercolors, supplied \textit{Early Morning Thames} and \textit{Nocturne in Grey and Silver} with a delicate minimalism that evoked the poetic in its illusory, ethereal nature.\(^{274}\) Théodore Duret, an art writer who purchased the \textit{Early Morning} from Whistler, stated:

\begin{quote}
He arrived there at the limit one does not know how to go beyond; he reached that extreme region where painting, having become vague, in taking one more step would fall into absolute indeterminacy and could no longer say anything to the eyes.\(^{275}\)
\end{quote}

In \textit{Nocturne in Grey and Silver}, Whistler further strived for an irreducible minimalism, almost a pure study of color. Only its title, distant steeple, and points of light reflected in the water anchor the composition to reality. Its minimalism and muted colors recall that of the aforementioned Turner oil painting, \textit{Three Seascapes}, almost as though Whistler painted his memory of Turner’s work in conflation with that of the Thames riverscape. Whistler’s repetition and use of memory, discussed below, led to his eventual dissolution of landscape elements in his mature Nocturnes.

\section*{“Blue and Silver”}

Whistler’s mature Nocturnes are remarkable for their tranquil, ambiguously rendered scenes, and act as a foil to his early treatment of the Thames riverscape, in which he emphasized its inhabitants, industry, and change. The Nocturnes, in turn, are explorations of color and design.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{273} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{274} Richard Dorment asserts that Whistler’s choice to imitate watercolorist techniques was a deliberate choice to align his art with British watercolorists and artists, further separating his work from the sculptural Realism of Courbet and French painting in general. Richard Dorment et al. \textit{James McNeill Whistler} (London: Tate Gallery, c1994), 24.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{275} As quoted in John Siewert, “Art, Music, and an Aesthetics of Place in Whistler’s Nocturne Paintings,” in Lochnan, 147.}
that prompt contemplation to observe fully their nuance and subtlety. The compositions are a natural progression in the japonisme achieved in *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* and *Sea and Rain*, in which Whistler economically painted the scenes with minimal realistic detail, flattened perspective, and limited palette unified with a tonal wash. Whistler further abandoned the traditional organization of space in some of his Nocturnes, destabilizing the viewer; areas of the canvas are more pigmented than others, but edges and details are difficult to distinguish, and the subject becomes nearly unidentifiable in specific terms. Whistler showed space as two-dimensional, bringing attention to the pictorial surface in its arrangement of colors and forms, and thus the painting as object.

Of the thirty-two extant Nocturnes, ten are described titularly as “blue and silver.” Since Whistler would officially call his painting of Courbet on the beach *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* in 1892, it is highly probable that Whistler later saw the work as the precursor for, and thus aligned with, his Nocturnes bearing the same phrase. The horizontal registers of *Harmony* are replicated in Whistler’s earliest nighttime depictions, which sequentially neared abstraction as time progressed. It is therefore especially intriguing that Whistler’s only nocturnal seascape, other than the pair ostensibly begun during his trip to Valparaíso, seemingly utilized the Trouville painting as a template and modified it to create *Nocturne: Blue and Silver -- Bognor* (1871-1876; Figure 58), completed a decade afterward. Whistler considered it one of his “very finest -- perhaps the most brilliant” seascape.276 He wrote of the Bognor canvas poetically and with great pride:

> A most lovely Nocturne in blue and silver [...] a large sea piece with some fishing smacks putting off -- sky lovely and the sea of an immense distance and gleaming in the soft light of the moon. This description is almost fit for the papers! [...] Go and see if you ever saw the sea painted like that! And the mystery of the whole thing -- nothing apparently when you look at the canvas, but stand off -- and I say the wet sands and

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276 James McNeill Whistler to Murray Marks, [February 1876], Victoria and Albert Museum, National Art Library, Reserve Collection, Q.4, 5; GUW 09300.
the water falling on the beach in the blue glimmering of the moon -- and the sheen of the whole thing.  

The resemblance between the Bognor picture and that of Trouville lies in the tilted perspective, soft diagonal of the shoreline, foreground figures in the bottom left, and arrangement of planes of color to compose the seascapes. Whistler’s specific satisfaction with the later seascape rested in the evolution of the original example into a monochrome rendering of the scene that accentuated the luminous and reflective aspects of the painting. Both images are geographically nondescript, thus implying the emergence of a formulaic self-reflexivity in Whistler’s oeuvre, which he further explored in his other blue and silver Nocturnes.

