

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF MODERN ART
VOLUME 4

Art in an Age of Civil Struggle

1848-1871



Albert Boime

The University of Chicago Press
Chicago & London



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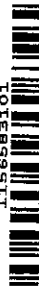
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9 Edouard Manet: Man About Town

If rough-and-umble Courbet exploited the image of the yokel to scandalize the bourgeois, his disciple Manet assumed the persona of the free-floating cosmopolitan to create his niche as the ultimate insider. He occasionally shocked his audience in the process of mocking their conventions, but his real aim was to strip away the masks of everyday life as an index of his cleverness. This explains why he coveted official honors and refused to be seen in company with the impressionist upstarts. Assuming the guise of the city slicker in contrast to Courbet's country bumpkin, Manet appeared on the stage as a dandified version of the consummate hipster. Now subsumed under the category of *flâneur*, his rebellious bourgeois type flourished under the Second Empire as a covert digger of the urban "scene."

When I say "rebellious," I do not mean to imply he engaged in overt political activity; the *flâneur* of the Second Empire flourished in a period when radical politics were banned and the Left had to go underground, only to surface again at the time of the regime's collapse. During most of the twenty-year reign, however, the bourgeois was politically stagnant, and the revolutionary energies of the working classes were drained off in the vast urban renewal program. The response of middle-class moderates like Manet was to create a kind of fashionable Bohemia, committed on the one hand to a life of pleasure that ranged from the *grand monde* to the *demi-monde*, and, on the other, to a cosmopolitan intensity on the boulevards that offered a venue for critical insights into the nature of Second Empire society.

Setting Fantin-Latour's famous portrait of Manet against Courbet's self-image in *The Meeting* helps put their contrary personas into perspective (fig. 9.1). Where Courbet wears rugged outdoor gear, Manet dons fashionably cut attire and a tall silk hat, and where Courbet sports a walking stick, Manet twirls a cane in his kid-gloved hands. Manet was as consistent as Courbet in maintaining his persona in the town as well as country, in both low and high haunts. (Manet's close friend Antonin Proust noted that when the situation demanded he would exaggerate his gait and affect the

9.1 Henri Fantin-Latour, *Portrait of Edouard Manet*, 1867. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

drawl of a Parisian gamain.) Both Courbet and Manet were radical realists to some extent in their range of subject matter and shared a Faustian ambition to sum up their era in paint. Both plunged into unexpected corners of their world in search of subject matter, only to return to the studio to complete the job. Neither Manet's elegant and dapper appearance nor Courbet's tough-and-ready mask could have allowed unlimited access to the actual space of all of their subjects. Hence the need to work mainly in the studio rather than on the spot, even when, as in the case of Manet, it was necessary to depict urban performers on the go, as in *The Street Singer*. In retrospect, it appears that the personas of both represented a privileged male position even when deployed as a disguise to mask more liberal ideals at a time when an authoritarian regime discouraged overt political expression.

Naturalism versus Realism

The personality and lifestyle polarities of the mature Manet and Courbet may be further contextualized within the shift from realism to naturalism—a shift evident in the Salon des Refusés of 1863 but only fully articulated in criticism after the emergence of Impressionism. Although the lines between these stylistic categories are fluid, to a large extent they are distinguished by a new awareness of time, motion, and space in the metropolitan centers.¹ The conscious effort of realists to find a scene in actuality that fit their ideological agendas was opposed by a greater sense of detachment whose model was the methodology of the natural scientist. Courbet's realism was unsentimentalized and deadpan, but the moments he captured signaled an engagement with the brutalities and social inequities of his time. Sometimes the narrative in his major works appears obscure, but it nevertheless built around a univocal theme, whereas in Manet the major works seem more random, fragmented, and loosely painted, as if sketched on the fly. The detachment is more on the order of a snapshot without aim as opposed to a formal photograph taken in the studio.

Both the naturalist and the realist went into the field with the mindset of an anthropologist, but the former assumed a neutral stance modeled on the scientific approach while the latter sought out subjects that could serve as clinical case studies. The realist presupposed a coherent material substratum underlying phenomena that could be grasped in its entirety once the deceptions of ideology were unveiled. Naturalists also believed in an independent, objective representation of this reality, but rejected the idea of a coherent, static picture of it. They analyzed its constituent and ambient elements such as light, color, and energy as if to capture people and inanimate objects by their negative (in the sense of a mold) impress on the environment surrounding them. Although the slice of life chosen by the naturalist still represented a selection rooted in personality and class consciousness, the goal was to accurately observe on the spot without appealing judgmental. Hence the craving for more trivial glimpses of everyday

life that challenged the conventional prejudices and routinized attitudes of entrenched styles. The result is that the beholder is forced to read the more incoherent naturalist image primarily in terms of its psychological complexities, whereas in the realist work, no matter how obscure the imagery, there remains the possibility of a systematic thematic interpretation.

Naturalism received its most succinct analysis in Zola's important essay *Le Roman expérimental* (The Experimental Novel, 1880), where the author traces the origins of his application of the scientific method to writing novels. Zola's model is Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (Introduction to a Study of Experimental Medicine, 1865), a widely popular work that provided a detailed view of the physiologist's scientific process. Zola boasted that the experimental method informed his "naturalist" novels, in which he carefully constructed the bloodlines and genetic inheritances of his Rougon-Macquart families to insure "scientific" behavior and appropriate responses to the environmental pressures he invented for them. Here the process would seem to rule out the element of unpredictability or spontaneity, but Zola insists that "if the experimental method leads to the knowledge of physical life, it should also lead to the knowledge of the passionate and intellectual life."²

Using Bernard's distinction between the sciences of observation and the sciences of experiment and his definition of the latter as "provoked observation," Zola argued "that the spontaneity of living bodies is not opposed to the employment of experiment." And he further amplified Bernard's thesis:

The difference is simply that an inanimate body possesses merely the ordinary, external environment, while the essence of the higher organism is set in an internal and perfected environment endowed with constant physico-chemical properties exactly like the external environment; hence there is an absolute determinism in the existing conditions of natural phenomena, for the living as for the inanimate bodies. He calls determinism the cause which determines the appearance of these phenomena. This nearest cause, as it is called, is nothing more than the physical and material condition of the existence or manifestation of the phenomena. The end of all experimental method, the boundary of all scientific research, is then identical for living and for inanimate bodies; it consists in finding the relations which unite a phenomenon of any kind to its nearest cause, or, in other words, in determining the conditions necessary for the manifestation of this phenomenon.³

Bernard distinguishes between observer and experimentalist: the first studies phenomena in which he can never intervene, in the manner of the astronomer, while the second employs the investigative process to modify natural phenomena in pursuit of some end, submitting them to conditions other than those readily perceived in nature. Observers operate like photographers of phenomena, but once they grasp the facts an idea or hypothesis

springs to mind and the experimentalist emerges to interpret the data. Experimentalists test their ideas through the reciprocal play of observation and experiment. The result, however, must be honestly observed without any preconceived idea, so that the experimentalist is turned once more into the observer.

How this might be achieved in Manet's work is exemplified in the account given by the painter Charles Toché, who met up with Manet in Venice in 1875. By then, Manet had thought deeply about making pictures, and willingly shared his methods with Toché. Watching Manet at the easel Toché was surprised to see how much time Manet spent on seemingly trivial details to achieve the desired look. He then bore witness to Manet's conceptual process when the two were observing a regatta spectacle at Mestre. Manet conceived of a picture on the spot and described his idea to Toché, who recorded the words verbatim in his notebook. Manet began with his selection of "the characteristic episode" from the welter of phenomena, delimiting the picture as if he saw it "already framed." He perceived as the element features the masts decorated with multicolored pennants, the tricolor flag of Italy, the undulating line of boats spilling over with spectators, the straight-arrow row of gondolas moving away from the horizon, and, at the top of the picture, the waterline, the finish line, and in the remote distance the vaporous islands. Manet admitted that it would be a struggle to obtain the different values rising tier upon tier that vanish according to the laws of atmospheric perspective. He planned to concentrate on the lagoon as the gathering site for the boats and passengers, and although mirroring the sky it also possessed its own color derived from the crowd and the colorful accessories. He emphasized concentration on light and color values rather than precise outlines of moving things, for when accurately observed the values yield "the true volume, the unquestionable outline." The motifs of individual spectators, seated or gesticulating, clothed in dark or dazzling fabrics, their umbrellas, their handkerchiefs, their hats forming a crenellation, have to be interpreted in terms of the different values that provide the necessary foil and interest to the planes. He would render the crowd, the rowers, the flags, and the masts like a colored mosaic, while simultaneously straining to maintain the "instantaneity of gestures, the quivering of the banners, the rocking of the boats." Finally, the sky would operate like an immense, dazzling canopy, enveloping the entire scene and shedding light on people and things. The last entry of the account reads: "The roughness will be impulsive, frank. No kitchen recipes, and you will pray to the gods of good and honest painters to come to your aid!"¹⁴

Except for the proverbial comment at the end, this recitation could stand as a clinical case study of Zola's experimental artist. Having scrutinized the scene in all of its complexities, Manet set up his experiment by focusing on the ambient air, light, and color and their interaction with people and things. Next, he establishes the relations that unite phenomena as well as seeking their causal wellsprings in the physical and material conditions

of their existence. Disregarding any overt attempt at narrativizing or formulaic procedures, he ranges over all the phenomena under the conditions in which he first observed them and conceals an experiment within a controlled framework. The final effect is one of an unpremeditated, informal view of nature and society, yet located in a specific time and place that reveal "the conditions necessary for the manifestation of this phenomenon."

Zola considers the novelist both an observer and an experimentalist, initially scrutinizing certain types in the crowd and then placing them in conditions that allow them to act out in accordance with genes and temperament. This leads to scientific knowledge akin to the experiments of the physiologist and physician. Zola quotes Bernard on the connection between the experimentalist's idea and his or her originality: "The appearance of the experimental idea is entirely spontaneous and its nature absolutely individual . . . it is a particular sentiment, a *quid proprium*, which constitutes the originality, the invention, and the genius of each one." Zola then repeats that an observed fact sparks an experiment to attain knowledge of the truth, the results of which are judged with the "freedom of mind" of one who accepts only facts that obey the fixed laws of nature. But what Zola calls the "determinism of phenomena" I see as the reflection of his own evolution as a writer under the Second Empire, when Hausmannization created the grid of a bourgeois society and gave rise to the *flâneur*. The determinism of which he writes complements the social and cultural restraints imposed on society by Napoléon III's innovative authoritarianism.

There was also a deeper social reason for the respective personas of Courbet and Manet: like Walt Whitman, Courbet deliberately assumed the guise of the peasant to serve as a role model for the autodidact and free thinker blocked by hierarchical restraints, while Manet's fashionable dress emphasized the artist's professionalism and respectability. Courbet's outfit symbolized his emancipative stance, Manet's his demand for the artist's social recognition. Manet had to defend his choice of career against the wishes of his upper-class parents by distancing himself from the popular image of the bohemian-type artist luridly characterized in Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie bohème* (1851) and restaged in the student rituals of the École des Beaux-Arts directly across the street from the familial residence. His posturing is brought home vividly in an interview with a critic at a time when he was under intense public scrutiny: "Look at me, I'm not one of those long-haired types, I'm a bourgeois—like you—like everybody else. I don't look like an artist, do I?"¹⁵ Thus he could justify his dandified costume as a form of camouflage that guaranteed him entry into his parents' social circles as well as the meanest cabaret.

Manet's Family Background

Yet Manet was still exceptional in the range of his urban themes, as if desiring to fulfill Baudelaire's ideal of the "painter of modern life." We would

want to know how it was that this scion of distinguished parents could assume a much more liberal posture than they, eventually coming close to an overt critique of the government in his *Execution of Maximilian*. There is his rebellion against the parental choice of profession, and the independence of his visual production, but he clearly retained close ties to his family even to the point of heroically protecting his father's reputation after the elder Manet sired a son with the family piano tutor by eventually marrying the tutor and adopting the son himself. There is his experience in witnessing the workers' uprising and its suppression, and his experience in December 1851, during Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état, when he again witnessed violence in the streets. This explains, perhaps, his sympathy for the Communards in the aftermath of their defeat in 1871 and brutal treatment during "Bloody Week." Although he could never accept their politics, he blamed the government for its ruthless reprisals against the Communards. In a way, the *filshneur* had to rise above class interests since part of the persona had to do with demonstrating ease of mobility within every nook and cranny of the social realm.

This clubman persona suggests that Manet's hunger for official recognition was less a self-aggrandizing posture than an effort to legitimize independent activity. When explaining why he refused to show with the independents, he declared: "I will never exhibit in the booth [*baraque*] next door; I enter the Salon through the main door, and fight with the others." Politically, he began and ended a republican moderate with liberal vision and social issues. He revealed this disposition early in life as an apprentice naval cadet on a voyage to Rio de Janeiro. Persuaded momentarily against the life of the artist and rejecting the law profession of his father, he compromised by considering a career in the navy. Admission to the naval academy at the age (then seventeen) required a prior apprenticeship aboard a commercial vessel, and young Manet signed up with other sons of good families aboard a ship specially outfitted for the purpose. Setting sail in December 1849, he reached its destination of Rio de Janeiro the following February. Manet was immediately struck by the racist structure of Brazilian society: "In this country all the Negroes [*Les Nègres*] are slaves. This is quite a revolting sight for us. The Negro men wear trousers; occasionally, a linen jacket, but as slaves, they are not allowed to wear shoes. The Negro women are for the most part naked to the waist. Some wear a scarf around their neck that falls over the chest. They are generally ugly; however, I have seen quite a few pretty ones."⁷⁷ Although in his eyes Black was not Beautiful, and he made ethnic distinctions in labeling only the whites "Brazilian," as an adolescent he already indicates awareness of social injustice and race prejudice.

He also shows an unexpected political astuteness in writing his father after learning that Louis-Napoléon had been elected president of the Republic: "Try to keep for our return a healthy Republic, for I am very much afraid that Louis-Napoléon is not very republican."⁷⁸ His comments attest to the family's liberal position and support for the moderate Republic, but

he accurately expresses pessimism about the new president's future course of action. In December 1851 Manet would witness the street fighting of the coup d'état, and was even arrested while observing the shelling of residential sections in Paris. After his release, he visited the cemetery of Montmartre with several fellow students to sketch the hundreds of victims laid out for identification. These scenes would haunt him all his life, and he would subsequently seize other opportunities to covertly expose the duplicity and brutality of Napoléon III's imperialist policies.

Manet nevertheless was advantageously positioned in society thanks to his family background and wealth. His independence derived partly from lifelong financial security and partly from his heightened political consciousness. His father, Auguste Manet, descended from a long line of landowners in the countryside northwest of Paris, held a sinecure as magistrate at the court of the Seine, while his mother, née Eugénie-Désirée Fournier, belonged to a family that boasted several career officers and diplomats. By all accounts, the father was rigid and punctilious, and the mother long-suffering though encouraging of her son's efforts. In addition to Edouard, the first-born, the Manets would bring into the world two other males, Eugène and Gustave, who would serve as surrogates for their older brother in several of his paintings.

9.2 Edouard Manet, *Portrait of M. and Mme. Auguste Manet*, 1860. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



We get a keen sense of the parental tension in Manet's double portrait of his parents, begun in 1859 and shown at the Salon of 1861 (fig. 9.2). It is a strange and unconventional half-length portrait, where neither parent looks out but averts the gaze of the artist/viewer by glancing downward. The father's expression is severe and his right hand clenched in a fist, as if in concentration in thought or profoundly disturbed. The mother seems more visibly anxious as she glances downward absentmindedly while sifting through her basket of fabrics. Neither communicates with the other, but hierarchy is maintained through the position of the woman behind the patriarch and in her diminutive stature. Although psychologically separate they are united visually in unremitting black, relieved only by incidental details like the basketful of colorful fabrics, the blue of the mother's bonnet ribbon, and the red flash of the father's Légion d'Honneur. Two years before Manet began his picture Auguste was stricken with paralysis and ultimately forced to retire; he was treated by a specialist

in venereal disease and the records suggest that he suffered from tertiary syphilis. In the midst of this horrendous familial trauma, Manet courageously confronted his sitters with the realist detachment of a Meissonnier, a Courbet, a Menzel. Neither he nor his parents could face one another directly, but he solved the problem by deflecting their glances downward. Although a striking image of the couple's estrangement, the drama as presented without knowledge of the historical background could pass as a tension between the stern male carrying the burden of responsibility and the perplexed spouse straining to be supportive.

Manet's painful struggle to put a proper face on these circumstances while still remaining true to his vision may have influenced his mature ambition to cut through the pretenses of modern society. By the time he painted this portrait, he had already undergone a private trauma of his own involving the entire family that ever after forced him to live a double life.⁹ While still in his teens, Manet's musically minded mother hired a young Dutch piano teacher named Suzanne Leenhoff to teach him and Eugène the keyboard basics. Suzanne soon became Edouard's mistress and on 29 January 1852 gave birth to a son named on the birth certificate Léon-Edouard Koëlla. The child was taken in society for Suzanne's younger brother Léon Leenhoff, and, until Nancy Locke's study, it was generally assumed by most specialists that Manet fathered the child. Léon was baptized only in 1855, when Manet served as the child's godfather. It is curious that even after Manet married Suzanne in a civil ceremony in 1863 he still did not recognize Léon as his son, even though there were legal channels for doing so. Manet certainly cared for the boy, who is statistically the single most frequent subject of his canvases.

Manet's will perhaps hints at the mystery of Léon's paternity; he left his estate to Suzanne with the proviso that she in turn bequeath it in toto to Léon, noting somewhat cryptically that his brothers should "find these dispositions quite natural."¹⁰ In view of his concern for Léon it seems surprising that he never legitimized him and refused responsibility as the biological father. Nancy Locke makes a convincing case in favor of Auguste Manet as the actual father of the child, and that it was his reputation as a civil judge that the family tried to shield. If Auguste did in fact father Léon, then under the law governing the offspring of adulterous relations Léon could not have been legitimized. Thus the fact that Edouard cared deeply for the child yet never recognized him strongly suggests that Léon was not eligible for legitimation.¹¹ In any case, Manet and his family had to ceaselessly weave a fabric of lies, concealments, and denials that surely shrouded his waking life. It is perhaps this camouflaged existence that explains the conspicuous lack of revealing personal documents that might shed light on the painter's personality and pictorial intentions.

