

# Manet's "Espada" and Marcantonio

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ENIGMA is a term not customarily associated with realist painters. Nevertheless, Edouard Manet's Made-moiselle Victorine in the Costume of an Espada (1862), in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 1),<sup>1</sup> must be regarded as an enigmatic work. Before a Goyesque backdrop of a bullfighting scene stands the full-length figure of Victorine Meurent, Manet's favorite model in 1862 and for several years thereafter, dressed in Spanish male costume and posed as though for a photographer. The brilliantly and realistically rendered figure, obviously painted before the model, testifies to Manet's visual sensitivity and manual dexterity, but in its relation to the background scene violates the laws of linear perspective in a manner so obvious as to seem deliberate. Indeed, the artificiality of the whole arrangement, noted by critics in 1863 and frequently since, can best be interpreted as the result of a carefully constructed interplay of colors and values, responding more to abstract pictorial exigencies than to the visual experience of spatial relationships. Alternating bands of dark and light in the background serve to silhouette op-

posing values in the figure, isolating it in space, and even separating it from the presumed location of the dull-pink cape that the model holds so unprofessionally in her left hand. Color, however, mitigates this effect and shows the light pink in relief against its brown ground, even though the values are nearly identical in a black-and-white reproduction. Frontal lighting as well as silhouetting flattens the figure, and its relation to the background is rendered ambiguous not only by the false perspective, but also by the coinciding outlines of the model's back and the tail of the horse, a feature that paradoxically telescopes the space and affirms the supremacy of the picture plane over space illusion.

These peculiarities of spatial composition are well-known characteristics of Manet's early style. They have been more frequently noted in other works, particularly the Déjeuner sur l'Herbe and the Olympia of 1863 in the Louvre, for both of which Victorine Meurent also posed. It is these characteristics that have caused later critics to see Manet as a pioneer of flatness in modern art.<sup>2</sup> Manet himself apparently felt by 1864 that he had

1. C. Sterling and M. M. Salinger, *French Paintings, A Catalogue of the Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, III (New York, 1967) pp. 33–35. Manet made a pencil and wash drawing after the painting (Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence), probably in preparation for an etching (Marcel Guérin, *L'Oeuvre gravé de Manet* [Paris, 1944] no. 32), as the composition is reversed (Figure 2). The etching presents the figure facing to the left, as in the painting, though Mlle Victorine's eyes no longer look directly at the spectator (Figure 3). Manet's first published port-

folio of etchings came out in October of 1862. The etching after Mlle Victorine was included; therefore, the painting must have been completed by September at the latest. See the unpublished dissertation of Jean Collins Harris, *The Graphic Work of Edouard Manet*, Radcliffe College, 1961, p. 114, note 77, cat. no. 35.

2. For a perceptive discussion of Manet's art in relation to traditional perspective and to photography, see Anne Coffin Hanson, *Edouard Manet, 1832–1883*, exhibition catalogue, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1966, pp. 21–23.





FIGURE 2  
Mademoiselle Victorine in the Costume of an Espada, by Edouard Manet. Pencil and wash drawing. Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R.I.

gone too far, or taken the wrong route, with this space-collapsing impulse. After showing a large bullfighting scene in the Salon of that year to an outraged public, he cut the canvas in pieces. The surviving fragments are *The Dead Toreador*, from the foreground, now in the National Gallery in Washington, and a piece of the background known as *Bull-Fight*, in the Frick Collection in New York.