Whistler’s first Thames night scene, *Nocturne in Blue and Silver--Chelsea* (1871; Figure 59), recalls *Sea and Rain* in the superimposed, diaphanous figure added to the foreground. The figure seemingly acts simultaneously as a point of visual interest and as a guide into the composition. Both the barge and the figure are out of scale in relation to each other and their setting, reinforcing their late addition to the canvas, which is discernible in their translucency. Despite its human presence, this Nocturne was described as “just as comprehensible when turned upside-down” after its exhibition in the Dudley Gallery in 1871. By this time, critics had warmed to the idea of Whistler’s musical titles, especially as his art grew increasingly abstract:

They are illustrations of the theory, not confined to this painter, but most conspicuously and ably worked out by him, that painting is so closely akin to music that the colours of the one may and should be used, like the ordered sounds of the other, as means and influences of vague emotion; that painting should not aim at expressing dramatic emotions, depicting incidents of history, or of recording facts of nature, but should be content with moulding our moods and stirring our imaginations, by subtle combinations of colour through which all that painting has to say to us can be said, and beyond which painting has no valuable or true speech whatever.

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It is surprising to note that some critics regarded Whistler’s idiosyncratic style favorably at its onset in 1871, considering that Ruskin’s slander and following lawsuit would occur only seven years later.\textsuperscript{280} Whistler’s subtle exploration of only one or two tones exhibited a more subjective point of view, one that refined his previous naturalism to relate and invite contemplation. Whistler’s adoption of the title “Nocturne,” which complied with his earlier decision to use musical names, was based on the suggestion of his patron, Frederick Leyland:

I can’t thank you too much for the name “Nocturne” as a title for my moonlights! You have no idea what an irritation it proves to the critics and consequent pleasure to me - besides it is really so charming and does so poetically say all I want to say and \textit{no more} than I wish.\textsuperscript{281}

Early in the Nocturne series, it therefore appears that Whistler was primarily concerned with the viewer’s interaction with these paintings as pure images to be confronted as they were, without the need for the paintings to be referential. In fact, Whistler only attributed locations to his Nocturnes in 1892; the original titles did not include clarifiers as far as the names of the places pictured, but simply elaborated with one or two descriptive colors.\textsuperscript{282}

The subset of Nocturnes identified as “blue and silver” seems to bear particular significance among the larger series of Thames night scenes in Whistler’s oeuvre, as no other paintings can be as succinctly grouped though their similarities in composition and title. Viewing the group chronologically reveals Whistler’s methodical approach to the river scenes, in which

\textsuperscript{280} Despite winning the trial, Whistler was only awarded one farthing, and the publicity associated with the trial damaged the sales of his now infamous Nocturnes; scholars claim this as the reason Whistler ended the series of paintings. There was no negative affect affiliated with his musical titles per se, and Whistler used them for the rest of his career.

\textsuperscript{281} James McNeill Whistler to Frederick Richards Leyland, 2/9 November 1872, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Pennell-Whistler Collection, PWC 6B/21/3, GUW 08794. \textit{The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler, 1855-1903}, edited by Margaret F. MacDonald, Patricia de Montfort and Nigel Thorp.

\textsuperscript{282} Robin Spencer, “Whistler, Swinburne and art for art’s sake,” in \textit{After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England}, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 79. It was also typical of Whistler to exhibit paintings under different names in various shows and/or venues. Since Whistler stopped painting Nocturnes after 1880, presumably because he was unable to sell them after the Ruskin trial, his revisit of their titles in 1892 to make them allude to specific places implies that he thought this tie to reality might make them more appealing to potential buyers.
the artist’s hand is progressively erased and the portrayed landscapes lose detail and become more monochromatic. Overall, the images progress toward abstraction. Whistler, having found a balance between the natural and decorative in his first couple of “blue and silver” canvases, namely *Harmony in Blue and Silver* and the 1871 Thames *Nocturne in Blue and Silver--Chelsea*, seemingly used these as examples that he could loosely replicate and from which he could push the boundaries further from representation toward the decorative and the abstract.