Significantly, Manet exploited his professional activity to work through his secrets and sense of guilt. An early work, *The Nymph Surprised*, combines two iconographical precedents that would have touched on his

private anxieties: Susanna and the Elders and the Finding of Moses (fig. 9.3). Antonin Proust, Manet's boyhood chum and fellow student in Courbet's atelier, informs us in his early recollections that Manet began a large canvas, *Moses Saved from the Waters*, in his studio on the rue Lavoisier (hence before 1860) which he subsequently destroyed save for only one figure—the nude nymph.¹² The model for the nude was none other than Suzanne, whose pose is almost a literal quotation from a lost Rubens painting of Susanna but well known in reproduction. Manet's projection of the Dutch heroine as the biblical "Susanna" in association with one of his cherished heroes from the Low Countries has too many reference points to dismiss it as coincidental, including her Rubensian proportions. In her present state, the "chaste" Suzanne/Susanna stares out at the leering elders whom she subsequently spurns but who try to avenge themselves by publicly accusing her of illicit sex with a young man. She is ultimately "rescued" by the young Daniel, who catches the elders in a lie and metes out death as their punishment. Now if we recall that the matronly Suzanne was two years older than Manet and something of a mother figure, the subject immediately takes on Oedipal implications. The lusty elder in real life who forced his attentions on a vulnerable female is analogously dethroned by the rival son, who rescues the "mother" and preserves her chastity.

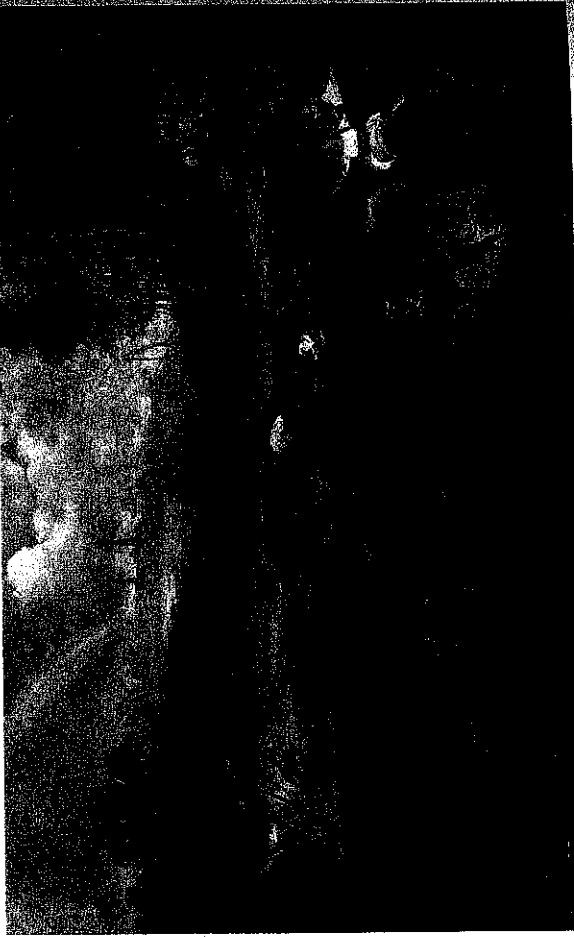
9.3 Edouard Manet, *The Nymph Surprised*, 1859–1861. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires.



The theme of *Moses Saved from the Waters* is similarly transparent in its relevance to the family's history: the child Moses is a foundling, rescued on the banks of the Nile by a maidservant (who is prominent in the sketch) of the daughter of Pharaoh. The child is then nursed by the biological mother, but ultimately given to the royal princess, who adopts him as her son. This is a narrative about switching places, the role of a servant in the royal household, ambiguous parentage, and a male child raised in ignorance of his true birthright. When we put the two halves of the puzzle together we realize that Manet plunged into tradition to come up with the means to allegorize his intimate liaison with Suzanne and the family trauma. When the attempt at veiling the allusions failed, he destroyed the original canvas in a fit of panic. In an effort to remove it from any associations with Suzanne and Léon, he cut out the nude figure of Suzanne, scaled it a nymph, and added a leering saryr (eliminated after Manet's death) in the background foliage.

Manet's mischievous identification of himself and family members in thin allegorical guise, however, did not end there. It may be stated that a mark of his modernity is his self-conscious rivalry with the Old Masters, as he invades their archaic world with his private space. An excellent example is *La Pêche* (Fishing, fig. 9-4), painted between 1861 and 1863, in which Manet represents himself and Suzanne in seventeenth-century Flemish

9-4 Edouard Manet, *La Pêche*, 1861-1863, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



costume. Although inspired by two compositions by Rubens, the actual landscape shows the banks of the Seine at Ile Saint-Ouen, near Gennevilliers, where Manet's family on his father's side owned property for over two centuries. In this sense, Manet's outdoor scene is typical of nineteenth-century landscape, which tended to celebrate rural property, and it seems certain that the extensive panorama hints at the family patrimony. The diminutive figures of Manet and Suzanne appear in the right foreground as actors on a stage, with Manet beckoning with the index finger of his right hand into the distance as he tries to console a disconsolate Suzanne. The heads of both are turned away from the sight of a tiny Léon seated alone on the opposite bank of the river concentrating on his fishing. The river separates the pair from Léon, a gulf emphasized by the conspicuous presence of the fishing boat in the compositional center and anonymous fishermen. Their prominent role in the picture may represent a common play on the title *La Pêche*, since the verb *pêcher*, to fish, is a homonym of the verb *pécher*, to sin.¹³ On the distant horizon we glimpse a rainbow and church steeple—conspicuous allusions to hope, promise, and a sanctified covenant.

On the surface, the painting appears as an allegory of confessed transgression and an expression of wanting to do the right thing. The promise of a bright future through the legacy of the extensive family land holdings may even symbolize the father's potential reparation. At the same time, the many degrees of separation between the lovers and Léon attest to ambiguous feelings about his place in their future plans. Kept at a safe distance in isolation, the child will have to learn to survive on his own. After the couple married in 1863 they led curious lives, with Manet preferring to dine at his mother's apartment and leaving Suzanne to the child-raising. Although Proust and others claimed that Manet cared for the boy as a father who indulged his every whim, our main evidence for the connection is the frequency of Léon's appearance in the artist's work. In most of his appearances, however, he is seen isolated or in ambiguous circumstances that hint at his provisional social status. It is perhaps noteworthy that Léon's death notice in 1927 gives the fictitious surname Koëlla recorded on the birth certificate rather than the name Leenhoff, bestowed upon him by Suzanne and Edouard.¹⁴

Manet and Couture

Manet's nautical apprenticeship galvanized his future plans, and by the time he returned in June 1849 knew exactly what he wished to do with the rest of his life. He had been appointed the ship's art teacher for off-hour activities, and during the voyage managed to compile a portfolio of drawings. Now determined on an artist's career, he chose as his master Thomas Couture, a painter who had created a sensation at the Salon of 1847 with his *Romans of the Decadence* and at the time of Manet's decision was working on the highly publicized *Enrollment of the Volunteers*. Although Couture never

won the coveted academic prize known as the Prix de Rome, he won all the official honors and established an international reputation for his portraiture. He represented to Manet and his generation a refreshing alternative to the tired, outmoded classical tradition still haunting the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

Couture's atelier was located on a street now called rue Victor-Maistre located near the Place Pigalle on the southeastern edge of the Batignolles, a large artists' quarter where Manet would set up shop for the rest of his career. Manet entered the studio in January 1850 and remained a disciple of the master until the spring of 1856.¹⁵ Despite this lengthy apprenticeship many historians would have us believe that Manet remained more or less impervious to Couture's instruction. In fact, the opposite is true: Manet's entire career is imbued with the pictorial, philosophical, and social ideal of the master.

Perhaps the most conspicuous example of Manet's early debt to Couture is his portrait of his friend and fellow student, Antonin Proust, dating from 1855-1856 when his six-year apprenticeship was coming to a close (fig. 9.5). Its filiation with Couture's *Portrait of a Woman* is immediately apparent (fig. 9.6). Although the pitted surface is not as exaggerated in Manet's picture, the pigment has been similarly harried and spread over the *ébauche* (underpainting), leaving tiny holes in the encrusted surface texture

9.5 Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Antonin Proust*, 1855-1856. Narodni galerie, Prague.

9.6 Thomas Couture, *Portrait of a Woman*, ca. 1851. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau.



Proust's jacket, moreover, has been treated in the master's typical manner for costume details. Manet's thick, facile contours and combination of fluid and grainy strokes might easily be mistaken for Couture's hand. But if a pupil's production would be expected to betray the teacher's influence, it should be observed that in this case Manet anticipates his mature work as well: the bravura strokes, the informal and distended contours, and the strong presence of the *ébauche* persist as permanent features of Manet's style. Like his master, he sought a delicate balance between thin and thick paint, between summary and labored execution, between broadly swept, untidy brushwork and a well-aimed, precise touch.

Manet especially profited from Couture's programmatic practice of what I call the "sketch-copy," in which students were encouraged to retrace Old Master processes by broadly replicating a work's essential structure. Here Couture's curriculum deviated from the traditional academic requirement of scrupulously finished copies, demonstrating his rejection of the tidily polished surface and instead emphasizing the underlying idea that informed the final product. Significantly, Manet's earliest known productions are copies of masters like Titian, Tintoretto, Rembrandt, Delacroix, and Velázquez that affirm Couture's taste for models of painterly technique.

In one instance, Manet made two copies of Delacroix's *The Bark of Dante* (see volume 3 in this series), a carefully finished reproduction and a smaller and freer version (figs. 9.7-8). Both were done in the same period and show a conscious application of the generative-executive categories of traditional studio procedure. Although unusual, I believe that in this instance Manet conducted a kind of experiment with a careful copy that he could study at leisure outside the precincts of the Luxembourg while carrying out the freer version. The sketch-copy is essentially a study of Delacroix's color harmonies and compositional effect, and it is significant that the technique he used is stamped indelibly by Couture's methods.

We know that Manet also copied Velázquez's *Infanta Margarita*, for which he probably registered in the Louvre in the

9.7 Edouard Manet, *The Bark of Dante*, ca. 1854, after Delacroix. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyons.

9.8 Edouard Manet, *The Bark of Dante*, ca. 1854, after Delacroix. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.





9.9 Edouard Manet, *The Infanta Margarita*, 1859–1860. Private Collection, United States.

period 1859–1860.¹⁶ The presumed physical absence of this copy has been one of the most vexing lacunae in his oeuvre. Although an excellent contender for the missing picture, has been proposed for several years, its lack of provenance and signature has cast a dubious pall over its origins. First published by Anne Coffin Hanson in 1977 in her seminal work *Manet and the Modern Tradition*, she described it as the best contestant for the place “of the work long known to have existed but never located and presumed lost or destroyed (fig. 9.9).”¹⁷ Although she added that it was impossible in the present state of knowledge to firmly identify the picture and consigned it to unknown authorship, she argued that of all the copies after the popular painting that had surfaced over the years this was the one that came closest to approximating the methods, colors, and vivacity of Manet’s style.

Since Hanson published the painting, his work has been rigorously submitted to a wide of-the-art scientific analysis. The outcome of the application of the latest forensic methods by Walter McCrone of the McCrone Institute and Alexander Kosolapov of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, should eradicate whatever remaining reservations art historians and art critics may still hold regarding it. Previously, Hanson and others entertained the possibility of this picture’s copy being a Manet simply on the basis of external appearances and his historical record. Indeed, the internal evidence of *The Infanta* in favor of Manet identification—style, paint layer, and physical structure—has never been disputed by the critics and historians, and, now that all the scientific data has been assembled and analyzed, the attribution is assured. There is no need to rehearse the abundant historical data of Manet’s profound admiration for Velázquez that he inherited from Couture; during his trip to Spain in September 1865 he wrote of the Spanish master in rapturous terms: “the mere sight of whom seemed a fulfillment of his most cherished pictorial ideals.”

After registering in the Louvre on 1 July 1859, Manet copied two paintings then attributed to Velázquez, *Reunion of the Thirteen Cavaliers*, usually dated 1859–1860, and presumably *The Infanta Margarita*, reportedly executed concurrently with Edgar Degas’s reproduction of the same work in 1859.¹⁸ Velázquez’s portrait in the Louvre of the infanta has since 1870 been located in the Salon Carré, and became an object of great interest during the Second Empire at the height of the Spanish revival. Manet did not fail



9.10 Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Roudier*, sanguine drawing, ca. 1860. Cabinet des dessins, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

9.11 Thomas Couture, *Portrait of a Man*, black chalk drawing, ca. 1855. Private Collection, Beauvais.

to acknowledge this connection in his most provocative Salon display of the 1860s, *Olympia*; he slyly transferred the pink flower from the head of the innocent Infanta to the head of the brazen courtesan to complicate still further his paradoxical challenge to tradition.

Manet’s paraphrase of *The Infanta* concentrates on a smaller portion of the actual work in the Louvre, turning what is essentially a three-quarters length figure into a portrait bust that iconically centers the object. What is remarkable in both the drawn and painted copies of his early phase is his tendency to reduce the actual torsos of the originals to primarily head and shoulders—typical of Couture’s drawing style—and to centralize them. Manet’s portrait of Roudier of 1860, for example, showing head and shoulders only of the sitter, could easily pass for Couture’s work (figs. 9.10–11).¹⁹ Couture’s formula left its mark on Manet, who continued this practice throughout most of his career, especially noticeable in a series of portrait studies of females in the 1880s, in his drawn portraits of Courbet, Monet, and Edgar Allen Poe, and the etched portrait in profile of Baudelaire (ca. 1862–1865).²⁰

At every stage of his curriculum Couture stressed freshness and purity of color, which he sought to achieve through a minimum of mixing colors and by hitting the canvas with the exact tint he desired without disturbing it afterwards. Rather than disturb it, he preferred to scrape away an unfortunate touch and repaint it later. Although Couture preached a strict adherence to the traditional preparation of a painting with an *ébauche*, or underpainting, even here he developed his own singular approach in

exploiting it as a positive feature in the definitive work. He permitted the rich red-brown of the earth tone to show through in shaded areas and rough-textured objects, and, at the same time, exposed it in the interests of pictorial expressiveness and freshness of execution. In addition, he dragged over the underpainting with a tone used for brighter areas, giving a greater depth and transparency to the shadows. He also employed the *ébauche* as a device for simplifying the palette. By giving full authority to the underpainting, he could divide a single tone into a grade series, spreading the pigment and attenuating its viscosity over the ground. This process not only expedited his execution, but imparted an air of spontaneity to it. The play between the canvas texture, thinly covered in the red-brown tone, and heavier impastoed areas added a flickering and luminous quality to the pictorial surface. As the critic Armand Dayot summed up his technique:

Couture later used this fine, clear pigment, the colors of which were almost un-mixed, in different thicknesses, and by spreading it more or less densely on the *ébauche* layer that was actively brought into play in the final stage, he obtained delicate half-tints.²¹

Couture thus employed the *ébauche* to eliminate extraneous *demi-tons*.

Why set out to mix special half-tones? However clever you may be, your half-tints will take on colors that do not belong to them and will look wrong. A half-tint simply means a less bright light, and this you can achieve by a judicious softening of your principal light over the *ébauche* surface.²²

Manet, however, wanted to go even further than his master in eliminating gradations from dark to light, and experimented with methods for achieving more immediate transitions. Couture once asked his opinion on a recently painted portrait, and Manet answered that its color scheme seemed to him too much encumbered by half-tones. Couture replied: "Ah! I know why you say that. You refuse to see the succession of intermediate tones between dark and light." But, for Manet:

Light appeared to the human eye with a unity such that a single tone was sufficient to render it; moreover it was preferable, crude though it might seem to pass suddenly from light to darkness rather than accumulate features that they do not see and that not only weaken the force of light but attenuate the coloring of shadows which it is important to emphasize, for the coloring of the dark areas is not uniform, but extremely varied.²³

For Manet, the effect was intimately related to the intensity of light, and the accumulation of *demi-tons* only served to diminish this intensity. Light alone was the unifying factor, requiring only a single tone for its execution. In a sense, Manet took the premeditated content out of the *ébauche*.

demie method by insisting on the elimination of tones that escaped the vision in a drawing or painting session. This would have significant implications for later independents like the impressionists.

Yet Manet's notion ultimately derives from the master's instruction. Couture did not wish to reduce his luminosity through the addition of a middle tone, but aimed to preserve its vitality by dragging the same tone across the *ébauche* surface. Manet went one step further, ultimately eliminating the reddish-brown underpainting and closing the gap between the most brilliant light and the darkest shadow. Nevertheless, both master and pupil shared the same goal: the preservation of the luminosity of the brightest light.

The Absinthe Drinker

By the end of the 1850s Manet was struggling to emancipate himself from his scholastic years, and his first major independent effort, *Le Buveur d'absinthe* (The Absinthe Drinker), marked his professional debut (fig. 9.12). A representation of a single iconic figure against a plain background, it could stand as Manet's urban riposte to Millet's solitary peasants. Although no longer enrolled in the studio, Manet continued to seek his teacher's advice and show him work in progress. By his own admission, he prepared the underpainting of this work according to Couture's recipes, and this is confirmed by the red-brown tonality peeking through in the area of the protagonist's cloak and the wall behind him. The heavy outlines of his trousers, the warm patchwork in the face and sliver of white collar also attest to Couture's lingering sway over his pupil. Perhaps intending to ingratiate himself with the master who still possessed official clout, Manet invited him to preview the work in his studio. After viewing the painting, his former teacher unsympathetically informed his disciple of six years: "My friend, the only absinthe drinker here is the painter who produced this insanity."²⁴ Needless to say, this cruel comment terminated their relationship and, to add insult to injury, the Salon jury of 1859 rejected the work.