It was recognized in Manet's time that *The Dead Toreador* was derived directly from a North Italian

FIGURE 1  
Mademoiselle Victorine in the Costume of an Espada, by Edouard Manet. Oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, the H. O. Havemeyer Collection, 29.100.53



FIGURE 3  
Mademoiselle Victorine in the Costume of an Espada, by Edouard Manet. Etching. The George A. Lucas Collection on permanent loan from The Maryland Institute, The Baltimore Museum of Art

painting of a dead soldier known as *Orlando Muerto*, which was then in the Pourtalès Collection in Paris and attributed to Velázquez, and which is now in the National Gallery in London.<sup>3</sup> *Olympia's* dependence on Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, though obvious, was missed at the time.<sup>4</sup> The derivation of the three principal figures of the *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* from a group of river gods in Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving after Raphael's lost *Judgment of Paris*, though known to Ernest Chesneau in 1864, was not widely recognized

3. See Gerald M. Ackerman, "Gérôme and Manet," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 70 (1967) pp. 163-176, for an interesting hypothesis, that this figure may have been derived from Gérôme's *Death of Caesar*. The problem of Manet's relation to academic painters of his time, such as Gérôme, has yet to be investigated.

4. See Theodore Reff, "The Meaning of Manet's *Olympia*," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 63 (1964) p. 114.

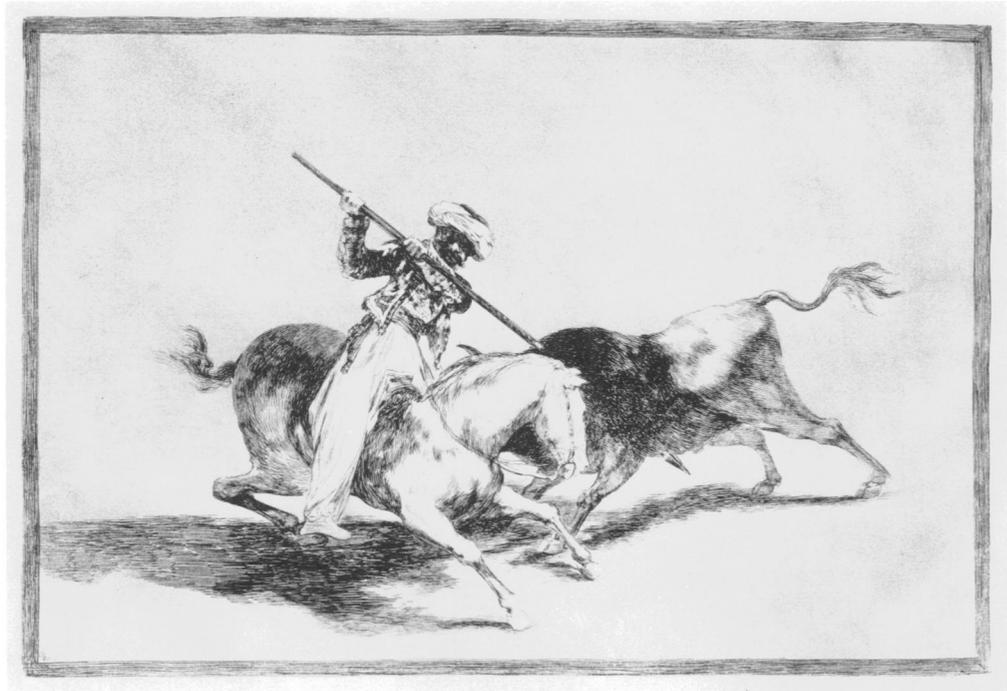


FIGURE 4

El animoso moro Gazul es el primero que lanceó toros en regla (The spirited Moor Gazul is the first to spear bulls according to rules), Plate 5 from the *Tauromaquia*, by Francisco Goya. D. 228 III, 1st edition. Etching and aquatint. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 21.19.5

until Gustav Pauli pointed it out in 1908.<sup>5</sup> On the occasion of the great Manet centennial exhibition in 1932, a rash of articles in French periodicals revealed in Manet's early work an unsuspected frequency of borrowings of figures and motifs from paintings by old masters or engravings after them.<sup>6</sup> A large enough number of additional examples has been discovered since 1932 to make unsafe any assumptions about the "realist" intentions in figural poses and arrangements in any work of Manet before 1865, even though he obviously painted them from known models in his