At the inception of the Nocturnes, the aforementioned *Nocturne in Blue and Silver--Chelsea* was originally called *Nocturne in Blue-Green*, though it was renamed in 1892, the same year that Whistler officially titled *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*. The broad sweeps of Whistler’s hog-hair brush across the width of the composition are traceable in the creamy paint of the sky and foreground, which continues Whistler’s paint handling in his seascapes of the mid-1860s and is emphasized by the smooth surface of the wood board. Subsequently, Whistler painted *Nocturne in Blue and Silver* (1871/1872; Figure 60), in which he omitted the foreground completely, reproducing the ungrounded view he observed from his nightly excursions on the Thames in the Greaves’ rowboat. To compensate for the lost visual interest and demarcation of space, Whistler added a sketchily painted branch and cartouche signature at the bottom of the work, two motifs appropriated from Japanese prints. Whistler’s contemporaneous addition of the same two elements to his Valparaíso seascape *Symphony in Grey and Green*, mentioned above, reinforces and emphasizes the aesthetic and conceptual links between his seascapes of the mid-1860s and his early Nocturnes.

Whistler’s 1872 *Nocturne in Blue and Silver--Cremorne Lights* (Figure 61) is the first of this subgroup painted on a canvas support rather than wood.\(^{283}\) Partially due to the porous surface

\(^{283}\) Painting on wood panels instead of canvas was unusual for Whistler and thus accentuates his continued multifaceted experimentation with style and facture from the onset of his career to the early 1870s.
of the canvas and largely caused by his thinned paint, Whistler’s brushstrokes are less distinct; Whistler’s interest shifted toward generally effacing the evidence of the works’ making, advancing toward his later belief that “[p]aint should not be applied thick[;] [i]t should be like breath on the surface of a pane of glass.” Whistler’s thinned paint mimicked watercolors, and specifically recall Turner’s reductive views of Venice at night. His pigments were so diluted that Whistler, who would refer to the paint as “sauce,” would often rest his canvases supine as he painted and while they dried. Whistler often also chose to display the finished works in frames under glass, as watercolors typically were exhibited. In doing so, he further emphasized the layering of tonal washes he used to create his images; this technique was originally explored in Trouville, but was only fully explored in the Nocturnes. In *Nocturne in Blue and Silver—Cremorne Lights*, for instance, Whistler portrayed the riverbank by leaving the ground exposed, while the remainder of the image was constructed through the buildup, and often the wiping off, of various layers of translucent paint. As a result, the ground peeks through the blue water and sky, activating the composition, a technique that is also noticeable in his 1865 *Harmony in Blue and Silver*. A barge in the middle distance of *Cremorne Lights*, seemingly derived from that in Whistler’s aforementioned first Thames Nocturne, is so softly painted that it evokes reverie or a fading memory.

Whistler sometimes spent multiple hours to days preparing his palette with pre-mixed pigments, all of which were diluted to the consistency of ink, prior to starting a composition that

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285 Whistler also spent time in Venice painting watercolors for over a year starting in 1879.
287 Whistler’s Nocturnes are also relatively small; he chose their scale in an attempt to reproduce an image in the size that he observed it. Between this realistic size and framing them under glass, Whistler may have been commenting on the tradition of academic landscape painting in which the work of art would act as picture window. For instance, Whistler specifically criticized how “people have acquired the habit of looking, as who should say, not at a picture, but through it.” Whistler, “Ten O’Clock” lecture, in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, 138.
might only take him an hour to paint. Already in this preparatory step, Whistler harmonized colors by mixing them together in varying ratios, so that each pigment would reflect those found elsewhere in the composition. Black was the one common addition to all his oil paints, including the ground; as taught by Charles Gleyre, Whistler regarded it as the “universal harmonizer.”

The artist’s hand remained discernible to varying degrees; sometimes one could practically count the bristles of Whistler’s brush in his Nocturnes of the early 1870s, while the later Nocturnes almost appear like an image that materialized on the dyed canvas, almost like the conjured memory from which Whistler painted.

Whistler never painted his Nocturnes on the spot, but rather relied on his memory, and this attributed to his simplification of composition and disintegration of form in his Nocturnes, aided by his variance in facture to imitate watercolor techniques. Whistler defended his rapid painting in Whistler v. Ruskin, since he felt the method facilitated his capture of an observed vista from memory: “I do not always sketch the subjects of my pictures, but I form the idea in my mind conscientiously and work it to the best of my ability [...] The proper execution of the idea depends greatly upon the instantaneous work of my hand.” Whistler’s biographers noted that he would test his remembrance by turning his back to a view and describing it in detail to his companions, and, in rare instances, he would minimally plot the outlines of forms on scraps of paper while on the water. Since Whistler’s Nocturnes gradually veer toward dissolution and abstraction, it is probable that he increasingly used memory as the basis and inspiration for his art.