The derelict creature wrapped in a tattered old cloak and wearing a battered top hat was modeled after a ragpicker and peddler of scrap iron named Colardet whom Manet happened upon in the Louvre and invited to pose in his studio. Colardet belonged to the tribe of colorful urban outcasts attractive to someone of Manet's age, a sweet-natured but cynical social dropout and con artist seemingly full of wisdom and surprising explanations about the vexing riddles of the universe.²⁵ Existing on the fringes of the modern city and scrounging for castoffs at odd times of the day, such solitary types latched on to idealistic, antihomergous youths who also prowled the urban environment during off hours seeking alternative lifestyles. The mere fact of the exchange between ragman and dandy in the Louvre suggests a shared sense of culture that collided with the dominant view. These destitute yet appealing characters on the margins of civilized society gave off a nostalgic

whiff of "what might have been," while making light of the pretensions to worldly fame. Manet interpreted the tipsy ragpicker as a streetwise sage: he subsequently grouped *The Absinthe Drinker* with his series of so-called philosophers, actually vagabonds of one sort or another, in the tradition of Voltaire's analogous images of beggar-philosophers Menippus and Aesop. Here he may have been inspired by another ragpicker named Christophe, known as "the philosopher" for his sharp tongue and worldly wisdom, but who bitterly insulted passers-by, and from a distance threw a disdainful laugh "whose vibrations echoed in your breast and made you sick."²⁶

Manet locates his antihero in a shadowy corner remote from his own affable environment, perhaps reflecting contemporary accounts of the ragpicker's world as a modern-day equivalent of the "hideous and mephitic streets that confined the swarming and sinister Jewish population of the Middle Ages."²⁷ In addition to the bizarre castoff clothing worn by the ragpicker, Manet identifies him with the trademark, triangular-shaped glass of absinthe at his side and the empty bottle at his feet. These attributes of his "calling" have iconographic significance, and key us to his strange posture. A certain morbid stage of alcoholism, often showing hallucinatory symptoms, was known as *absinthisme*. In what appears as a half-sitting and half-standing pose, Colardet prepares to rise from his seat on a ledge to perform a dance for his fascinated spectator (presumably the artist). He steps out with his left foot forward, his right dragging behind in a gesture that Fournel described as characteristic of ex-con ragpickers who had tugged a ball and chain.²⁸ Absinthe has liberated him momentarily from his despair, corresponding to the contemporary notion of drink as the primary consolation as well as worst vice of the poor.²⁹

Although Manet's blatant and unsentimentalized depiction of a modern alcoholic ragpicker offended Couture, the gloomy solitude and shadowy residual romanticism could not have been alien to his sensibility. Manet's moody treatment, vague background, and symbolic attributes of the absinthe glass and bottle recall analogous traits in Couture's *Love of Gold*, *Supper after the Masked Ball*, *Drummer Boy*, and the *Illness of Pierrot*. The gesture of the *Drinker* has been likened to the aristocrat in the center of *The Enrollment of the Volunteers*, both of whom engage in a curious dance-like movement. As Michael Fried has pointed out, however, another source of the Manet is Wateau's *Indifférent*, no doubt the common source for both master and disciple.³⁰ For Couture, the eighteenth-century aristocratic gesture gave authenticity to his history painting; for Manet, it gave his bum a touch of dignified elegance that contrasted with the drabness of his actual existence.

Proust tells us that he was with Manet and Baudelaire in the studio on rue Lavoisier when news of the jury's rejection reached them. Manet's one consolation was hearsay that Delacroix, also on the jury, voted to accept the picture. Baudelaire's admonition confirms Manet's effort to ponder to his master's taste: "The conclusion is that one has to be oneself." Although Manet protested the implications of Baudelaire's suggestion, it

OPPOSITE

9.12 Edouard Manet, *The Absinthe Drinker*, 1859. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.



is significant that the poet was standing by at this time to provide moral support. Although ragpickers as an occupation acquired a special mystique in the Parisian imagination, most likely Baudelaire's "Le Vin des chiffonniers" ("The Ragpickers' Wine") from *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), with its invented protagonist "banging his head against the walls like a poet," inspired Manet's painting. Set in one of the old faubourgs where ragpickers congregated (perhaps the old Faubourg Saint-Marceau in the vicinity of the Latin Quarter, where chiffonniers flocked), the poem pictures a lurid street lamp gleaming red in a darkened niche while a ragpicker "pours out his heart in glorious projects." "Compensating for his burdensome toil, he dreams in possible schemes:

He takes great oaths, dictates sublime laws,
Casts down the wicked, aids the victims,
Beneath the sky, like a vast canopy,
He is drunk with his own splendid virtues.

Ragpickers return from their hunt as from war "through triumphal arches" magically erected for them, and are greeted with deafening music and shouts, bringing "glory to the love-drunk folks at home." Baudelaire's final verse, however, abruptly changes course as he makes the ragpickers run headlong into the reality principle:

To fall these wretches' sloth and drown the hate
Of all who mutely die, compassionate,
God has created sleep's oblivion;
Man added Wine, divine child of the Sun.

Baudelaire perceived drunkenness as both a strategy for the urban poor to make it through the day, and a means for the artist to achieve an exalted state of imaginative insight. The poem's protagonist shares with Manet's *Absinthe Drinker* this dual perception of the ragpicker as a defeated member of society who nevertheless refuses to accept his degradation, relying on alcohol to help him create an alternative universe. Manet's solitary inebriate rises to the beat of a different drummer and hoofs off his troubles to the plaudits of his charmed audience of one, Manet himself.

Manet's subject for his Salon debut was probably carefully chosen with a view to exploiting the obvious appeal of the type who survived by his wits—what one would now refer to as a "hobohemian." Hanson reminds us that the Salon of 1859 displayed two ragpicker pictures, and that popular imagery and sociology had elevated the figure into an archetypal occupant of the streets akin to the *flâneur*, the creative stroller.³¹ Densely populated urban precincts, modern industrial processes, and consumerist mania gave trash a fresh value, thus increasing the numbers of Parisian ragpickers, who needed nothing more than a sack, a stick with a prong on the end of it (or

or *crochet*), and a lantern to set up shop. Bartering with middlemen of all sorts, they transacted business in the lowest depths of society.

But it is especially the double life of the *chiffonnier* that attracted Manet: the bifurcated existence of the pinched survivalist, on the one hand, and the dreamer of impossible schemes, on the other, must have resonated with the painter who for several years had been developing the fine art of camouflage and masquerade. This split in the ragpicker's personality is signaled by the looming shadow on the wall behind him and his cloaked avatar. According to Fournel, the gesture of brandishing a crook in shadowy haunts gave the ragpicker the air of a "fallen angel."³² The ragpicker's costume at any given time constituted a form of disguise, and Manet's ragpicker sports what once must have been a dashing cape and elegant top hat that were relegated to the dustbin, only to be retrieved and recycled into a reinvented identity. Indeed, the ragpicker's costume would have mutated daily in accordance with his scavenging of discarded treasures, leading Ewa Lajert-Burcharth to shrewdly observe that the ragpicker's secondhand wardrobe sentenced him "to the condition of permanent disguise."³³

We have already seen that Manet's lifestyle required considerable role-playing and masquerade, and that his subjects often address these themes. There is an unmistakable link between his social masking and the nature of the regime that governed during the period of his maturation. Of course, at all times and places individuals are called upon to assume different parts in life's charade and are more or less conscious of performing these parts. The Second Empire is unique in this regard, however, since the ruler himself thoroughly exploited the name and historical renown of the first Napoleon to bolster his domestic standing. Caricaturists had a field day even before the elections of 10 December 1848 depicting Louis-Napoléon wearing his uncle's trademark costume, and in one jibe at his political campaign a side-show clown calls upon the electorate to nominate only the costume itself. Louis-Napoléon was also caricatured as Robert-Macaire, the gentlemanly con artist popularized on the stage by the actor Frédéric Lemaître.³⁴ In his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx opens with the unforgettable paraphrase of Hegel's dictum that all facts and personages of great importance in world history repeat themselves: "the first time as tragedy, the second as farce." The nephew behaved like other cautious actors in revolutionary crisis, falling back on the spirits of the past, borrowing "from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in the time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language."³⁵ Thus the eerie sense that it was only a supporting cast in an imperial comic opera must have haunted the whole of Second Empire society.

One indication that this feeling trickled down into the ranks of the ragpickers is indicated by their own internal social divisions, a sort of send-up of the empty political categories of the day. Their favorite hangout, a cabaret near the *barrière* at Fontainebleau, was divided hierarchically into three major rooms: ragpickers of the "first class" occupied the space known as

the *Chambre des pairs*, the next group the *Chambre des députés*, and the less attractive room, for the use of the "last class," was designated the *Reinbon des vrais prolétaires*.³⁶ Although their social construct was a defensive measure against being pigeonholed as "monstrous types" by the dominant classes, it also demonstrates that even the most brutalized sector of the society could step back and perceive itself as participating in the imperial farce.

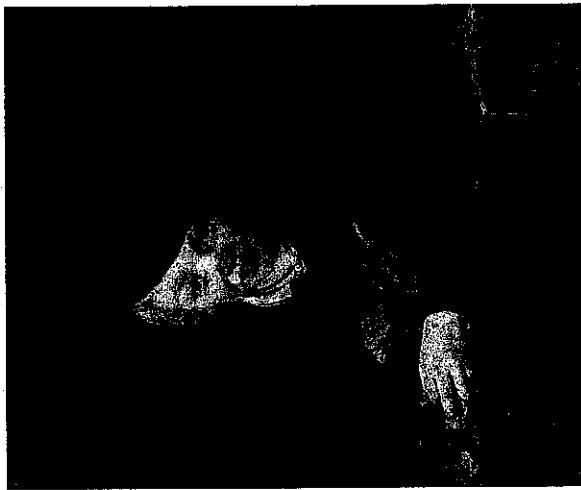
All the sociologies and picturesque narratives of ragpickers stressed their addiction to aromatic drinks and eau-de-vie as relief from a wretched existence driven by rage and revenge fantasies. One source of their revolutionary spleen was the unfair wine tax, whose rates remained constant for the cheapest as well as the most expensive brands, thereby operating at a regressive tax penalty on the poorest segment of the population. It particularly harmed impoverished city dwellers by placing them at the mercy of sleazy cabaret owners in the faubourgs who served adulterated and imitated wines. In Manet's picture, the sickly, yellowish tint of what was normally green absinthe may allude to such practices. Manet here charges the government with a double standard for rich and for poor, just as Haussmannization privileged the wealthy strata and victimized the lumpenproletariat. During Louis-Napoléon's presidency, there were several feints in the direction of abolishing the tax, and the unfulfilled promises aroused the indignation of poor urban dweller and peasant alike. On 19 May 1849 the National Assembly abrogated the wine tax as of 1 January 1850, but just ten days before the new law was to go into effect it got cold feet and voted the retention of the tax. To legitimize their apparent vacillation, the National Assembly appointed a committee of inquiry into the justice of the tax retention that promptly rubber-stamped the principle of the regressive tax in its report of 14 June 1851. If, as some observers would have it, the absinthe drinker's gesture reflects an act of provocation, it would have been aimed at Louis-Napoléon's broken faith with those who voted him into office.

The combination of this spirited dance of defiance and the brooding aura may have contributed to the picture's rejection in 1859. Manet's character simply did not live up to its colorful "type," safely tucked away in the slums and *barrières* of Paris, but secretly aspired to broader reaches. The *ariviste* of the Second Empire hardly wished to be reminded of the slippage in the class structure. If mere wealth was an index of social status, then the achievement of this status meant little in the way of superior skills or achievement. The meanest ragpicker might win the lottery and be awarded crossover status in the *haut monde*. The stereotype of the occupations that in truth attempted to fix and thereby control the dangerous classes through an ideal social structure was seen to be a fiction sustained by bourgeois society. The *chiffonnier's* ability to overcome class differences may have taken place solely in fantasy, but the leveling process and social mobility of the Second Empire gave the "rags-to-riches" story a new twist. The movement could also take place in a reverse direction, as in the case of the magistrate's son who wished to become an artist.

Manet's *chiffonnier*, with his fancy footwork, battered top hat, and threadbare cape, has to be seen as the painter's counterpart—the obverse of the elegant *flâneur*. Both scavenge the streets in search of the magic bullet that will transform their lives, although their schedules and relationship to the crowd differ drastically. The act of "*chiffonnerie*" may be said to constitute the dark side of *flânerie*. The ragpicker creates narratives out of the flotsam and jetsam of the trash he collects by imagining the prior history of things, while the *flâneur* spins an analogous tale from the prior histories of the faces in the crowd. Manet's absinthe drinker therefore operates as the painter's alter ego, acting the part of a character in an imagined drama.

The Boy with the Cherries and The Gamin of Paris

The same year that Manet painted the *The Absinthe Drinker*, he produced another work in a similar vein inspired by Couture's precedent, *The Boy with the Cherries* (fig. 9.13). It, too, established a connection with Baudelaire. Couture's red-brown sauce is once again in evidence, as is the rough impastoed surface that also owes something to their common idol, Chardin. This image inaugurates a series of solitary adolescents (often modeled by Léon) engaged in seemingly innocuous acts modeled after Couture's allegorical gamins and urchins. Couture's *Falconer* and *Drummer Boy* set the youth in



9.13 Edouard Manet, *The Boy with the Cherries*, 1859. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon.

a potentially risky situation by identifying him incongruously with the military or a barbarous sport. The child innocently plays his part, oblivious to the destructive potential of the circumstances. Manet's *The Boy with the Cherries* and, later, his *Soap Bubbles* and *Youth Peeling a Pear* signify like trope of the transient state of human existence. All the accessories hint at the fragility of life on earth and the short-lived happiness associated with youth, sleeping the works themselves in a peculiar mood of melancholy and resignation that belie the cryptic smiles and lackadaisical attitudes of the protagonists.

Couture's *Drummer Boy*, painted in 1857, belongs to the category of images that probably influenced *The Boy with the Cherries* (fig. 9.14).³⁷ Even the ripe grape clusters dangling overhead invoke Manet's central motif. *Drummer Boy*, however, is more overtly propagandistic in conjuring up the popular enthusiasm for the imperial army in the wake of the Crimean War. In this case, the youth has not yet enrolled in the ranks, but his elation at finding the military drum and its accessories leaves no doubt as to his future plans. The poorly clad urchin was interpreted by one critic as an example of the typical Victorian rags-to-riches theme, eminently compatible with



14. Thomas Couture, *Drummer Boy*, 1857. Detroit: Institute of Arts, Detroit.

the ideology of the Second Empire that encouraged the romantic view of success: "Ah! I understand the boy clearly in the process of analyzing him: he smiles at the future does he not, my dear Couture? And he already beats the charge in some imaginary battle, and he will enlist in an army of volunteers, and perhaps he will be in a revolution, he will become a general, a *maréchal* of France,—and will become rich enough to buy your very expensive painting!"³⁸

Despite the surface message of *Drummer Boy*, there are a number of disturbing aspects about the picture. The somber backdrop that casts a gloomy aura over the scene contradicts the apparent joy of the garmin. The would-be drummer boy takes up the drumsticks in the ominous shadow of the stacked rifles leaning against the wall—like horrific echoes of the battle. The youth also seems much too pampered and refined for his tattered clothing, thus suggesting costume. The sense of incongruity is heightened by the child's mawkish smile—hinting at the artist's own repugnance for the character. Couture's loathing for his subject is reflected in the contrast between the child's vacuousness and the degree of naturalism lavished by the artist on the inanimate objects. Just as the idle schoolboy of Couture's *Soap Bubbles* wiles away his valuable moments building castles in the air, so the drummer boy, dreaming of military glory, is destined for obliteration by the French military machine.

Manet's *The Boy with the Cherries* strikes the viewer as more consistent in its portrayal of a coarse, streetwise garmin smiling mischievously over his latest haul. He conforms more directly to the type described in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, who is prey to two passions: hunger and liberty. He continually obsesses about his next meal and his restlessness keeps him on the move. A preadolescent, he is hardened into grownup precocity by the abandonment of uncaring and abusive parents. Like the *flâneur*, he knows the entire city by heart, its streets, boulevards and passages, and has made a thorough study of the faubourgs, the streets, quays, promenades, and intersections. He attends all the spectacles and celebrations, but his favorite hangout is the stalls of the Funambules. Forced to eke out his existence by hustling on the streets, he develops a variety of survival skills that enable him to perform the duties of apprentice in various crafts. He embodies a mixture of all the vices and virtues and is a dyed-in-the-wool revolutionary, not on principle or for personal gain but by a naturally rebellious and independent sensibility.³⁹

The model for Manet's picture was a street urchin named Alexandre who more or less fit this profile, hired by the painter to clean his brushes and tend to studio chores (fig. 9.15). His garmin's trademark cap tilted rakishly to one side ("la casquette sur l'oreille"⁴⁰), the boy looks out poignantly at the spectator as he leans on a ledge fondling a paper wrapper filled with plump red cherries. The rosy-cheeked and ruby-lipped child is identified with the fruit, as in the French expression "être rouge comme une cerise." Manet must have felt some affinity with the kid, not unlike his sympathetic

association with Colardet, but here memorializing him at the moment of his triumphal harvest. He was forever pilfering sweets and liquors (including *Kirschwasser*—a cherry brandy?) from Manet's cabinet, until one day the painter severely reprimanded him for his petty thievery and threatened to send him back to his parents. When Manet returned to the studio later that day, he found that the lad had hung himself from a rope attached to a nail in the ceiling. The incident so unnerved him that he moved to a new location. He subsequently told the story to Baudelaire, who composed a "prose-poem" about the experience and dedicated it to Manet.

Entitled "La Cordé" (The Rope) and first published in *L'Artiste*, its core theme, as recounted by the painter-narrator, is the myth of the steadfastness of maternal love. Following the suicide, the thought of having to inform the parents tortures the painter endlessly. At last, he summons sufficient courage to confront them but is horrified to learn that the mother is quite unmoved. "Not a single tear rose from the corner of her eye." The father, in turn, only comments, "Perhaps it's better that way after all, as he'd have come to a bad end in any case. Later, the painter thinks the mother has a change of heart when she returns to recover the rope and the nail—but he discovers that her intention in doing so is to sell these items as souvenirs.

Baudelaire's short tale not only relates the incident but addresses the issue of parenting that weighed so heavily on Manet. The artist in the poem asked the impoverished parents of the gamine to hand him over to his care, essentially stepping in as a surrogate father. He cleans the child, provides him clothes and pocket money, and creates a more congenial environment than the boy's family hovel. Hence he considered himself in the first instance as a superior parent, but after the reprimand and the suicide he recognized his miscarried effort. His hesitation to appear before the boy's biological parents is bound up with his sense of failure, and he may have exaggerated the coolness of the parents in the face of the catastrophe as a means of swaging his own guilt and self-blame. In Manet's case, the circumstances would inevitably invoke Léon's ambiguous status and Suzanne's insistence on relating to the child as a brother, a distance forced upon Manet that may have pressured him into seeking alternative paths to fatherhood.