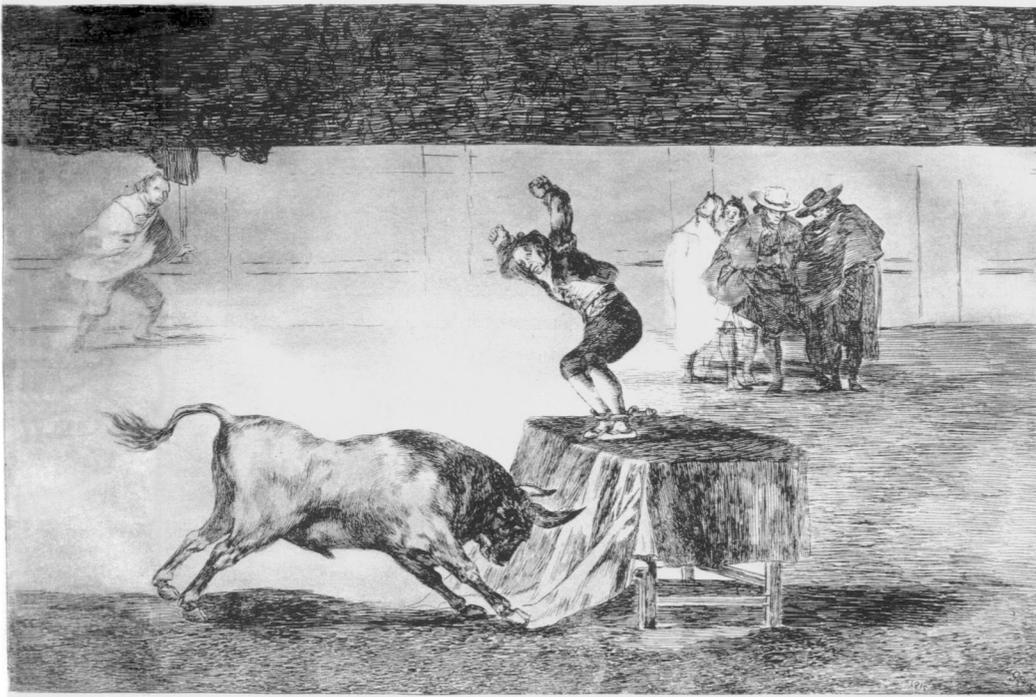
studio. There is a distinct connection between the borrowing of figural motifs and the peculiarities of Manet's spatial composition in that they imply a synthesized, and not a visually experienced, whole.

It seems that *Mademoiselle Victorine in the Costume of an Espada* is another case in point. It has long been known that the bullfighting action in the background is from the group in Plate 5 of the *Tauromaquia* by Goya (Figure 4), and that the barricade with its figures is freely derived from several other plates in the same series (Figures 5, 6).<sup>7</sup> Manet's intense interest at this