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290 As quoted in Merrill, 152-53.
291 Whistler was quite adept at remembering many details of a scene, despite omitting them from his final paintings. Biographer T. R. Way describes a scene in which he offered Whistler a sketchbook, but the artist dismissed it and instead turned away, saying, “Now see if I have learned it” before describing the vista. Memories of James McNeil Whistler, the Artist (New York; London: John Lane, 1912), 67.
riverscapes as the 1870s progressed. Doing so would have implored him to focus more on the
design and sensation evoked by his paintings.

While Whistler’s willful dependence on memory is well documented in the production of
his Nocturnes, it is fitting to assume that Whistler’s artistic response to Courbet’s *Sea at Palavas*,
in the form of *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, was reductive because it was partially based on his recollection of it. In addition, Whistler’s use of mnemonics further distanced his mode of working from Courbet’s insistence on nature as source, thus aligning Whistler’s work with the emotive qualities rather than the realism of a scene. By 1865, Whistler surely was familiar with the writings of Lecoq de Boisbaudran, published in 1862, which Whistler would have known through his colleagues Legros and Fantin-Latour, who had studied under Boisbaudran:

> The relations between the memory and the imagination are so direct and immediate, that it is generally acknowledged that the imagination does no more than fuse the material furnished to it by the memory, thus producing completely new compounds, in the same way as chemistry operates with unknown elements. Thus it can be established that the cultivation of a pictorial memory, while strengthening and serving the imagination undoubtedly favours artistic composition.²⁹²

Whistler’s subsequent Trouville canvas, *Sea and Rain*, equally could be interpreted as a scene constructed and portrayed from recollection. His choice of muted palette and veil of harmonizing grey only add to this illusion of the image as memory.

In Chapter 3, I posit that *Sea and Rain* is based loosely on *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, a relationship that allowed Whistler to push the boundaries of representation further toward minimalism and abstraction. In the same manner, I contend that Whistler’s subseries of “blue and silver” Nocturnes are intended to become cumulatively distant from reality. As the painted image would stray from the distinctly identifiable landscape, Whistler’s facture would evolve similarly from traceable brushstroke to diaphanous areas of color.

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²⁹² As quoted in Sutton, 22-23. The text was published in 1862, and Whistler likely would have been familiar with it through his friendships with Fantin-Latour and Legros.
An observation of the “blue and silver” Nocturne shows the progression from Whistler’s initial, visible drag of the brush across the width of the canvas in *Nocturne in Blue and Silver—Chelsea* to the creation of a coat of color. Nearing the mid-1870s, Whistler further thinned his paint, and his marks became diluted and softened amongst the other pigments mixed with turpentine and medium. In the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’s *Nocturne in Blue and Silver, Battersea Reach* (1872-1878; Figure 62), Whistler dissolved his pigment so much that it was absorbed into the weave of the canvas; it was so fluid that he often laid the canvas flat to create a single, uniform layer of color. As in his earlier compositions, only the floating boat in the middle distance of the water, accompanied by a silhouette in this instance, appears to have been painted after the uniform surface of the riverscape had been completed *alla prima*. The dark passages are exposed areas of its dark ground and are thus immersed in the veil of color Whistler applied to the entire image. Working from dark to light gave Whistler a more economical method of painting, therefore affording him the ability to imprint quickly his memorized image onto the canvas. In these more abstract renderings, Whistler abandoned his use of the superimposed Japanese-inspired branches and cartouche bearing his butterfly signature, seemingly as an acknowledgement of his having achieved a personal style, not simply his recreation of Japanese-esque compositions.

In his trial against Ruskin, Whistler stated:

> By using the word "nocturne" I wished to indicate an artistic interest alone, divesting the picture of any outside anecdotal interest which might have been otherwise attached to it. A nocturne is an arrangement of line, form, and color first. The picture is throughout a problem that I attempt to solve. I make use of any means, any incident or object in nature, that will bring about this symmetrical result. 293

The Nocturnes fully depart from planar organization, depiction of detail, and linear perspective. In the resulting unclear images, space and mass become nearly indistinguishable, and the