In the story, the artist adores the child's "lively and alert" appearance and derives much pleasure from his foolish antics. These are the appealing



9.16 Edouard Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

traits of childhood absent in the relationship of Manet and Léon, but vividly portrayed in *The Boy with the Cherries*. The boy's pixielike expression, awkward charm, and exultation in the day's haul display the qualities that attracted the painter in Baudelaire's short story, and point to what Manet was missing in his actual family entanglements. At the same time, the artist in the story was shocked from time to time to observe the little fellow's "singular fits of precocious depression"—a sort of presentment of things to come. In the picture, the somber backdrop and the flaccid silhouette of the child slumped over the ledge lends an air of vulnerability to the urban reminiscence of Couture's *Drummer Boy*.

Here I wish to leap ahead chronologically to examine Manet's painting of 1866, *The Fifer*, a work that resonates with both the example of the master and his own *Boy with the Cherries* (fig. 9.16). It may be recalled that the drum and fife most often constituted the field music in the nineteenth century, and that in military tradition they were inseparable instruments. Manet's model was a "petit troupier" brought to his studio by Major Lejosne of the Imperial Guard. The young fifer in his resplendent uniform exemplified the current revival of Napoleonic flamboyance. The popular enthusiasm for the musicians of the Imperial Guard was shown by the huge crowds that jammed their performance at the Palais de l'Industrie in July 1867.

Manet's image, however, is disturbingly singular in its total extirpation of flag-waving rhetoric.⁴ As in the Couture, we are confronted with the vulnerable child-soldier whose plump, awkward fingers have not yet developed the resilience required for technical excellence. Manet carried out the theme more effectively than his master through the distracted, almost helpless air on the boy's face and through the neutral background that isolates the figure like a target in a gunner's sight. Couture's gamine has now volunteered as a military mascot, decked out in fancy apparel for the public and reduced to the status of an object like a toy soldier. Considering the conventional presentation of drummer and fifers, the chilling effect of Manet's image becomes evident and anticipates his peculiar spin on *The Execution of Maximilian* conceived the following year.

Fournel's gamine of imperial Paris imagines wild military fantasies sparked by the contemporary penchant for martial dramas in popular



9.15 *Le Gamin de Paris*, wood engraving. Reproduced in J. Janin, "Le Gamin de Paris," in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1853 ed.), 1:107.

serious *flâneur*, who can savor the variations of the barrel-organ, take in the jugglers, acrobats, and hypnotists, and even contemplate the stonebreaker with a degree of admiration.⁴⁵

Fournel distinguished the simple *flâneur* or *badaud* from the aesthetic version: the former is always self-conscious and guards his individuality while the latter, "under the influence of spectacle, becomes an impersonal being, no longer a man: he becomes the public, the crowd."⁴⁶ Baudelaire's prose poem "Les Fousles" (The Crowds [1861]), a key text in clarifying the commonly used and abused term of *flânerie*, reiterates this thought:

Not everyone is capable of taking a crowd-bath: enjoying crowds is an art, and the only person who can binge on vitality at the expense of human beings is he into whom a fairy infused him at birth with a bent for disguises and masks, hatred of home, and a passion for traveling.

He goes on to state that "multitude and solitude are equal and interchangeable terms for the active and productive poet. Anyone who doesn't know how to populate his solitude, doesn't know how to be alone in a bustling crowd." Next he claims for the poet what his dear friend Manet practiced habitually:

The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able, at will, to be both himself and other people. Like those wandering souls seeking a body, he can enter the personality of anyone else, whenever he likes. For him alone, every thing is a vacancy; and if certain places seem closed to him, it is because in his view they are not worthy of a visit. The solitary and thoughtful stroller [from *Manet*] derives a special kind of intoxication from this universal communion. The person who can readily identify with the crowd enjoys ecstatic delights that are forever denied the selfish person locked in a coffee, and the lazy, confined like a mollusk. He adopts every profession as his own, as well as all those joys and miseries that circumstances may present to him.⁴⁷

Baudelaire here elaborates on his idea of the *flâneur*, or incognito stroller, already formulated in his influential essay "The Painter of Modern Life," written about 1860. According to Proust, Baudelaire and Manet were by then close friends and Manet profoundly influenced his thesis. Although Baudelaire's seminal essay conceals Manet's role in its formulation by using another artist—a reportorial illustrator named Constantin Guys—for his clinical case study, his profile of the "Man of the Crowds" is an ideal match for Manet as well. There Baudelaire amplifies the previously codified notion of the *flâneur* (a certain type of creative bourgeois idler already typecast in the July Monarchy⁴⁸) as merely an insightful observer of the urban scene to a productive intelligence actively participating in that scene by documenting it with reference to himself.

The crowd is [the *flâneur*'s] element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define.⁴⁹

The *flâneur*, however, is not content with the passing pleasure but aims at the biggest prize of all: the distillation, from the pageant of the now, of the poetry that can be transmitted to posterity as the legacy of the present. He grasps the quality of "modernity"—the distinguishing traits of the contemporary that will remain the historical residue of the future. Baudelaire then expands on this notion of modernity:

By "modernity" I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. Every old master had his own modernity; the great majority of fine portraits that have come down to us from former generations are clothed in the costume of their own period. They are perfectly harmonious, because everything—from costume and coiffure down to gesture, glance and smile (for each age has a deportment, a glance and a smile of its own)—everything, I say, combines to form a completely viable whole.⁵¹

Baudelaire here justifies the independent artist's rejection of past models in favor of the external life of the present; indeed, one's originality depends on immersion in the external life of the present, "for almost all our originality comes from the seal which Time imprints on our sensations." Of course, Baudelaire never tells the reader how to accomplish the process of distillation other than to pay attention to overt signs of modernity like costume, deportment, and hairstyles. The reason for this failure of explanation is his belief that the process of distillation is the affair of the genius, and not given to every face in the crowd. Indeed, the painter of modern life, who is also the dandy rising in distinction above the common herd, is the equivalent of the Old Master who managed to extract from his or her era the "other half" of the contingent, the immutable in the ephemeral. In the end, Baudelaire subscribes to another form of elitist philosophy that rationalizes the advance of the bourgeois modernist to the role of spokesperson for the emerging capitalist era.

But what is crucial for our study is Manet's identification with Baudelaire's formulation, as well as his dipping for pictorial inspiration into the various categories outlined by the poet in spelling out the subject matter of the *flâneur*. Walter Benjamin understood the *flâneur* as a kind of detective on the prowl, searching the physiognomies and gestures of the crowd for clues

to lifestyle and private fantasies.⁵² What he had in mind here was the spatial dimension of the creative stroller in a time of repression (Benjamin actually uses the stronger word "terror"), perhaps extrapolating from Baudelaire's explanation that the modernist/dandy/*flâneur* is a creature of disorderly transition periods, when "democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall." At such moments, the dandy/*flâneur* sees himself as forming a new kind of aristocracy of talent. Baudelaire's prose poem intimates that it is to gain control of the street that one assumes the guise of a *flâneur*, disdainfully rationalizing those instances in which he feels excluded as those unworthy of his presence.

The *flâneur* moves against the crowd as a poet composing his work or an artist visualizing a composition, identifying the faceless and anonymous masses with a metaphorical namesake. Like a good mythologist, he conceives the unknown for himself and his society; this is more than a form of self-indulgence or self-amusement, but an act of imaginative "crowd control." Victor Fournel, a self-proclaimed *flâneur* of the period, confirmed this trait in his examination of passers-by: "Each individual furnishes, not if I wish, with the material of a complicated novel; and, like Cuvier, reconstructing an animal from one tooth, and a whole world from one animal, I reconstitute all these scattered lives; I make move, think, and act at my will this theater of automatons whose strings I hold."⁵³

More importantly for Manet's developing lifestyle, Baudelaire's *flâneur* exploits his assumed anonymity by an ability to put on various disguises and mentally inhabit the bodies of everyone else around him. This role was made to order for Manet, whose ambition to record every Parisian type underscored his need to choreograph society according to a definite scenario. Forced to abide a double life, he compensated for his tentative social status by constantly being on the move and living out a communal existence in public spaces. Like an actor, his identity consisted of multiple guises in which he played everyone except himself. The chance encounter of these types in the street offered the opportunity to orchestrate his own urban drama. The anonymity of the crowd and the monetization of social relations could hide all sorts of personal secrets. This also constituted the mark of his modernity, for it was the erosion of traditional communal solidarity brought about by urbanization, industrialization, and secularization that created the conditions of *flânerie*.

Baudelaire underscores the need for the painter of modern life to seek expeditious technical means to capture the transitory and fleeting events of cosmopolitan existence. The Heraclitean flux of trivial external events demands quick reflexes and speed of execution from the artist, just as the opposite of the conventional painter of heroic or religious subjects who seeks the look and feel of perpetuity. Hence creative *flânerie* is synonymous with the *esquissateur*—the artist who exploits the *non-finito* as both an economy of means and as an intrinsic quality of the accelerated tempo of urban experience.⁵⁴

Fournel, an astute critic of Haussmannization, summed up the Parisian *flâneur* in a brilliant passage where he describes the sensations aroused by the new urban experience and the way the *flâneur* negotiates this experience freely and smoothly. Discussing the creation of the new parks and promenades through industrial artifice, the critic claimed that they were not designed for those who actually pined for rural seclusion and the beauty of nature, but for those who enjoyed solitude in crowds and to whom any work was artistic in proportion to its artificiality. For the true Parisian male the countryside has become "only an affair of custom and genre." Thus the potted geranium on the balcony amply satisfies his bucolic instincts:

He detests the empty spaces where no one is to be seen, where there are no pubs, where one encounters while promenading only water, grass, trees, flowers, and swarms of tiny insects; where one does not know how to kill time. If he rents a villa, he takes care to choose a fashionable location, not far from the railroad. . . . In showing you his garden, he boasts with pride: "The railroad runs past only two steps away and I hear all the trains." His ultimate dream would be the construction of cities in the country, or the shifting of the country to Paris. The public gardens have been created to this fantasy.⁵⁵

This witty yet insightful glimpse into the mindset of the *flâneur* perfectly characterizes Manet and his circle, whose daily routine rotated around the new spaces of leisure. Fournel implies that even the hybrid landscape of the suburb was fast becoming a commodified artifact, exemplified in Manet's depiction of his property at Gennevilliers in *La Pêche* with all of its returned accessories and symbols. His daily social life centered on the boulevards, with their theaters, restaurants, cabarets, and cafés—especially the Café Tortoni on the corner of the rue Taibout and boulevard des Italiens, where he regularly ate lunch before going for a stroll in the Tuileries gardens, and to which he returned for drinks in the evening.

It was within the interstices of the controlled spaces of the Haussmannian grid that the *flâneur* operated, public spaces that seemed to offer opportunities for the mingling of all the classes but whose advantages were available to the few. Although *flânerie* could be interpreted as a form of opposition to capitalist production, this type of idling unfolded within the world capitalism created. Rather than resist the system, he had the resources to exploit it and relished his ability to manipulate it to his advantage. For the rest the Haussmannian grid merely structured leisure as an extension of structured work.

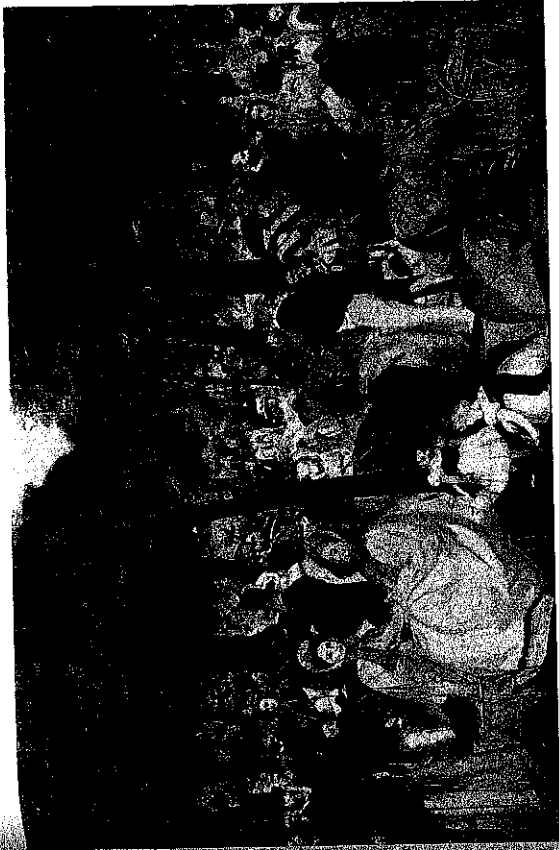
One way of understanding commodification of life during the Second Empire is to look at our culture's pervasive spread of the shopping mall. In many ways, the mall is an updated version of the Parisian arcades, the glass-enclosed passageways lined with elegant shops—a hybrid crossing of an interior and a street—that Benjamin defines as the locus of the *flâneur*'s haunts. We shop, dine out, look at art, and go to the movies in a single

place. Yet even when enclosed in glass and steel (again analogous to the Russian arcades) these sites are designed to retain the traditional appearance of promenades, street shops, corner restaurants, and hawkers of ready-to-eat snacks. But the spectacle presented to us is only a virtual image: the flea-mom-and-pop stores have disappeared, and downtown commercial districts have been destroyed while the mall seduces its car-driving customer with vast parking facilities. Tradition has been replaced by a simulacrum subject to endless manipulation, transformed into a theme park whose paradigm is Disneyland.

Disneyland is a totally regulated environment that boasts exceptional crowd control; but once inside you can freely glide from one event to another with all the aplomb of the *flâneur*. Of course, a second look reveals a compulsive cleanliness that belies the behavior of the roving multitude and through absence of human debris we can glimpse what has been lost. Here there are no homeless, and no signs of poverty other than what can be read into the Pirates' Cove or Frontierland fantasies. The Second Empire similarly built a structure of nodal points of pleasure that determined the mobility and freedom of the *flâneur*. Inside the mall and theme park social class seems to be homogenized and rank vanishes; the crowds in the Beverly Hills Mall are not necessarily different from those in less affluent areas. Yet the mall is self-contained and totally private—*public* protest and even acting up are outlawed.

Middle-class *flânerie* permitted the kind of social mobility required to access the less elitist urban sources of inspiration, but at the same time helped sustain the social hierarchy. Despite the presence of vagabonds, beggars, prostitutes, and street performers in Manet's early works, he reveals his liberal outlook in his paradoxical modes of representing them. His progressivism reduces to "radical chic," the revelation of trendy, ascending radicalism that best explains the authentic attitude of the *flâneur*. Like the modern conservative who considers the homeless to be in a state of voluntary and free detachment from civil society, the supposedly liberal *flâneur* perceived his impecunious subjects as free spirits. Of course, one can imagine here certain traits of identification, as even the privileged independent artist experienced marginalization within the Beaux-Arts system. No longer able to enjoy a stable social role, the independent gravitated to the outskirts of society as part of an extended family. Nevertheless, at day's end the *flâneur* returned to his favorite café to mingle with his peers, sip an absinthe, and discuss aesthetics.

This retreat to familiarity is perfectly summed up in *Concert in the Tuileries*, which is in effect a representative lineup of a club of *flâneur* analogs to a seventeenth-century Dutch guild portrait (fig. 9.17). Here Manet holds court with top-hatted colleagues and celebrities of the Second Empire like critics Baudelaire, Champfleury, and Gautier, witty journalist Antoinette Scholl, Beaux-Arts ministerial official Baron Taylor, and popular composer of comic opera (opéra bouffe) Jacques Offenbach—all habitués of the



177 Edouard Manet, *Concert in the Tuileries*, 1862. Trustees of the National Gallery, London.

boulevards. Despite Manet's modest positioning of himself at the extreme left edge of the picture, he resembles all the other groupies and dilettantes in comportment and dress and even indulges in a bit of satiric wit in posing as genius in this brilliant company. Sandblad pointed out in his essay on the *Concert* that Manet assumed the analogous position of his hero Velázquez in the courtly picture in the Louvre then attributed to the Spanish master, *The Little Cavaliers*, implying that he played an equivalent role in documenting upper-class Second Empire society.³⁶ Since the beholder of the picture is denied the view of the musicians whose concerts took place twice a week in the Tuileries, attention is concentrated on the elegant clique gathered to hear them. They are strung out parallel to the shallow horizontal picture plane for the entire world to see. As with Courbet's *Funeral at Ornans*—the image that probably inspired this work—the stated occasion of the picture is only a pretext to display a society in microcosm.

Although formally structured by the verticals of the shade trees that relieve the dominant horizontality, the composition projects an improvised look of a lively crowd divided into clusters of individuals engaged in animated conversation. The absence of a strong central focus and the random, casual look resembles journalistic illustration of the type found in the burgeoning illustrated press of the period. Manet may have taken his cue from Courbet's exploitation of popular imagery to overcome academic constraints, but more likely he followed Baudelaire's prototype of

the modern artist, Constauntin Guys, whose illustrations for the *Illustration London News* looked like sketches taken on the fly. Manet certainly completed this work in the studio from outdoor studies, but the final effect is closer to Guys than to Courbet. The combination of the women and their dandified consorts all dressed in the latest fashions, the asymmetrical groupings, and sense of aimless chatter effectively communicates a slice of contemporary life.

Significantly, this scene of splendidly dressed people unfolds in the shade of the formal gardens of the imperial palace, a kind of bourgeois shadow of the dazzling court. The establishment of the Second Empire created an explosion in the drapery trade and the world of high fashion. The formation of the new court and the wedding of Napoléon III and Eugénie de Montijo in 1853 sparked an enormous demand among the wealthy classes for beautiful clothes. The emperor's taste for display and impeccably tailored uniforms and Eugénie's obsession with etiquette and ceremony galvanized *haute couture*. The transformation and enlargement of Paris enriched many thousands of entrepreneurs who in turn emulated the social elite in the taste for grandeur. The emergence of the department store in this period also allowed the middle classes to buy readymade clothing at a reasonable price that imitated high fashion. The males wore faultlessly fitting jackets, and the widening skirts of their wives and lovers kept pace with the widening streets. In Manet's painting, the men and women in his entourage have invaded the imperial precincts to assert their pride of place in the social structure.