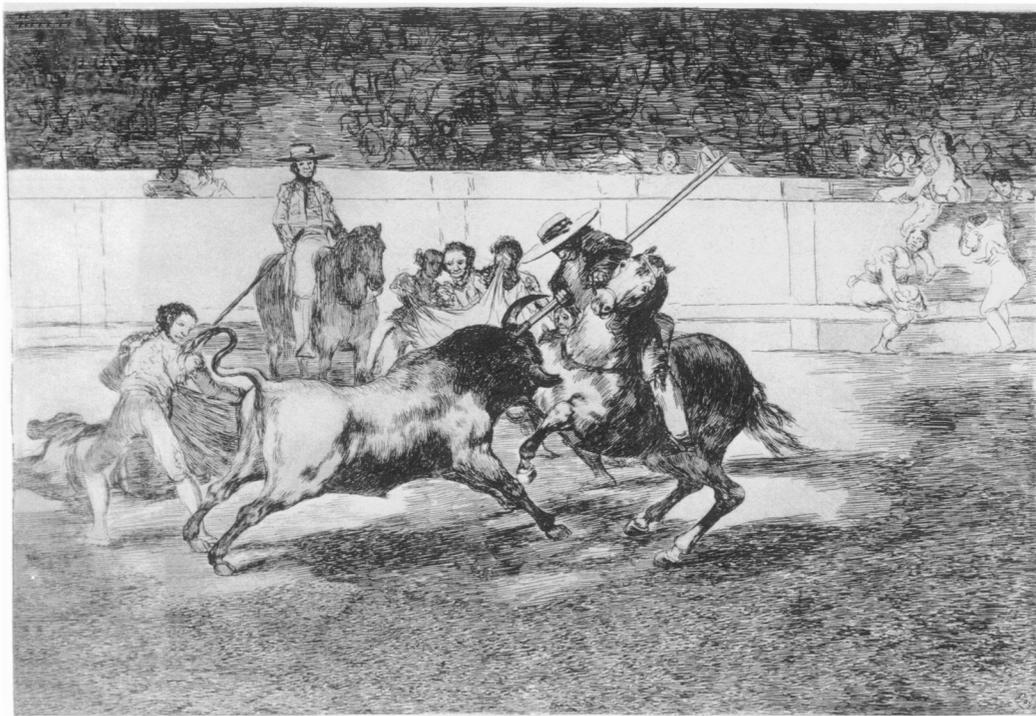
5. Ernest Chesneau, *L'Art et les artistes modernes en France et en Angleterre* (Paris, 1864) p. 190; Gustav Pauli, "Raffael und Manet," *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft* 1 (1908) p. 53.

6. See Germain Bazin, "Manet et la Tradition," *L'Amour de l'art* 13 (1932) pp. 153–163; Charles Sterling, "Manet et Rubens," *L'Amour de l'art* 13 (1932) p. 290; Christian Zervos, "Manet est-il un grand créateur?," *Cahiers d'art* 7 (1932) pp. 295–296, "A propos de Manet," *Cahiers d'art* 7 (1932) pp. 309–311.

7. Goya published his *Tauromaquia*, a series of 33 plates, in 1816. The first 12 plates were intended as illustrations for a text by Nicolas Fernández de Moratín on the origins and evolution of bullfighting originally published in 1777 (cf. Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, *Goya: Gravures et Lithographies, oeuvre complète* [Paris, 1961] p. xviii). In adapting the figures from pl. 5, Manet altered the costume of Goya's historical Moorish picador to conform with that of the more contemporary picador seen in later plates, and reversed his action to a left-handed thrust with his back to the spectator.



**FIGURE 5**  
 Otra locura suya en la misma plaza (Another madness of his in the same bullring), Plate 19 from the *Tauromaquia*, by Francisco Goya. D. 242 III, 1st edition. Etching and aquatint. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 21.19.19



**FIGURE 6**  
 El esforzado Rendon picando un toro, de cuya suerte murió en la plaza de Madrid (The brave Rendon stabbing a bull with the pic, the pass that caused his death in the ring at Madrid), Plate 28 from the *Tauromaquia*, by Francisco Goya. D. 251 III, 1st edition. Etching and aquatint. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 21.19.28

period not only in Spanish themes but also in the etching technique had led him to Goya's prints, and the *Tauromaquia* was the series best known outside of Spain at the time.<sup>8</sup> Manet only came to know Goya's painting with any intimacy when he visited Spain in 1865. Now, through the recognition of a heretofore unsuspected source, the enigmatic pose of Victorine herself becomes understandable.