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293 As quoted in Merrill, 144.
boundaries of one only fade into the other. The emphasis is on a design depicted on a flat
surface, an organization of shapes and colors that are pleasing to the eye and seemed to have
materialized onto the canvas in an effortless manner. Stemming from the planar organization
first integrated in his oeuvre in the mid-1860s, Whistler continued to transform nature, rather
than translate it onto canvas. In opposition to the impasto of Realism, Whistler sought its
opposite in a watercolor-inspired method of painting, which had evolved partially from his
experiments in Trouville and which simultaneously aided in blurring distinctions between tiers of
color to unify the image. As in Trouville, also, Whistler accentuated the horizontal format of the
landscape; unbroken lines or blocks of color typically composed his Nocturnes, all but five of
which are horizontally oriented. Figural elements, though only in the form of minute silhouettes,
sometimes remained, though their only purpose was visual interest. Although the Nocturnes
signify Whistler’s concretized aesthetic, he continued to experiment with aspects of palette and
viscosity of paint. However, the basics of composition and suggestion of nature, rather than its
reproduction, of the Nocturnes were already cemented in his works painted in Trouville.

Conclusion

After Turner’s death, Ruskin wrote a catalog, published in 1857, that described the
phases of his career: the first twenty years, starting in 1800, relied on Turner’s reproduction of
the works of several masters, a method that was subsequently replaced by his idealized
compositions of the world around him, and, ultimately, relaying his own impressions of nature

\[294\] One of the few lessons Whistler retained from his time in Gleyre’s studio was to fully prepare his palette prior to
commencing a painting. Despite the appearance of effortlessness, the Pennells remarked that “[h]ow many times he
made and wiped out that sweeping tone is another matter.” Pennells, Vol. I, 286.
and corresponding feelings. The three stages of evolution could likewise be applied to Whistler’s progress as an artist. That Turner was the last artist Whistler appears to have deliberately copied is particularly significant, and it implies that Whistler internalized his influence to a greater extent than those he previously had emulated.

Whistler’s affiliation with Moore and art-for-art’s-sake validified his view of art; his painting no longer needed to be tethered completely to reality. As the sole interpreter of nature’s aesthetic value, Whistler felt that the artist’s work should elucidate the following fact,

That Nature is always right, is an assertion, artistically, as untrue, as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted – Nature is very rarely right, to such an extent even, that it might almost be said that Nature is usually wrong – that is to say – the condition of things that shall bring about the perfection of harmony worthy a picture, is rare, and not common at all.

Instead of the landscape as subject, Whistler could explore color and facture, using the landscape as a lens. In the same way that Whistler had criticized Turner’s paintings for neither being decorative nor natural enough, Whistler sought to strike a balance between the conceptual and perceptual in his own works. The Nocturnes are an exercise in the search for the proper relationship between these two. Without a direct point of reference or comparison to the observed scenes, the Nocturnes invite contemplation, as foreshadowed by Courbet’s figure in Harmony in Blue and Silver.

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Conclusion

In his biography of James McNeill Whistler, Thomas Robert Way included a reproduction of a list compiled by the artist of his most important works (published 1912; Figure 63). Seventeen paintings were listed out of the hundreds Whistler produced over the course of his artistic career. Only four canvases, including two ambiguously named Nocturnes and two full-length portraits painted in 1871, fall outside of the 1860s. A surprising five works are seascapes: *Sea and Rain* (1865; Figure 28) and *Trouville* (1865; Figure 37) are included, as are two Valparaíso canvases, one of which is *Symphony in Grey and Green: the Ocean* (1866; Figure 46), identified by Whistler as “Valparaiso -- Grey.” In terms of percentage, Whistler therefore regarded at least one third of the total paintings produced in each seaside expedition to Trouville and to Valparaíso as instrumental to his overall oeuvre. The aforementioned canvases were not exhibited more often than other paintings in his body of work, nor were they the subject of more reviews or criticism. Whistler’s interpretation of these early works as significant was thus entirely personal.

This thesis has discussed the multifarious thematic and stylistic experiments of Whistler’s formative years. Whistler’s initial foray into the art world relied heavily on his background in etching and on the imitation of Courbet’s Realist aesthetic. Throughout a series of trips, Whistler successfully created etching portfolios either alongside or in tandem with artistic colleagues, and he likely realized that a peripatetic lifestyle sparked different periods of aesthetic inspiration. These short bursts of creativity brought forth by changes in scenery maintain ties to the environment as source inspiration; however, Whistler’s landscapes continued to stray from the Realist ideology as the 1860s progressed.
Due to his familiarity and confidence in the medium, Whistler’s etchings were the first to reveal his evolving aesthetic, and reflect his study and admiration of Eastern art objects. Whistler’s works of the early-to-mid 1860s are defined by a tripartite evolution demonstrating the incorporation of Japanese aesthetics into his oeuvre. Beginning with compositional alterations in his etchings, Whistler then boldly and directly appropriated Eastern objects in westernized settings in his studio paintings, and finally reached a conscious assimilation of design principles in *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*. As a reinterpretation of Courbet’s faithful reproduction of nature to a more individualistic and aestheticized view of nature, Whistler artistically stated his deliberate and bold departure from Realism in *Harmony in Blue and Silver*.