But I believe that Manet was after bigger game in this taxonomic display of his social circle: what is unfolding in this work is an unmistakable statement on *flâneurie* and its leading exponents. The public gardens of the Tuileries are presented as a site of a regrouping or launching stage of the *flâneurs* prior to invading the streets of their favorite haunts. The scene actually reverses the standard trope of the stroller in his element in the crowd, for here the crowd comprises almost exclusively the *flâneurs* themselves. Typically, they observe but never interact with the crowd from which they remain hidden; but now Manet reverses field and submits the *flâneurs* to the public gaze. No longer acting as single, solitary operatives, they are identified as a corporate body in a specific social and class setting. They have been "outed" so to speak, stripped of their anonymity, their covers blown; a theme of mask and disguise once more hovering dangerously close to the anxieties experienced by Manet every day of his life.

The Old Musician

The largest and most eccentric picture Manet painted prior to *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* of 1862–1863, *The Old Musician* is a valedictory to Old Paris and a reminder of the human costs of the New (fig. 9.18). This poor man's street "concert" reveals the social flip side of the fashionable



9.18 Edouard Manet, *The Old Musician*, 1862. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

outdoor *Concert in the Tuileries*. Manet brings together a disparate cast of characters—gypsies, Jews, street urchins, and ragpickers—straight out of the pages of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*⁵⁷ to perform a pantomime about their common displacement from the demolished slums they once inhabited. It is a kind of tragic "family portrait" of the nomadic flossam and jetsam thrown up on the outskirts of the city by Haussmann's program of urban renewal.

Inspired in part by Courbet's *L'Atelier*, Manet also critiques that painting with his choice of outdoor setting and arrangement of social types. His work is realist in its absence of conventional compositional staging, but it differs from say Courbet's *Funeral at Ornans* in that the figures seem less like members of an indivisible community than a ragtag representation of different tribal and caste types tossed together willy-nilly by events beyond their control. Their physical and psychological separation bear witness to the dismantling of picturesque Paris. Despite the absence of an embrace narrative or unifying motif, all of the figures were individually posed in

Manet's studio at one time or another and thoughtfully positioned by his composition. He brought them in off the streets to test his social and political observations, as proof of the validity of his ideological *flânerie*.

Some of the models Manet employed for his street urchins originated from a mean and sordid ghetto known as La Petite Pologne, home to the most wretched and "dangerous" sector of French society, including the street entertainers, salimbanques, and every type of desperate surviving on the fringe. Their indigent status and appeal to the popular classes to whom they often conveyed anti-government messages) made them especially vulnerable to police regulation and harassment. Hausmann targeted Petite Pologne as a district filled with criminals and subversives, and tried to make way for the new boulevard Malesherbes.⁵⁸

Death stalks this devastated wilderness and its victims. In Baudelaire's prose-poem "La Corde," the Manet character reflects on the remote part of the city where he rented his studio, "and where considerably grassy areas are still to be found between building sites, I often noticed a boy who lives lively and alert appearance at once appealed to me more than any I had seen." This was Alexandre, the gamin who posed for *The Boy with the Cigar*.⁵⁹ He and who would soon take his own life following Manet's severance. Baudelaire's protagonist recalled that for pictorial purposes he sometimes turned the boy into "a little gypsy" (*petit bohémien*) and painted him as a "vagabond's violin." The small boy standing beside the gypsy violinist with his arm around the "Gilles" character undoubtedly refers to Alexandre, another martyr of modernization.

Manet had recently rented a studio on the rue Guyot in the Baignon district nearby, and observed with rapt fascination the leveling of the terrains and the ruinous appearance caused by the demolitions. Proudly, he pressed associated Manet's observations of the process with his *flânerie*, and at every step Manet would point out to his friend the destructive effect on the landscape. In one instance, he called attention to a cedar tree standing isolated in the middle of a ruined garden, its long branches like arms seemingly searching for "its clusters of destroyed flowers."⁵⁹ Consistent with his *flânerie*, Manet brought together familiar Parisian types from the squalid quarters of the metropolis into a dreamlike setting that invokes the spectator's participation and acknowledgment of their condition in never-never land. The emperor inaugurated the boulevard Malesherbes on 13 August 1861 amid great fanfare, and the ironic contrast between the celebration space and the wasteland of the victims could not have been more apparent to Manet. That these marginalized urban vagrants, street urchins, and itinerant musicians are cast into a desolate, quasi-rural precinct signifies a fate worse than death, for it means that the sources of their scanty subsistence no longer exist.

The seemingly unrelated figures are grouped around a seated musician who has momentarily ceased playing his violin to gaze at the beholder in

what I read as a questioning expression. He sits on an old suitcase next to a vagrant's sack that indicates his itinerant status. It is not mere coincidence that he was posed by Jean Lagrène, the leader of a band of gypsies who earned a hand-to-mouth living in the Batignolles district as an organ grinder and artist's model. The dominant figure in this group, he bears a striking resemblance to Manet, thus serving as a persona for the displaced artist as well. That he is a gathering point for the motley crew in the picture suggests that he offers the bare minimum of aesthetic consolation in this ravaged wasteland. The orphan girl, or "big sister" at the left, burdened with the care of an infant, awaits the musician's concert as the operational symbol of this needy audience.

The bearded old man partially cropped at the far right was posed by Guérault, the "old Jew with a white beard" mentioned by the artist in his notebook. That he was another familiar neighborhood type is suggested by Henry Tuckerman, an American visitor to Paris in 1867, who encountered at the Théâtre des Italiens, "in his old seat . . . the old Jew, with snowy beard and velvet cap—an ancient figure, whose attention showed the hereditary love of music, and whose isolation, even in that temple of Europe, marks one the race whose badge is suffering."⁶⁰ Here the profile of Tuckerman's "Titianesque" Jew matches the character in Manet's painting: ancient and venerable, with snowy beard and velvet hat, he is drawn to music, and yet is trapped in utter isolation as an inevitable outcome of his ethnic heritage.

These are solid grounds for associating this character with the traditional folk image of the "Wandering Jew"—the sinner who mocked Christ on his way to Golgotha and was condemned to tread the globe until he recognized the divinity of Christ upon his Second Coming. Always out of sync with his times, he trudges through history as a solitary, unloved pariah—the quintessential outcast and symbol of social dislocation. Although Gobineau's singularly racist *Essai sur l'Inégalité des races humaines* appeared in 1853 (if it does not mention Jews, his theory of the decline of the Nordic strain in French culture could be interpreted to include them), the status of the Jewish middle and upper middle classes actually improved during the period of the Second Empire. Notable figures such as the Pèreire brothers, founders of the Crédit Mobilier, and Achille Fould, minister of finance, as well as the Rothschilds, played prominent roles in keeping the Second Empire government afloat. Manet himself enjoyed the patronage and friendship of several middle-class Jews, including Charles Ephrussi, Antonin Proust, Zacharie Astruc, and Alphonse Hirsch, and unlike Couëtbet, his teacher Couture, and several of his colleagues, neither his recorded conversations nor his correspondence reveal the taint of anti-Semitism. Indeed, his depiction of Guérault shows his understanding that the Jewish millionaire was an exception and that a significant proportion of French Jews lived in impoverished conditions. Even the anti-Semitic Fournel associated the Temple district of the old-clothes merchants—a place where

even "the inoffensive *flâneur* might fear to tread—with the lowest rung of the social ladder:

The Temple is appropriately named. What ironic and cruel energy in this denomination borne by a zone of equal turpitude! Here in fact is the temple of avarice and scraps, the temple of theft, of chicanery and usury, of the lie, of advance and profit! Everything there smacks of the Jew, oozing rapacity, exhaling a stench of petty cupidity and shrill haggling. . . . Nothing exists outside, neither sun, nor nature, nor love; life is there in its entirety, harnessed to an implacable cogwheel that grinds it to the point of suffocation.⁶¹

Manet, on the other hand, by depicting the Jew as victim sharing the same mean conditions as the other refugees in his composition, demonstrates that he still retained his youthful idealism expressed in his observations of the Brazilian slaves. Manet's image of the Wandering Jew assumes a positive connotation as a symbol of perennial suffering. This is Manet's riposte to Courbet's swaggering rabbi at the far left of *L'Atelier* who tightly clasps his jewelry box and mutters to himself that he has the best of it.

It is crucial that Manet reproduces *The Absinthe Drinker* in the composition, positioning the ragpicker—this time in broad daylight—behind the Gypsy violinist. His incorporation of this figure is not only an indication of the importance he attached to the work, but also that the motif of the dancing figure who tries to surmount his subterranean privation is relevant to the central theme of *The Old Musician*. In their wretchedness, these homeless vagabonds behave analogously to slaves on a Southern plantation—who sang and danced to improvised music as a strategy for survival. Apologists for slavery always pointed to these actions as evidence of their contentment, but, as the African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass retorted: "Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. . . . The singing of a man cast away on a desert island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion."⁶²

The curious presence of the gamin in Pierrrot costume is perhaps the one real clue we have to the connection between this ragtag group of vagabonds, clochards, street musicians, orphans, and mountebanks and Haussmann's demolitions.⁶³ The boulevard du Temple, torn up the very year the picture was painted, was once the scene of lively street festivities and theaters of every kind, including the Théâtre des Funambules—the French equivalent of the commedia dell'arte with its star Debureau fils—which gave its farewell performance on 15 July 1862. Fournel's dithyramb on the gamins of Paris stressed their fanatical love of Debureau, who, at the first sign of Pierrrot, "hurled themselves down from the third gallery to the stage . . . only to kiss the tip of his shoe."⁶⁴ In addition to the professionals, the boulevard du Temple swarmed with pierrrots and pierrettes, harlequins and columbines during the festive celebrations of the last three days of the Paris



9.19 Charles Monginot, *Caught in the Act*, 1864. Reproduced in *Illustration*, 1864.

Carnival. Thus the vanished tradition of the boulevard du Temple—one of the favorite haunts of the *flâneur* and the gamin—is symbolized by the lost waif in the costume of Pierrrot.

It should also be noted that Couture began a major series of Harlequin and Pierrrot during the late years of Manet's apprenticeship in his studio, and such a major shift in the direction of his work would have decisively affected his students. Charles Monginot, a Couture disciple and friend of Manet who lent the latter the sword for *Child with a Sword*, painted a picture for the 1864 Salon showing an adolescent in a Pierrrot costume confronting the spectator (fig. 9.19). Although Monginot may have derived the idea from Manet, it is more likely that the two shared the master's legacy of using characters from the Funambules to comment on topical events.

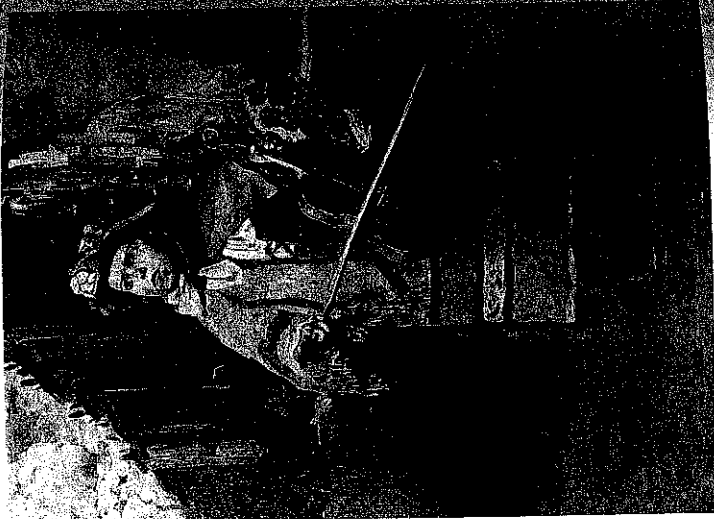
The gamin's clear reference to Watteau's *Gilles* further calls our attention to the abundant ink spilled in Manet criticism to explain the artist's numerous borrowings from the Old Masters in *The Old Musician*. In addition to Watteau for the gamin, the pose of the violinist has been modeled on a Roman replica of a Hellenistic statuette representing the Stoic philosopher Chrysis, the orphan girl with the infant based on a picture by Puvis de Chavannes, and the composition itself has been likened to Verlax's *Drinkers* and a painting by one of the Le Nain brothers, Louis Le Nain's *Halt of the Horseman*. A creative artist's motivation for using sources of the Old Masters derives mainly from the need to legitimize experimental activity and ground it in the original formal solutions of the past. In the case of *The Old Musician*, Manet further deployed his numerous Old Master references to lend his outcasts an aura of gravity and dignity associated with the art of the museums. His borrowings expose through contrast the dark side of Haussmannian fallout, and, at the same time, reveal the human dimension missing from the "types" described in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*.

The Street Singer

Manet's fascination and sympathy with itinerant musicians is seen again in his painting of *The Street Singer*, first exhibited at the Galerie Martinet in 1863 with several other canvases, including *The Gypsies* and *The Old Musician* (fig. 9.20). Proust mentioned their encounter with the street singer just after discussing Manet's *flânerie* in the zone of demolitions for the boulevard Maesthetbes. A young woman suddenly exited a dingy cabaret, lifting

her skirt and gripping her guitar at the same moment. Manet went straight up to her and asked her to pose for him in his studio. She laughed in return, but the painter had recourse to his favorite model, Victorine Meisner, who subsequently posed for the picture.⁶⁵

In the painting, he added a few details unnoticed by Proust: as the woman strides into the street she cradles a wrapper of loose cherries in the crook of her left arm while grabbing a bite with her right hand. Her left arm and hand seem overburdened by the multiple tasks of lifting the skirt, clutching the guitar, and cradling the bunch of cherries. Behind her the swinging green doors of the sleazy joint are freeze-framed in an open position as we catch a glimpse in the interior of three or four customers seated at a table, hats hanging on the wall (except for the top hat worn by one of them), and the rear of a standing waiter wearing the familiar white waist apron. The entire image—figure and background—is cinematically conceived to convey the *flâneur's* random, instantaneous capture of a person in motion.



OPPOSITE
 20. Edouard Manet, *The Street Singer*, ca. 1862. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

21. Frédéric Bazille, *The Italian Street Singer*, 1866. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

What previous scholars have emphasized as a movement of transition and instantaneity is the *flâneur's* insight into the continuum of a particular social type's existence other than the specific occupational stance that fixed the figure in the popular imagination. No one could have cared less about a street singer when not at her job, and it is to Manet's credit that he allows us a glimpse into the everyday exigencies of the performer and the pressures she endured behind the scenes. The street singer is no notorious celebrity, but a survivalist on society's periphery like the protagonists of *The Old Maid-sician*. We see her in a rush to return to work, stopping only for a moment to relieve herself and grab a snack, signs of the moment-to-moment stress of her occupation. This is no romantic or anecdotal image of a *chanteuse des rues*, but a poignant glimpse into a hurried life. The comma-like shadows at the top of the nose (misread in the nineteenth-century as eyebrows slipping from the horizontal position!) accentuate her anxious look.

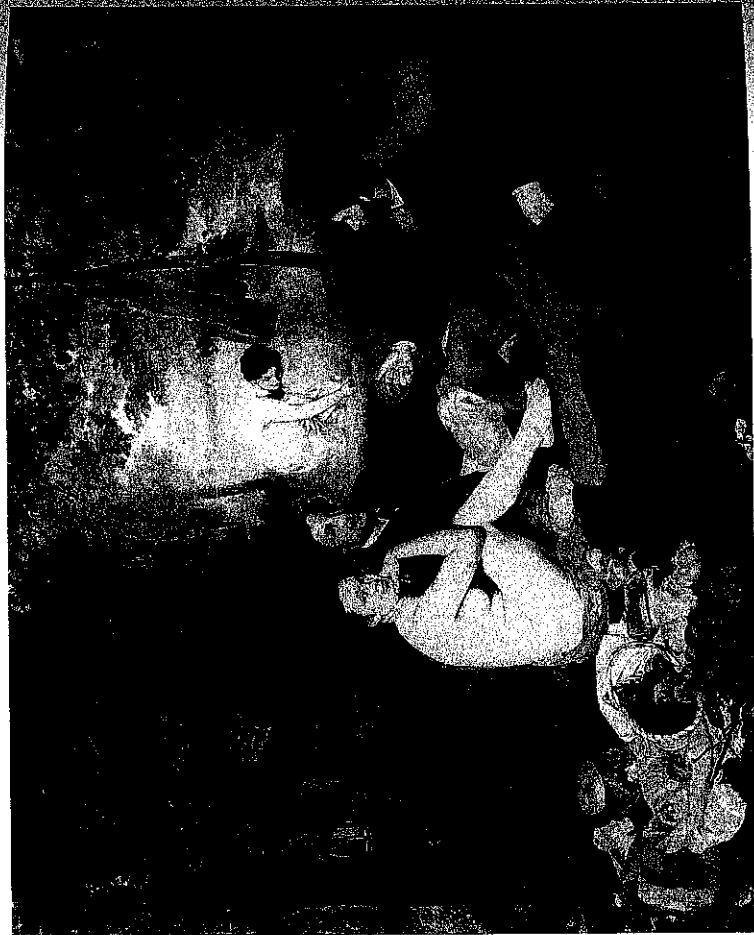
Manet's unique vision is more easily grasped when we compare his street singer with the same subject by Frédéric Bazille, an emerging impressionist whose *Italian Street Singer* was painted seven years later, in 1869 (fig. 9.21). Standing isolated in the street at the vertex of a V-shaped intersection that falls away in two directions, she pauses in her performance as she gazes upward with a fierce expression at some malicious looker-on. Her unfashionable hat and ragged outfit lend her a pathetic air, while all around her passers-by avoid her like the plague. Bazille, younger than Manet, nevertheless exploits the contemporary taste for sentimentalism and pathos in the treatment of the subject; although Manet's female also sports an unfashionable hat and slovenly reveals the bottom of her petticoat, his studious avoidance of anecdote and pathos grants her a degree of humanity that raises it above anecdote. Just as he refuses the stereotype, so he refuses to be a mere observer—actively seeking displaced soul mates in Haussmann's Paris.

Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe

There is a dialectical relationship between the male *flâneur* and the female prostitute in Second Empire France, both *déclassé* (though starting out from opposite ends of the social ladder), living on the edge, and preoccupied with selling themselves in the marketplace. In the arcades, the new department stores, the parks, the Folies-Bergère, and the corner café, and on the grand boulevards built by Haussmann, the loitering dandy could meet his dressy sister, "the street-walker."⁶⁶ Manet's *flânerie* involved a variety of erotic experiences on the street, and themes of prostitution preoccupied him throughout his career. Like Manet's own subterfuge, the prostitute had to camouflage her social relations in public spaces by playing the role of another.