Manet's teacher, Thomas Couture, painter of *The Romans of the Decadence*, taught his pupils to look to the old masters of the painterly tradition—the Venetians, especially Veronese—to learn what great art is. He also recommended Raphael for "grace."<sup>9</sup> Though Manet's idea of "grace" differed substantially from that of his teacher, in the case of the *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* he seems to have taken this advice literally. We now find he did the same for our picture, which was painted in the early fall of 1862 when he was also working on the notorious large composition that was to cause such a scandal at the Salon des Refusés the following year. I believe it can be postulated that the painter had found access to a group of engravings by Marcantonio, many of them thought to be after lost works of Raphael, and discovered in them a mine of possibilities for figures in his own compositions.<sup>10</sup> Considering the many paintings in which he treats his audience to the direct, level gaze of Victorine Meurent, it would be entertaining to imagine, though perhaps impossible to prove, that Manet, fascinated with this aspect of Victorine's presence, looked for old-master poses that could exploit it. He found one such pose for the *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* in Marcantonio's river nymph, and another for the picture now under consideration in the engraver's figure of Temperance from a series of allegorical figures representing the theological and cardinal virtues (Figure 7).

It is surprising, considering how well the source for the *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* is known, that Marcantonio has been otherwise overlooked as a source for Manet. It has been more usual to seek sources among Venetian, Flemish, Spanish, and Dutch works because of Manet's

8. Lafuente Ferrari, *Goya*, p. xix.

9. Thomas Couture, *Méthode et entretiens d'atelier* (Paris, 1868) pp. 291–293.

10. I have found relationships between prints of Marcantonio and several early works of Manet besides the present one, and I am currently preparing these findings for publication.



FIGURE 7  
Temperance, after Raphael, by Marcantonio Raimondi. B. XIV.295.390. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 26.50.1(72)

stylistic and technical affinity with these schools. But it is precisely the discrepancy between his painterly-realist handling and the artificiality of Victorine's posture that gives to the present painting its enigmatic quality. It is a quality present in many of Manet's early compositions, and one that contributed to the bafflement of his contemporaries when faced with pictures they saw as "meaningless."

The monumental work of Adam Bartsch, *Le peintre graveur*, which attempts to document the entire world of old-master prints, was published in Leipzig between 1805 and 1854. While Manet was "discovering" Marcantonio, the gentleman scholar Henri Delaborde, curator of prints at the Bibliothèque Nationale, was probably already at work on his compilation of Marcantonio's oeuvre based on Bartsch, Passavant, and Ottley, with his own additions and emendations. Delaborde's book was not published until 1888. But in 1856 Delaborde reviewed for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* a recent publication consisting of photographic prints after the engravings of Marcantonio, one of several early attempts to use the new photographic medium for recording works of art.<sup>11</sup> Not only do these examples bear out the widespread interest in intaglio art at the time, but they also make it clear that the bulk of Marcantonio's oeuvre was available to Manet in some form or other, very probably within the confines of the Louvre or the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Delaborde lists the Temperance of Figure 7 as belonging to the first set of Virtues.<sup>12</sup> In a second series there is a variation of the figure (Figure 8), in a somewhat less attractive pose, but with both arms raised, instead of only one, to hold the bit and bridle that are the traditional attributes of this Virtue. In the first

11. Delaborde first mentioned this photographic record of Marcantonio in "La Gravure en France," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, April 15, 1853, p. 294, note 1, as the work of a M. Benjamin Delesert. His later review of several photographic works, including this one ("La Photographie et la Gravure," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, April 1, 1856, pp. 617-638), is far more extensive. In view of today's universal dependence on photography for recording works of art, it is ironic that Delaborde found this medium inferior to the time-honored hand engraving as a means of reproduction, though his arguments are thoughtful and persuasive in terms of his experience.

12. See Henri Delaborde, *Marc-Antoine Raimondi* (Paris, 1888) p. 187. Delaborde's predecessors attributed the drawings Marcantonio must have worked from to Raphael, but Delaborde believed they were made by Giulio Romano or some other pupil of Raphael.