Throughout his life, Whistler continuously returned to the seascape as a subject he could employ as he refined the balance between seemingly disparate aesthetic viewpoints. In *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, Whistler achieved a harmonious midpoint between the representation of nature and a study of the arrangement of form and color, which he subsequently further explored in *Sea and Rain* and his Nocturnes of the early to mid-1870s. Since *Harmony* reproduced Courbet’s seascape featuring a self-portrait, Whistler’s treatment of the figure as little more than visual accent, combined with his extreme simplification of the landscape in thinned, layered paint, transformed the painting into a critique of his former idol’s Realism. *Harmony in Blue and Silver* thus announced Whistler’s arrival as a modern painter with a personal artistic viewpoint and method.

Whistler’s undeniable use of Courbet’s *Sea at Palavas* as a template for *Harmony in Blue and Silver* warrants a further study of Whistler’s imitation of canvases by modern masters. Woven throughout this thesis are mentions of other seascapes by Whistler that correlate formally...
to paintings by artists other than Courbet, namely those of Manet, Moore, and Turner, implying Whistler’s intent to relate his own work to their avant-garde status. At the same time that Whistler systematically emulated these artists, he constantly sought ways in which to differentiate his work, a method that forced him to find an idiosyncratic technique and style. Whistler’s strive for individuality reached beyond his painted style to his titular choices, further abstracting the depicted scenes by emphasizing their design and arrangement of form. The similarities between Whistler’s abstraction and that of Turner especially, though executed in different ways, is rife for exploration, especially considering their late careers, in which each artist returned to the seascape as subject matter and produced dozens of semi-abstract watercolors.

Although Whistler temporarily abandoned the horizontal bands of color as his oeuvre progressed toward proto-abstraction in his mature Nocturnes, it is notable that Whistler’s transformation of the landscape into such tiers to flatten the perspective and simultaneously accentuate the picture plane was one of the initial ways in which his work pivoted toward suggestion through design rather than representation. Horizontal bands of color observable in his Trouville seascapes remained strong elements in his simplistic arrangement of forms and allowed for a structured, patterned way of organizing color; even his *Colour Scheme for the Dining-Room at Aubrey House* (c.1875; Figure 64) is strikingly similar to *Harmony in Blue and Silver*.

In the last two decades of his life, as his reputation was already formed and his finances stable, Whistler returned to the coasts of the English Channel, both in England and in France, creating small sets of postcard-sized seascapes with minimal added detail. Unlike the Nocturnes, in which the artist’s hand is nearly erased, single brushstrokes are sometimes used to depict an entire tier of a composition, and every mark has the potential to change completely the impact.
Dividing elements into horizontal bands as he had originally done in *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, Whistler explored brightly hued color relationships, abandoning his overlaid washes of color used to unify and harmonize the depicted scenes. The compositions near abstraction and boldly retain the freshness of the short amount of time in which they were executed. It is as though, having established his reputation in the art world, these small paintings are glimpses of Whistler’s personal, abstract take on nature, even when confronting it *en plein air* as opposed to relying on memory.

Whistler uniformly denied the influence of other artists, especially contemporaneous ones, throughout his lifetime. His *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, first published in 1890, is dedicated to “The rare Few, who, early in Life, have rid themselves of the Friendship of Many.” *Harmony in Blue and Silver*, as visual statement, represents Whistler’s initial confrontation of, and rejection of, another artist’s influence and aesthetic. In so doing, *Harmony* represents Whistler’s initial, concrete assertion of his own, idiosyncratic style and aesthetic.

This thesis shows that the formative period of the early 1860s culminated in a cemented artistic style for Whistler. In subsuming Courbet’s seaside self-portrait to this newly consolidated, unique mode of working, Whistler staked a claim as reigning modern painter. *Harmony in Blue and Silver* demonstrated a break from the Realist doctrine, catalyzing the long-lasting impact of the incorporation of japonisme, lighter palette, diluted paint applied in veils of color, and reductionism that would ultimately lead to his more recognized, mature Nocturnes.
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