The infamous *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, originally entitled *Le Bain or The Bath*, for example, is a distinct send-up of one aspect of Second Empire

social life as well as a modernized version of the high art trope of classical nudity as constitutive of the traditional ideal (fig. 9.22).⁶⁷ It was his largest effort to date, a genre theme done on the scale of history painting, reminiscent of Courbet's infamous blockbusters. Rejected by the Salon jury of 1863, Manet seized the opportunity to exhibit this, and two other refused paintings, in the equally notorious Salon des Refusés. The official jury had been particularly severe that year, accepting less than half of the 5,000 paintings submitted. A storm of protest followed, and Napoleon III, trying to appear as an impartial judge, decided to investigate the circumstances himself. As a result, he commanded that an exhibition be held outside the official Salon to display the rejected works and let the public decide for itself. This Salon des Refusés was attended by a record seven thousand visitors the first day, and the public and critical outcry in response to Manet's work made him a hero to the younger generation that met at the Café Guerbois on the rue des Batignolles.



OPPOSITE
9.22 Edouard Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1863. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Manet's "shocking" composition nevertheless came with solid credentials. It reworked the early sixteenth-century painting by Giorgione entitled *Pastoral Concert*, where two musicians clothed in typical Renaissance costume squat in an idyllic landscape, blissfully unaware of the presence of two nude females in the foreground. The women haunt their reveries as unseen muses, but do not share their world and avoid the glances of the spectator from whom they modestly avert their gaze, if not their naked flesh. As already shown, Manet had copied several celebrated works in the Louvre, including *The Infanta* of Velázquez, testing his personal talent against traditional rivals by modernizing their conventions.

In addition to the Giorgione, Manet borrowed figural motifs from Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael's lost *Judgment of Paris*, a deliberate plagiarism recognized in his own time and hardly meant to be disguised. It operated like a cookie cutter whose disguised but felt presence added a ghostly complexion to the picture. Manet appropriated the three figures in the lower right of the engraving—a water nymph and two river gods who sit idly by a riverbank during the fateful selection of the fairest goddess in creation and the ruinous consequences of the apple of discord. It is these figures that Manet transformed into the brazen naked female who stares openly at the spectator, and her two male student companions dressed to the nines in the latest Parisian fashion.

By using Renaissance sources and ancient allusions for his scene of contemporary French society, Manet created a kind of opera bouffe on the order of Offenbach's *Opérette aux Elyées* (Orpheus in Hades, 1858). Offenbach's controversial comic opera satirized Olympian gods, and was attacked by Jules Janin in the *Journal des débats* for profaning "glorious antiquity, in a spirit of irreverence that borders on blasphemy." Boredom and the attempt to alleviate it is a major motif of the operetta: in the first act, the audience learns that Orpheus and Eurydice have grown bored with each other, but while she begs the gods for deliverance from her husband, he insists they cannot part for fear of offending Public Opinion (allegorically depicted as a character in the piece). Meanwhile, Jupiter is tired of Mount Olympus, with its continual diet of nectar and ambrosia. Everyone descends into Hades to escape the tedium of their existence, where a bacchanalian revel engages the gods, goddesses, and nymphs. This is followed first by a staid minuett and then by an abandoned caucan—an electrifying contrast that shocked and startled contemporary audiences. In addition, gods wore carnival costume and cracked jokes in the idiom of the boulevards.⁶⁸ Both Offenbach's comic opera and Manet's painting represented an admixture of classical setting and characters with Second Empire frivolities that mocked antiquity and added up to a stinging satirical commentary on the pretensions of contemporary moral codes.

The males are peculiarly disengaged from each other and from the naked female in their midst. Now in both the Giorgione and the Marcantonio Raimondi there is a curious narratival disjunction in the interaction of

the protagonists: in the first neither the females nor the males appear to be cognizant of one another, and in the second the nymph and river god are seemingly ignorant of the results of the central action. It is precisely this sense of disjunction that Manet aimed to impart to his painting, in its modernized paraphrase it conveys an understated deadpan that became the painter's cosmopolitan trademark. What today one calls "cool," and in Manet's time "blasé," points to the urban sophisticate's capacity to take everything in stride and never be caught unawares even by the most unexpected events.

The *flâneurs* in the picture appear not only blasé but also bored out of their minds, they evidently have failed to overcome their world-weariness by a sudden plunge into illicit pleasure. Manet transformed the Giorgione dreaminess into Second Empire aimlessness, and that is why the work seems to lack any kind of resolution despite its vivid focus on the nude. He deliberately created two registers in conflict with one another, one in which there is a kind of Renaissance reverie and another that conveys a sense of instantaneous impression belonging to the modern world that does violence to the reverie. These two registers are also marked by the hybridized landscape, the foreground of which is rendered in a highly naturalistic style whereas the background has the look of a painted studio backdrop.⁷⁶

Visitors to the Salon of 1863 knew that bathing areas along the Seine were separated by gender, and that absolute nudity was prohibited.⁷⁷ But there were numerous hidden alcoves on the riverbank and infractions of the rule must have been commonplace (fig. 9.23). After all, there was no



OPPOSITE
9.23 Charles de Marville,
Scene at the Bois de Boulogne,
Paris, albumen, ca. 1865. J. Paul
Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

law forbidding mixed-sex picnicking, and who was there to stop someone from suddenly taking a dip? Manet's portrayal of the bizarre foursome is meant to point up the inconsistency between Second Empire legality and Second Empire reality. The men in black try to preserve appearances by tuning out the women after the manner of the males in the Giorgione, as if to pretend that de jure separation of the sexes actually existed, while the viewer cannot miss the actual de facto circumstances. The gesturing male sprouting beside the seated bather tries to carry on normal conversation with his inattentive companion, who nevertheless studiously avoids any eye contact with the principal nude. She breaks this façade of false decorum and betrays its underlying moral hypocrisy by refusing to be tuned out in compliance with the double standard. She turns up the heat in inverse proportion to the blithe behavior of her male companions.

She, in fact, carries the punch line: she looks out at the beholder with a knowing glance, privy to the artist's inside joke. This is typical of nineteenth-century genre, as seen in works by the Americans William Sidney Mount and Lilly Martin Spencer and the French Courbet, where a figure looks out slyly at the spectator. Although feminist writers certainly have a point in emphasizing her total absence of shamefulness and confrontational gesture, I believe that what is operative in *Déjeuner*, as well as in the notorious *Olympia*, is not the liberated female returning the male gaze but the knowing female winking at both the knowing female and male spectators. Unlike the marginal figures in typical genre who betray the joke, the brightly lit seated nude is a commanding presence who monopolizes the scene and disrupts the pretense.

Manet also had access to a modern source that had previously exploited the Marcantonio Raimondi engraving, an 1861 lithograph by Eugène Guérard entitled *Long Live Wine, Long Live the Juice Divine*, a bawdy picnic scene featuring a reclining male in the position of the river god at the right of the engraving (fig. 9.24).⁷⁸ Although all the figures are clothed in the lithograph, what is crucial here is the attempt to smuggle the subject matter of high art into popular culture, a subversion consistently practiced by Manet and a hallmark of his modernism. Manet's picnic scene strips Guérard's of its vulgarity and makes more apparent its classical sources, again attesting to a subtler and more nuanced approach that nevertheless brings down magisterial art a notch or two in favor of a fresh bourgeois synthesis.

Part of the joke also relates to the *demi-monde* of Second Empire society, the transgression of the borders between high and low society for which Manet sought a visual expression. As we will see in the study of *Olympia*, a hierarchical ranking existed in the netherworld: we may distinguish more or less precisely *grisettes* at one end of the scale and the high-paid courtesan at the other. The *grisette* was a lower-class working woman who attached herself to students and artists and incarnated a kind of free spirit. Neither venal nor ambitious, she represented the courtesan of the people.⁷⁹ Often, students would pick up *grisettes* at one of the gates to the city for a tryst in

sister to the *gamin*, who similarly knew every nook and cranny of the city.⁷⁴ Often, they came from the ranks of the street entertainers and female rag-pickers. Earlier, I noted that the prostitute was the female corollary of the *flâneur*, the "street-walker" who sized up the (male) crowd on her daily rounds. Significantly, all the categories of prostitute in nineteenth-century France were identified with either specific streets or *quartiers* in Paris: *grisettes* populated the rue Vivienne and populating the rue Bréda in the vicinity of the church of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette were the *lorettes*. Around 1840 the term *lorette* entered the literary vocabulary for a certain type of venal prostitute. It was invented by the journalist Nestor Roqueplan to describe certain women in the *quartier* located around the church that provided the name. Modest and with a slight education and fortune, the *lorettes* cohabited with every level of society and were sympathetically treated in the literature. The rich bourgeois in quest of gallant adventures looked for this special type of prostitute, whose venality was masked by playing at love. Zola's *Nana* and other novels in the Rougon-Macquart series feature the various levels of prostitution, aping Manet's visual attempts to show the importance of the role of the prostitute in modern life.

At the high end of the hierarchical ranking in the demi-monde was the elegant courtesan, a term already rich in historical associations and connoting a female prostitute who enjoyed a certain degree of power and prestige. Elegant prostitution flourished with the expansion of industrialization that produced speculation and quick fortunes which in turn encouraged an epicurean existence. Here I wish to stress the hierarchical divisions of the practice as well as their sociological categories exploited by the prefecture of police to regulate prostitution in an attempt to monitor venereal disease. Of course, only women were held accountable for spreading disease; their clients were never liable. Manet's *Déjeuner* and *Olympia* attest to his recognition of these hierarchical categories and divisions, and demonstrate his commitment to a *flâneur's* sociology of Paris.

During the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, prostitution was classified as either public or clandestine, registered or unregistered.⁷⁵ The registered prostitute (*fille soumise*) was regularly submitted to an examination by police agents, while the unregistered (*fille insoumise*) or clandestine prostitute escaped all surveillance. The *grisette* fell under the division of the public prostitute and was examined twice a month; she was required to dress decently and forbidden to directly solicit passers-by in public settings. She worked part-time as a seamstress, flower seller, or model, but was kept by a lover who paid for her room and board. Law and medical students were clients of choice for this group of women, accustomed to receive "only men of good company, and who themselves are endowed with a high intelligence."⁷⁶

Significantly, she often worked as an artist's model and performed various roles for the history painter. In his chapter on the *grisette*, Janin creates an imaginary case study involving an interaction between himself as an



9-24 Eugène Guérard, *Long Live Wine, Long Live the Juice Divine*, lithograph, 1861. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.



9-25 A. Morlon, *Boating Party on the Banks of the Seine*, lithograph, 1860. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

the park, an event which I believe is being enacted in the Manet's *Déjeuner*. These scenes were reenacted often enough in popular illustration, as in the Guérard lithograph where fully clothed couples could be seen cavorting on the grass (fig. 9-24).⁷⁷

The *grisette* (so-called for the plainness of her costume) was a familiar type associated with the streets and *flânerie*; she was seen as modest and

artist and his *grisette*/model "Jenny." Wishing her to pose for him, he may find her morally transformed in the heady confines of the studio, where he can purify her in paint and surround her with poetry. The artist can make her a queen, a noble lady, even the Holy Virgin, and if she falls into the right pose he can even render her the mistress of Raphael and Rubens. Finally, he envisions the definitive tableau on display, but bemoans the lack of appreciation for her role in its success while the artist gets all the credit: "They see the picture: Isn't this woman beautiful! What a look! What a hand! What vehement inspiration in that head! They carry the artist to the clouds, shower him with gold and honors; but there is nothing for poor Jenny: yet it's Jenny who made the picture!"⁷⁷

This sentimentalized image of the *grisette* and romanticized view of painting was rejected by Manet, but he glommed on to the idea of creating the female model with her part in the creative process. He achieved this by the shocking confrontation of the nude with the spectator, a nude reclining back without the slightest sense of shame, her picnic basket overturned and spilling out such erotic goodies as oysters, cherries, figs, peaches, and a silver flask, and piled up beside her a heap of fashionable clothing that to emphasize her status as undressed, *naked*, as opposed to *nude*. She is *summe* but insouciant, sexually active, and totally up front about it. The males in the conventional profile of the *grisette*'s lovers—Manet's brothers Eugène and Gustave, who posed for the male figures, had been law students and the tasseled cap worn by the reclining figure was the popular student *fabuche*. Manet, however, insisted on the honest depiction of the *grisette* as both naked and self-possessed, with a fresh, candid glance, and in the process deconstructed the bohemian idealization of the *grisette* as totally beholden to male fantasies about self-sacrificing whores.

He must have shared this narratival gambit with the model herself, central nude herself, Victorine Meurent, who had previously posed for *The Street Singer*, and sensed the importance Manet assigned to her part in the evolution of his work. She wrote the recently widowed Suzanne Manet in August 1883 about her special agreement with the painter:

You doubtless know that I posed for a large portion of his paintings, notably for Olympia, his masterpiece. M. Manet was concerned about me and often said to me if he sold his pictures he would set aside a gratuity for me. I was young then and carefree. I left for America. When I returned, M. Manet, who had sold a large number of pictures to M. Faure, told me that a share of that was mine. I refused, thanking him warmly, and added that when I could no longer pose I would remind him of his promise. That time has come sooner than expected.⁷⁸

Manet's expressed obligations to Meurent suggest some mutually shared idea of her productive participation in the history of his work. Finally, he was willing to set aside a portion of the purchase by the noted opera singer and collector Jean-Baptiste Faure—the first owner of *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*

suggests his willingness to also share the credit of his success with her. It is this openness in their relationship that constitutes the thematics of the painting and unravels its riddle.

The painting is a statement about "truth" in naturalist painting—and the series of contradictions within the work act as a catalyst for revealing it. Proust recalled that on the Sunday prior to Manet's beginning the picture, the two of them were at Argenteuil watching the passing white sails striking a brilliant note against the deep blue waters. Some women were bathing, and Manet's eye was fixed on the flesh of those leaving the water. "I'm told," he said to me, "that I must do a nude. Very well, I'm going to make them one. Back in our studio days, I copied Giorgione's women, the women with the musicians. That's a dark picture. The background has retreated. I intend to redo it, and do it in the transparency of the atmosphere, with figures like those you see over there." Manet then confessed his appreciation of Courbet's example: "There's something very French about that master painter—it goes without saying, we in France have a basic honesty that always brings us back to the truth, in spite of all the acrobatic *tours de force*. Look at the Le Nains, the Watteau, the Chardins, David himself. What a feeling for the truth!"⁷⁹ Manet's method of achieving his brand of truth was to put into conflict tradition and modernity, the nude of the Old Masters and the honest-to-goodness naked *grisette* of contemporary Paris.

Meanwhile, "the acrobatic *tours de force*" went on unabated in the Salons sustained by Napoléon III's perpetual maneuvering to keep the country in a unceasing state of anxiety and block opportunities for cool reflection. When invited to view the Salon des Refusés, he stopped for a long time in front of the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* before declaring it offensive to good taste. Yet the scandalous events of the Court revealed that the boundaries between the *demi-monde* and the respectable fashionable world had all but evaporated. Offenbach's *Ophélie in Hades* made contemporary allusions to the current regime through the character of Jupiter, who eyed every pretty woman in the operetta, while his wife, Juno, was consumed with jealousy, and the Jovian court on Mount Olympus followed the example of the master. The emperor's various mistresses included several of the empress's ladies-in-waiting, all of whom wore the latest fashions. Winterhalter's famous 1855 group portrait of the Empress Eugénie and her ladies-in-waiting is staged in a park setting reminiscent of the artificial backdrop of the *Déjeuner* (fig. 9.26). In both pictures, the seated figures form a V-shaped accent that aligns itself with the clearing in the woods leading to a vista of the bright sky. The woman seated to the right of the empress rests her head on her hand like the naked female in *Déjeuner*, and various costume accessories like the beribboned straw hat and still-life details in the foreground of both suggest a more than coincidental affinity. In the *Déjeuner*, the woman has disrobed her fashionable summer garments and piled them at her side, suggesting a transition from a clothed state to an undressed state.



9.26 Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Empress Eugénie Surrounded by Her Ladies-in-Waiting*, 1855. Musée National du Château, Compiègne.

Just the reverse is the Winterhalter, where the skirts (perhaps including petticoats) are depicted so copiously as to dominate the pictorial space. The width of Second Empire skirts intimidated the wealth and status of the wearer and/or her sugar daddy: the wealthier the owner, the wider became its circumference and the more fabric required to cover it. Ultimately, the perfected crinoline—a light metal or whalebone cage of horizontal hoops bound by curved ribs—revealed the razzle-dazzle of spectacle dear to the imperial agenda. In this picture, Eugénie wears a dress from the Maison Gagelin and designed by the haute couturier Charles Frédéric Worth.⁸⁰ The empress not only displayed the latest fashions herself but wanted to be surrounded by beautiful, well-dressed ladies-in-waiting who showed off the court in its best light. To the left of the empress is the princessesse d'Essling, grand maîtresse; the baronne de Pierres and the vicomtesse de Lezay-Marnésia, dames du palais; to the right, the duchesse de Bassano, dame d'honneur; the comtesse de Montebello, the baronne de Malaret, the marquise de Las Marismas, and the marquise de la Tour-Marbourg, dames du palais. Mérimée noted: "The portrait of the Empress by Winterhalter is detestable in my opinion, but nothing must be said about it to the court. It is a troop of tarts in a garden, all dolled up, with petty affected looks. It could be used as a dance hall signboard for the Bal Mabille."⁸¹ Mérimée's comparison of the scene with the Bal Mabille, a public dance arena is telling: a famous trysting place for encounters with *grisettes* and *lovettes*, its notorious meeting ground and the wild gyrations of its participant were dubbed by conservatives as obscene. Similarly, critics were reminded of Bréda—the street where *lovettes* congregated—and of the Closserie de Lalau.

another popular dance hall, when viewing the Manet.⁸² Mérimée's description of the women as "tarts" further alludes to their role as sexual playmates of the emperor. Hence the copious skirts simultaneously conceal and reveal the truth of the empress's entourage—an official version of Barbizon woodland eroticism.

Thus *Déjeuner* parodies the Winterhalter, unmasking the pretensions of the court while disguising Manet's own stratagem with an ingenious twist of Renaissance conventions. The central female protagonist mocks the ladies-in-waiting by undressing in a lush woodland site and flaunting her nudity as a natural, matter-of-fact gesture. While in the Winterhalter all the women avert their gaze from the spectator, Manet's protagonist looks directly out at you. She throws off all constraints, including the bothersome skirt that encumbered female movements. But her look is not brazen or confrontational as often stated; she looks directly outward but with a somewhat quizzical, ironical look.

Salon des Refusés

Manet's controversial picture has to be understood as a display in an already overdetermined environment—the Salon des Refusés of 1863. This event may well represent the most decisive institutional development in the progress of modern art, serving as the model for all subsequent independent and counter-Establishment shows. It marked the official sanction of the artist's right to demonstrate freely the fruits of his or her labor without regard to stylistic classification. It further implied that freedom of exhibition was inextricably linked to freedom of pictorial expression. The *refusés*—especially as represented by Manet and Whistler and the future impressionists—celebrated qualities of spontaneity and originality that critics then perceived as incompleteness.

Organized by a conservative jury to accommodate the numbers of rejected painters, the Salon des Refusés was the first government alternative to the official salon. The timing was strategic: the government was launching its so-called "Liberal Empire" phase, trying to win support of moderates to offset losses on both Left and Right. Renewed republican activity and Catholic censure of his forays into Italy induced the emperor to appeal to the center. In acceding to the demand for an alternative exhibition to showcase the rejectees, however, the government deliberately framed the exhibition to appear as public entertainment.

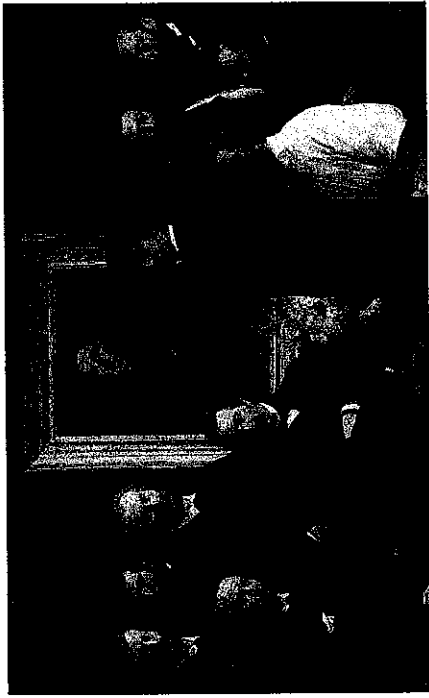
Initially, the surintendant des Beaux-Arts, Nieuwerkerke, left the spurned artists the option of withdrawing their works from the Salon des Refusés—an ingenious attempt to neutralize to some extent the impact of the radical institution. Over six hundred works were withdrawn—undoubtedly by those very artists who best exemplified the arbitrariness of the jury's verdict. Nieuwerkerke exploited their fear of ridicule by creating a risky public situation and possible humiliation for those who still aspired

to official honors. The jury itself invited public derision and took pains to show what they considered the worst pictures in the most conspicuous places. The administration could thus appear liberal, while sustaining the aristocratic concept of the Salon by isolating and heaping ridicule on the rejectees.

The scheme, however, backfired: in allowing the spurned artists to exhibit under the official aegis, the administration provided them with a conspicuous and highly publicized venue. At the same time, there appeared among the rejected artists a sufficient number of realists and naturalists to constitute a kind of "school"—a coherent trend which could be identified by the public.⁸³ Although the Salon des Refusés proved to be an aggregation of disparate examples, the vivid presence of the independents gave it the cast of a unified show revealing characteristic features. The jury's systematic exclusion of the radical realists and naturalists now appeared as part of a conspiratorial design. The radical critic Théophile Thoré drew the following conclusion from the Salon des Refusés: "We can . . . perceive despite the current indifference to the art, that there is in painting two hostile directions, that perpetuate, in other terms, the ardent battle between the Classics and the Romantics, or, if you wish, between the conservatives and the innovators, tradition and originality."⁸⁴ Another critic wrote of the Refusés: "Singular school, isn't it? Where there is neither master nor student, and whose only principles are independence, sincerity, and individualism!"⁸⁵

Visual evidence for the sense of fraternity among the younger generation of independents and the elevating of Manet to a leadership position is seen in the work of Fantin-Latour, an artist who developed a manner well in the new style and, significantly, exhibited in both the official Salon and the Salon des Refusés. We have already looked at his elegant portrait of Manet, and in two major group portraits of the decade he documented the communal participation and leadership position of Manet. The first, *Homage to Delacroix* (1863–1864), initially sprang from a desire to memorialize the older painter, who died on 13 August 1863, and rectify the lack of official recognition at his funeral, but in the end was exploited as a pretext for bringing together and celebrating the youthful members of the new movement (fig. 9.27).⁸⁶

That Delacroix is only the pretext rather than the central theme is seen in the indifference of the group to his portrait; they casually turn their back on it and face the spectator as if in possession of some piece of secret knowledge. Nevertheless, by grouping the ten artists and critics around an elevated portrait of Delacroix in the background, Fantin-Latour also categorically affirmed the roots of the group's innovative ideal and through this connection declared the legitimacy of their movement. Five of the six artists depicted—Fantin-Latour himself, Legros, Whistler, Manet, and Bracquemond—had been included with the Refusés and thus felt a shared sense of community. Legros's entry in the Refusés was a portrait of Manet's

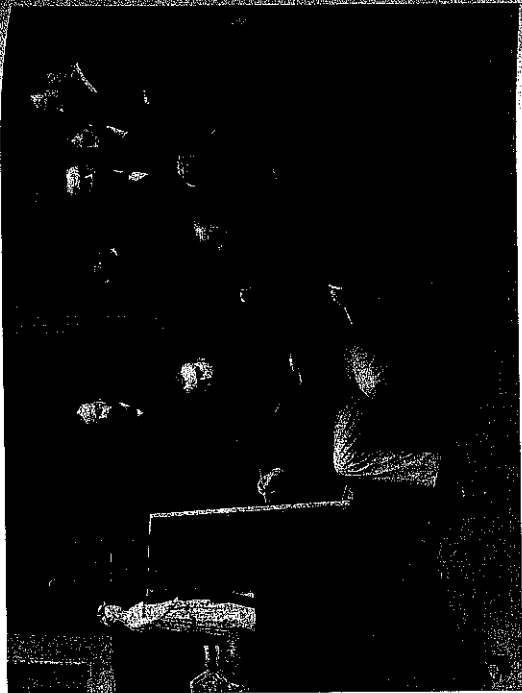


9.27 Henri Fantin-Latour, *Homage to Delacroix*, 1863–1864. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

again affirming Manet's leadership position in the new tendency. The other artist portrayed, Albert de Balleroy, was a close friend and studio mate of Manet and appears by his side in *Concert in the Tuileries*. The important realist writers and critics Edmond Duranty and Champfleury are given key positions in the front row, and Baudelaire, a bridge between generations, is shown seated at the far right, closing out the composition.

By the end of the decade, Fantin-Latour shifted the thematic focus of his previous group portrait to a frank celebration of Manet himself and his immediate followers, now occupying center stage (fig. 9.28). The title of the painting, *The Atelier in the Batignolles*, derives from the new hangout of Manet and his circle—the Café Guerbois located at 11 Grande rue des Batignolles (now the avenue de Clichy).⁸⁷ Manet is depicted painting a portrait of his friend, the poet and critic Zacharie Astruc, and standing over them, observing the proceedings, are Otto Scholderer, a German disciple of Courbet and Courbet, and Auguste Renoir and Frédéric Bazille, future impressionists. Grouped around the tall, lanky Bazille are Emile Zola, Edmond Maître, an amateur musician who shared the group's aesthetic views, and at the extreme right, a phlegmatic Claude Monet. Zola gazes dreamily out of the canvas, while the other two self-consciously address the beholder. The net effect of the work is a profound solemnity, an ideological intent to divest the public of the notion that this group is a flighty cast of characters from Murger's novel of bohemian life. As if to emphasize this theme of gravitas, Fantin-Latour included a statuette of Minerva—goddess of Truth and Wisdom—on the table just to the left of Manet's easel.

Another still-life object on the table further points to the group's communal sense of purpose, the ceramic pot designed by Laurent-Joseph-Daniel Bouvier. Bouvier's absorption in Japanese art, reflected in the pot's



9.38 Henri Fantin-Latour,
The Atelier in the Batignolles, 1870.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

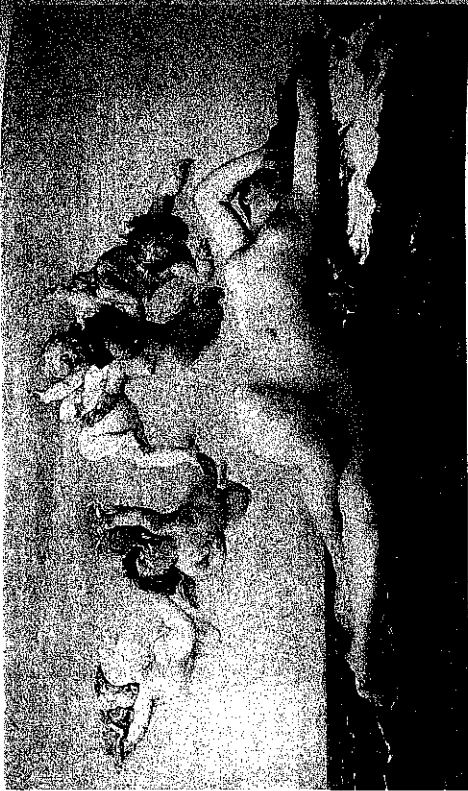
design, was shared by Manet, Whistler, and their circle. Just then coming into vogue, Japanese styles and motifs held up a standard of purity of color, unconventional compositional arrangements, and flat modeling that appealed to the Parisian avant-garde. Worldwide imperialism, beginning with the forced opening of the Japanese ports by Commodore Matthew Perry and the eventual Meiji Restoration, assured exposure of Japanese artifacts at the world's fairs and private galleries. The fascination for Asian products also signaled a new official interest in encouraging the lowering of the bar between fine and decorative arts to promote the national taste and heighten the general public's awareness of good design. A group of independent art teachers emerged outside the academic system in response to this instruction among the proletariat. One of these was Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, teacher of Fantin-Latour and Legros, who not only wanted to introduce art instruction to the working classes for their general enlightenment but also to raise the level of French industrial design. The emerging avant-garde displayed active support for this program, and the Old Guard often compared their sketchlike works to the reductive patterns of industrial products.

It may be recalled that the poor showing of its products in the British Great Exhibition of 1851 and its own World's Fair of 1855 prompted the French government to embark on a systematic review of art instruction with an eye to major reform. The year of the Salon des Refusés witnessed the landmark decree wresting control of official art instruction from

the Académie des Beaux-Arts and advocating sweeping changes aimed at telescoping the distance between high and industrial art production. The same year a group of entrepreneurs founded the Union Centrale des Beaux-Arts Appliqués à l'Industrie, an organization that even a moderate like Charles Blanc heralded as the beginning of the regeneration of the fine arts in France.⁸⁸ Among its manifold activities, the Union sponsored special exhibitions of the decorative arts; Bouvier, for example, received critical praise for his ceramics at the Union's exhibition of 1869. Significantly, Renoir began his career as a porcelain decorator and throughout his career emphasized the need for a close working relationship between art and industry. Thus Fantin-Latour's second group portrait again reunites a community of artists organized around shared assumptions announced at the Salon des Refusés.

Manet's satire of Second Empire society doubly profited from the loosening of the tight censorship imposed by the government in its first decade. Its content spoofed the hypocrisy of the court and at the same time did so in a vaudevillian context that offered maximum publicity for the spurned artists. Although Manet's work sustained criticism for its lewdness and indifference to public morality, most of the discussion centered on his want of skill and the sketchy nature of the *Déjeuner* and his other entries. Indeed, some works in the official Salon gained more attention for their more explicitly sexual display, although cloaked in classicizing visual rhetoric and titles. Two of the more controversial works, Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* and Paul Baudry's *The Pearl and the Wave (Persian Fable)*, were purchased prior to the opening of the Salon by the imperial couple and betrayed the hypocrisy in Napoléon III's comments on the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Despite the swag of cupids flying overhead to add a touch of wholesome daintiness, Cabanel's supine nude, angled in the direction of the viewer, practically invites rape, while Baudry's nude, seen from the rear stretched out along the water's edge, twists her body like a pretzel to cast a knowing glance at her admiring onlooker (fig. 9.29).

Here again Manet's frank yet puzzling image seems to address the issue of the licentiousness of the imperial court. Almost in anticipation of the reception of a large number of academic nudes in mythological and bathing scenes at the official Salon, Manet submitted a work that deconstructed them. Most critics tried to ingratiate themselves with the court and referred to their idealized qualities and even tolerated their seductive glances as signs of passion appropriate to the subject. Critics of the regime, however, saw in the nudes contemporary studio models whose classicizing associations fooled no one. Their prostrate bodies contorted into inconceivable positions recalled less the goddesses of Mount Olympus than the Parisian boudoir and bordellos. Zola later described Cabanel's *Venus* as having "the air of a delicious *lortette*, not made of flesh and bone—that would be indecent—but made of a sort of white and pink almond paste."⁸⁹ One clue to Manet's deconstructive strategy is the obvious studio-like backdrop that



9.20 Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1865. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

serves as the landscape background: its synthetic appearance contrasts with both the artificial lakes and grottoes constructed in the Bois de Boulogne and other parks of the period and the fake settings concocted by Cabanel and Baudry for their classical nudes. The insertion of the fench and thentoy as vertical brackets for Manet's nude indexically points to what is omitted in the works of his academic rivals.

Manet's unclad woman accompanied by two clad males in a modern setting, candidly painted and unselfconsciously gazing at the viewer, appears as an innocent by contrast. Her very lack of flirtatiousness and sensitivity constitutes a riposte to the academic nudes; Manet modernizes the high art ideal through the representation of contemporary Parisian models in an outdoor setting exploiting some of the stylistic qualities and iconoclasm of Barbizon realism. It was to disrobe these contradictions and reveal the necessary conditions for consistency in contemporary art that Manet produced his unique visual dialogue between past and present.

Olympia

Though it was painted the same year as *Déjeuner*, Manet waited until 1865 to show what turned out to be an even more controversial Salon work. The two pictures were surely conceived as pendants, thematically and socio-logically spanning the social categories of prostitute. The 1867 *Paris Guide* section on prostitution begins by contrasting masculine control with feminine weakness—"Woman was not born to struggle, but instead destined to fall"—and spells out her ineluctable fate: "She begins as Fantine the street girl and she finishes as Fantine the whore. She was the mistress of a student, she



9.21 Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1865. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

became the concubine of the Public: a stain that could have vanished has become an indelible blemish." The author, Alfred Delvau, tearfully regretted this heart-breaking development, but it could not be helped: woman was a creature so inherently inferior, so lacking in moral understanding, that he could not even bring himself to chastise her with his contempt.²⁴

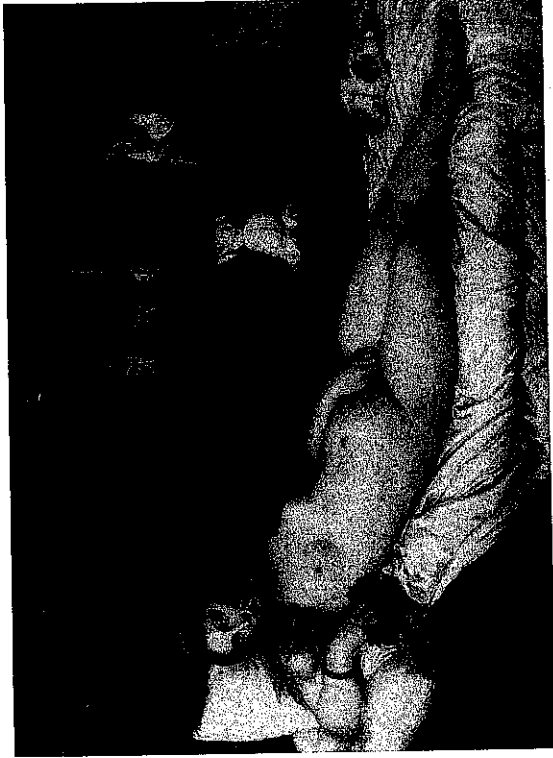
If the *grisette* in *Déjeuner* was a *fille soumise* or *fille isolée*, the courtesan of *Olympia* was a *fille insoumise*—submerged in the lifestyle and trappings of the bourgeoisie (fig. 9.30).²⁵ Rich protection enabled the courtesan to escape the Bureau of Morals, otherwise she would be at the mercy of the police, like the *grisettes* and residents of a *maison close*. Olympia, however, shares many features with her counterpart on the grass: she is naked rather than nude—the heavy gold bracelet on her arm, the thin black choker around her neck, the flashy red flower borrowed from Velázquez's *Infanta Margarita* in her hair, and the satin slippers dangling or fallen away from her feet, all betray a state of undress. Again turned toward the spectator as if in consensual agreement, she extends the genre-like motif of the internal character conveying insider's information to a knowing spectator. She is neither coy nor flirtatious à la Cabanel or Baudry, and her facial expression is even less cheeky than her *Déjeuner* counterpart. Only this time the spectators

received mixed signals about the woman's social category, hence the confusion on the part of many of the critics struggling to identify her. It is inevitably resisted precise classification for the reason that the life of the Second Empire courtesan of *grande marque* embraced many of the conventional cultural traits of the bourgeoisie, and overt class distinctions in her comportment were breaking down. In the female-dominated marketplace of the department store or at the Opéra, the *demi-mondaine* easily merged with the *femme honnête*. The *demi-mondaine's* boudoir was identical in furnishing to accessories to that of the *mondaine*, except that the former would receive visitors there in the evening. Manet's deadpan woman is socially above notches above the *grisette* of the *Déjeuner*; her sobriquet Olympia, in fact that she is attended by a maidservant, suggest the highly paid courtesan the *grande horizontale*, the upper echelon of the prostitute's profession. The maid is delivering a bouquet of flowers to her mistress, a gift offered by "John" or "Arthur" (a term often used at that time) waiting unseen and impatiently for an answer in an alcove on the other side of the curtain. It is fine that a male client has called upon her unexpectedly or wishes to end up a quarrel, hoping for acceptance or forgiveness by his offer of flowers. In a slow burn, Olympia gazes quizzically at the male or female spectator as if to inquire, "What would you do in my position?"

There is a curious freezing of action in this picture—a sense of time transfixed, as if the protagonists were held in a state of suspended animation. Olympia rises from her pillow but halts half-way up with one foot slippers dangling, the maid taries for an answer, the cat-tailers' tail unfurls its tail in mid-air—all of which convey an air of suspense. Manet's reductive modeling and cookie-cutter patterning reinforces this feeling: the outlined shapes of the figures and plush bedding immediately define themselves as a congealed mass and heighten the sense of expectancy.

Olympia's surroundings are consistent with the requirements of her profession. The courtesan was especially powerful in her seductive, satirical milieu and luxurious, perfumed toilette. The entire environment exuded sexuality and fortified her dominance over her clients. Courtesans are everywhere in evidence as well as hints of a waiting-room and multiple entrances and exits. This is no *maison de passe*, or short-term lodging house catering to the prostitution trade, or even a *maison de tolérance*—a bordello with women in residence—as described by Parent-Duchâtelet, but clearly an elegant townhouse or sumptuous apartment indicating a *demi-mondaine de grande marque*.¹⁹⁰

Although there were occasional caustic references to Olympia's dependence on older sources—most notably, Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, which vividly it bears a strong resemblance—I believe the majority of the critics deliberately withheld mention of the connection so as not to dignify Manet's habit (fig. 9.31). Manet in no way tried to disguise his source, quite the opposite case of the Marcantonio Raimondi motif in the *Déjeuner*, openly declaring it through ingenious pairings of the pose, animal, and servant as symbols



Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

of underscoring his modernity. Of course, the relaxed position, limp hand gestures, and demure glance of Titian's female differ drastically from Manet's Olympia in conforming to the mold of the conventional nude. Yet critics who did not deign to recognize it in their reviews could not have missed Olympia's earlier precedents, including Couture's central motif in *Romans of the Decadence*. Both the female of the *Romans* and that of Olympia differ from the more "natural" woman of the *Déjeuner* in being identified with the luxury and corruption of a patrician class, and cast aspersions on their respective societies.

Even the cutout design of Olympia is unmistakably affiliated with the central female and her immediate surroundings in *Romans*. If we could mask out the background details we should find the shapes remarkably similar: Manet's maid corresponds with the female organist filling the cup of her reclining companion in the Couture, while Olympia's pillow replaces the celebrant whose thigh supports the supine arm of the courtesan. Excepting his head and left arm, the line of his shoulder and the indentation formed by his deltoid and biceps muscles conform to the outline of the cushion. The V-shaped area between the two couples in *Romans* anticipates the detached configuration of Olympia and her maid. Finally, the strong vertical of the wall in Manet's picture echoes the column behind Couture's courtesan. All of this went unnoticed by the critics, however, who hesitated to lend any historical credibility to Manet's exhibit or grant it any legitimate Salon status.

If Susstris's special contribution to the Manet remained the painter's little secret, it nevertheless played an unseen role in the equivocal character of the composition. The silence of the critics on the spectral presence of the Old Masters in Manet's picture attested to their unforbearing posture on his perceived liberties with the stereotype. This was a modern whore on her own turf in full control of the situation. If only she had sagged a bit in the bed, loosened her grip on her thigh, and gazed outward from beneath heavy-lidded eyes. She did none of these things for her beholders, and they in turn vented their outrage on her. Olympia's relative inexpressiveness and indifference, the absence of any coy or flirtatious facial or body gesture, her lack of flattering attention to the beholder threw the Salon audience for a loop. Critics more or less recognized her professional status, but perceived her as a bizarre combination of puniness and ugliness. She was characterized as filthy, diseased, and even cadaverous—in some ways, responses to Manet's modeling recalled criticism of Courbet. Gautier, for example, wrote: "We would still forgive the ugliness, were it only truthful, carefully studied, heightened by some splendid effect of color. The least beautiful woman has bones, muscles, skin, and some sort of color."⁹⁶ Once again, "ugliness" was invoked as the favorite weapon in the conservative critic's arsenal to put down experimental work.

But Olympia was strange in other ways—a sort of hybrid creature that forced the critics to abandon their formulaic responses to Salon nudes. One reviewer of the Salon of 1863 noted that it abounded in "Venuses" that year, and then settled into a cliché-ridden discourse about the fresh ways artists like Cabanel and Baudry maintained the old tradition. Manet, however, did not permit the critics to fall back on timeworn positions; like Courbet, he challenged them to travel on his turf and look freshly at his imagery and their evaluative criteria. His choice of model complicated matters; Meurent was hardly a match for the fleshy, bosomy, and coquettish types of the Salon. Her short hair, angular, taut body, and small breasts possessed an almost boyish quality, and her imperturbable gaze struck a defiant note. Even her hand gestures disturbed; the left hand on her thigh concealing her crotch seems to have been brought down with a resounding slap. She was clearly no glamorous *fille de marbre*—the expression for a hardened prostitute—instead, her plain features and diminutive frame gave her the quality of a former *grisette* rather than that of a dazzling courtesan of the first rank. Claretie called her "a base model picked up I know not where," while Senelier (under the pseudonym of Ravenel) described her as a "little *faubourienne*"—an expression implying her working-class origins.⁹⁷

Part of the confusion also had to do with the critics' familiarity with the high-level *cocottes*, who enjoyed celebrity status in the press much as movie stars do today. Indeed, critics shared several traits of identification with courtesans: like them, the critics jumped class barriers to attach themselves to fashionable bohemia, and like them they often "prostituted" their talents for the sake of money and worldly success. This is already a major

EDOUARD MANET: MAN ABOUT TOWN

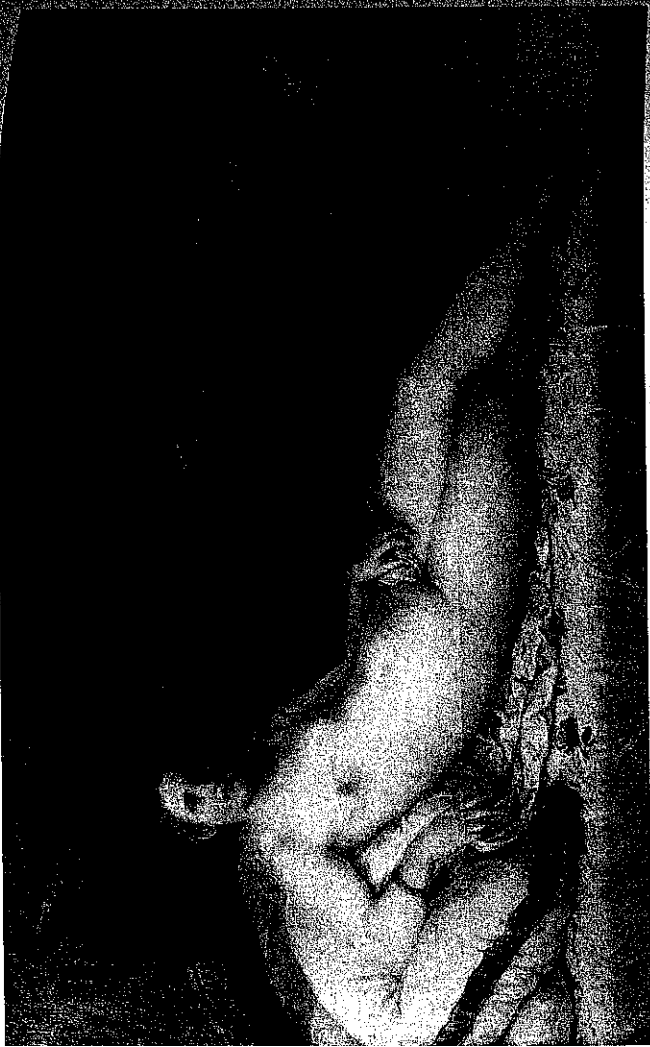
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In fact, Manet did a sort of end run around his bewildered reviewers past and present, for in some ways the declared derivation from Titian and Courture was only a decoy mischievously planted to divert attention from his main source: Lambert Susstris's *Vénus*, which he either saw in Amsterdam in the fall of 1863 or knew from an engraving (fig. 9.32). Active in the mid-sixteenth century, the Dutch painter himself owed a conspicuous debt to Titian, with whom he studied in Italy. He copied the *Vénus of Urbino* then made his own version that preserves the soft, pliant flesh and swelling abdomen of his master's original, as well as the position of her legs and the background anecdote. Susstris's deviations from his teacher, however, in several crucial details bring his *Vénus* much closer to Manet's courtesan: she sits upright on her bed at almost the same angle as Olympia, her right arm bent at a similar angle with her elbow causing analogous creases in the pillow, her wrist bracelet is also identically placed, the flowers strewn across her bed resemble the floral pattern on Olympia's cashmere shawl, and over her head is a similar fragment of a curtain, and, above all, she stands with total self-possession and even assertiveness at the onlooker.⁹⁸ Underlying Manet's *Olympia* is a fusion of Titian and Susstris—the Dutch and Italian schools—to vindicate his French version of a modern courtesan.

CHAPTER NINE

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9.32 Lambert Susstris, *Vénus*, ca. 1530s. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



theme in Balzac's *Illusions perdues*, where newspaper offices are characterized as "bordellos of thought" and courtesans and journalists pursue their careers of corruption in common.

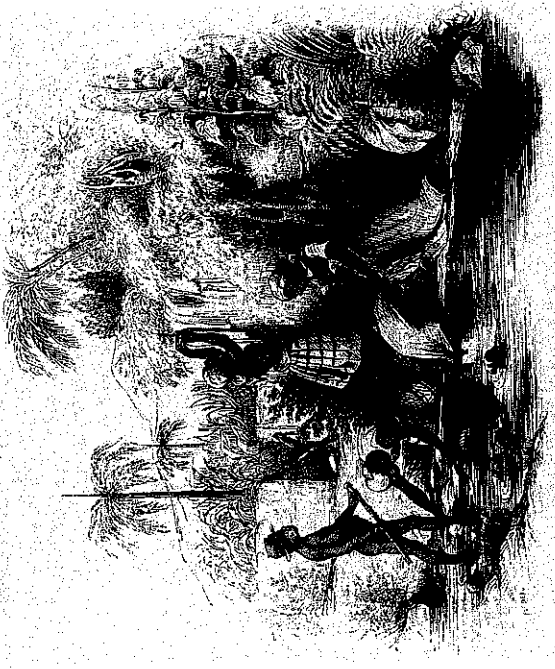
Couture's painting, *The Love of Gold* of 1844 exemplified this dual role of woman and journalist; bare-breasted women and writers alike offer themselves to the leering miser playing with his gold. Gautier noted in his review of the painting: "The virgin offers her beauty and the poet his genius: the two most horrifying prostitutions." Then in a curious turnabout he directed his critique to the Salon public:

Monieur Couture's canvas stops many spectators, but among them are a large number who admire the gold pieces above everything else! Young ladies discuss and find the usurer too ugly, and they calculate the dresses, the necklaces, the earrings concentrated in the piles of coins; mamas think that he would make quite an acceptable match; men of letters would like to have him provide the funds for a daily newspaper, in return for being praised in it everyday. So the lesson is false and the devil with the horns is unable to frighten anyone.⁸⁷

Gautier's allusion to the corrupting influence of journalism on contemporary writers reflected a real fear among intellectuals that their livelihood was dependent upon the editorial whims of newspapers and governmental pressures. This was even more pronounced during the Second Empire when overt politics were relegated to the background. Gautier himself, columnist and lightweight satirist—both of whom appear in *Concerts parisiens*—*Théâtre* as quintessential *flâneurs*—typified their profession in this period: "The journalist and the courtesan, who often rendered each other mutual services in the way of fresh items of gossip and sexual favors."⁸⁸ These relationships were idealized if only to protect journalists from damaging their self-image of intellectual integrity. Hence Manet's equivocal projections of the courtesan's social status and realistic treatment of her body threatened to betray the critics' own class mobility and trivializing brand of journalism. This is one disguised source of their confusion and frustration in front of the picture.

The dark-skinned servant also came under sharp critical attack as the "hideous Negress," yet her presence is crucial in marking the crossover status of the courtesan from *filles de peuple* to denizen of upper-class society. (There is plenty of evidence to suggest she hated the bourgeois or aristocrat who bought her body and gladly ruined him in an act of class resistance.) Consistent with his previous work, Manet tried to suppress the social realities with the ambiguous social status of his subjects. The maid who invariably presided over this hothouse environment was generally a confidante of the mistress who shared all her secrets. She received tips from clients and in Manet's picture a gratuity has probably motivated her to take the gift

of an impromptu caller to her mistress. The black maidservant is a figure only cursorily discussed in the literature, looked upon as primarily an accessory to establish local "color" or to heighten the whiteness of her lady's skin. (It is true that in the nineteenth century the association of blacks with harems was interpreted as a deliberate strategy for "bringing out the white beauty of the odalisque."¹⁰⁰) Identified as West Indian (from Guadeloupe or Martinique) by her calico bandanna ("*mouchoir d'indienne*"), "Laure" (no surname known) fulfills the role of the black slave in Orientalist themes who establishes a haremlike environment (fig. 9.33). Hence she confirms the high status of Olympia in the social hierarchy. The courtesan does not even deign to look at the maid (like David's Socrates ignoring the cup of hemlock), who is clearly seeking a response, thereby reinforcing the difference in status. Early commentators understood the pairing of the two as Manet's aesthetic pretext for black-and-white contrast, but since hierarchical values were attached to skin color and social position the so-called pretext still retains a powerful social and political significance. Although the maid is not overtly eroticized as nude slaves usually are in the harem scenes of nineteenth-century painters, blacks generally and black women in particular were considered oversexed and their very representation connoted uninhibited female sexuality.¹⁰¹ This is further demonstrated by the presence of the macabre black cat at the right of the bed, stemming from the mythic belief that cats are especially highly sexed creatures. Slang for



9.33 *West Indian Women Laundering*. Scene reproduced in "Le Nègre [Antilles]," in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, Province* (1840-1842 ed.), 3:328.

female genitalia is often associated with the cat, and brothels are commonly called "cat-houses." The symbolic link between women, cats, and forbidden sexuality was once so close that in the Middle Ages many a witch was burned at the stake with her cat at her side. It is no coincidence that Senegalese artist Bouboulay Diop saw Olympia as a page straight out of Goya's *Caprichos*.

I would also suggest the influence of the American Civil War, which in the motif of the black maid. Manet's painting of *The Battle of the Kébratou* in the *Alabama* indicates his absorption in the Civil War, which had profound implications for the government of the Second Empire. Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie always tilted in favor of the South, but the strong anti-slavery sentiments of large segments of the population and the intelligence had forced the emperor to declare an official policy of neutrality. Slavery was abolished in the French colonies in 1848, and French ideas of the situation in America had been significantly affected by the writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Ellery Channing.

Although not a slave in a traditional harem scene, the black maidservant would have been conflated with the Orientalist precedent for the Parisian South and thus connected with the household servant in the American South. In addition, the verses by Zacharie Astruc accompanying the entry in the Salon catalogue (from his poem "La Fille des îles") specifically named the term "slave" to metaphorically allude to an exotic tropical locale:

Quand, lasse de songer, Olympia s'éveille,

Le printemps entre au bras du doux messenger noir;

C'est l'esclave, à la nuit amoureuse pareille,

Qui vient fleurir le jour délicieux à voir;

L'auguste jeune fille en qui la flamme veille.

When, tired of dreams, Olympia awakens,

Spring enters on the arms of the sweet black messenger;

It is the slave, like the amorous night,

Who comes to make the day bloom, delicious to see:

The august young girl in whom the flame burns.

Recall now young Manet's comments on the condition of blacks when an apprentice seaman in Rio: "In this country all the Negroes are slaves. This is quite a revolting sight for us." Thus when he was painting *Olympia* in 1863 Manet's motif of the maidservant could not have been a mere sexual symbol, but surely was linked in his mind to the wider political and international context. Hence the power of the courtesan to command black bodies would have taken on added significance in the context of imperial society's conflict over white supremacy in the Southern states.

Manet's coupling of black maidservant and courtesan further suggests his awareness of the reformist literature that compared prostitution itself to a form of slavery. Alphonse Esquiros, the Saint-Simonist sociologist

and psychologist, made this leap on the grounds that prostitutes often possessed no authentic identity in the civil order. (The name Olympia, for example, was a common sobriquet of the demi-monde, and prostitutes often changed names and addresses depending on the pressure of circumstances.) Esquiros went even further in maintaining that woman herself, in whatever condition, was deliberately repressed in a state of bondage and demanded her immediate emancipation. Like children, women were not really free; rather, they were economic dependents who derived their social status from father or husband. It is man's commodification of love and sex that devalues the female and reinforces her status of inferiority. Well aware of the various sides of the controversy, Manet empowers his courtesan with the aid of the maidservant to choose her condition from moment-to-moment. Her sex grants her a share of social and purchasing power that emancipates her from the truly enslaved but reminds the audience that this condition is always contingent.

Courtesans occupied a powerful position in the Second Empire as signifiers of wealth and successful speculative enterprises. Béraud's seminal study of prostitution under the July Monarchy had already singled out the courtesan as the most dangerous of all whores,

for she combines with her personal attraction qualities of the most brilliant and varied education: music, singing, dance, good language, a clever mind, exquisite taste, and the most delightful spontaneity; everything is at her command for dazzling those who come close. There is no Proteus comparable to her; she may take any form in order to harmonize with the character, the mood and the inclination of the man to whom she clings like a leech. Sentiment and tears, joy and madness, jealousy and anger are brought into play in turn in order to weld the irons on her slave. Fortunate is he who wears those shameful chains for no more than a day and whose reason, enlightened by experience, becomes a sure safeguard against the power of intrigue.¹⁰²

Béraud here reflects the sexual fantasies of the epoch as much as he provides a sociological analysis. Although promising his readers more eyewitness testimony than his clinically minded predecessor, the physician and hygienist A.-J.-B. Parent-Duchâtelet—who pioneered the categories and hierarchy of modern prostitution—Béraud winds up projecting an image of the brilliant and beautiful courtesan trapping innocent males by all the arts of seduction. Thus the image of the alluring courtesan appeared even in the supposedly disinterested writings of the scientific observer.

Since money earned from speculative enterprises went as quickly as it came, the object was to spend it on pleasures of the moment. For both the bourgeois upstart and decadent aristocrat alike the courtesan represented an ideal commodity on which to lavish their newly gained income. Her extravagant lifestyle rapidly consumed their patrons' money, often mercifully fleecing them before abandoning them. Many of them vied with the