FIGURE 8

Temperance, after Mantegna according to Bartsch, after the School of Raphael according to Delaborde, by Marcantonio Raimondi. B. XIV.286.376. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whittelsey Fund, 49.97.133





FIGURE 9  
Justice, after Raphael, by Marcantonio Raimondi. B. XIV.294.388. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dick Fund, 26.50.1 (70)

series there is also a Justice (Figure 9), quite different in pose and movement, but brandishing a large sword in her right hand, while carrying half-hidden in her left the scales of her impartiality. Whether Manet, in seizing upon the essentials of the pose of the first Temperance, already saw Victorine as a sword-carrying bullfighter would be difficult to say. His subject certainly contradicts the iconography of Temperance, but it should not be forgotten that Manet was an outspoken enemy of historical and allegorical “content” in the old manner, even though he favored postures created under the aegis of the *beau idéal*. The most probable explanation is that he set out not to paint a bullfighter, but to paint Victorine Meurend in an arresting pose. I suspect it was not lack of interest in the iconographical implications, but rather a sly humor in the spirit of today’s pop artists, that produced in his mind the image of a Raphaelesque Victorine in the bullring. It is also conceivable that the Renaissance master’s treatment of clinging drapery, reduced to the hard engraved line, was suggestive of male attire, an effect particularly noticeable in the second Temperance, but present in all three of the prints.

Given Manet’s engagement with the fashion of *españolisme* at the time, his choice of a subject redolent of Goya has surprised no one. What *is* surprising is the idea of a lady bullfighter. It would be hard to envisage the russet-haired Victorine as an exotic Spanish *maja* in a mantilla, and it seems unlikely that Manet ever entertained such an idea for his essentially Parisian model. On the other hand, there is one female bullfighter in the Goya suite (No. 22, *La Pajuelera*), though her form there is anything but feminine. Manet had recently painted for Nadar a seductive portrait of the photographer’s mistress reclining in a pose recalling Goya’s *Maja Vestida* on a plum-colored Victorian sofa (1862, formerly in the Stephen C. Clark Collection, now in the Yale University Art Gallery, Figure 10). The model, whose name is not known, is dressed in cream-colored satin knee breeches, silk hose, and bolero, her black hair drawn into a plastered Spanish curl before her ear. Her costume, no less enigmatic than Victorine’s, could be related to the affectations of the “liberated” Second-Empire female following the example of George Sand and other *amazonas*, but also, and more likely, to what seems to have been a chic flouting of the female image among some members of

FIGURE 10

Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume, by Edouard Manet. Oil on canvas. Yale University Art Gallery, bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A. 1903



the flourishing demimonde of the time by dressing in men's clothes.<sup>13</sup> Possibly it could even refer back to Goya's association with the Duchess of Alba, who is said to have affected bullfighters' costume on occasion. These sociological implications of Victorine's role in our picture, however, go too far afield for proper treatment in this short study.

Manet kept Spanish costumes and other "props" in his atelier, and it can be seen in the Metropolitan Museum's galleries that the bolero, hat, and headscarf in our picture are the same as those in *The Spanish Singer* of 1860, a picture that won considerable praise and an honorable mention for Manet at the 1861 Salon.<sup>14</sup> Victorine must have been a sizable girl, as the model for *The Spanish Singer* needed to roll back the cuffs of the bolero while she did not. The same bolero appears, well-fitted, in the painting of Manet's brother Gustave known as *A Young Man in the Costume of a Majo*, also in the Metropolitan's Manet gallery. Where a history painter of the time would have used these costumes in some plausible context (as Manet still did in 1860), Manet in 1862 used them to present quite frankly his perfectly recognizable and named female model in a scene painted so as to leave no doubt in the viewer's mind of the total artificiality of its construction.

Though he is usually classified as a realist, Manet's interest in depicting "modern life" had only found its first full expression about the time when he painted our

picture, in the brilliant *Music in the Tuileries* of 1862, now in the National Gallery, London. Even that work has been shown to be derived in its conception from popular prints of the eighteenth or early nineteenth century, a source of imagery now under intensive investigation by more than one Manet scholar.<sup>15</sup> What the painter did with Raphael's river gods in the *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* had already been done in other pictures, including the one at hand. Similar modernization of old figures occurs in *La Nympe Surprise* (Museo de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires) of 1861,<sup>16</sup> and in *The Old Musician* (National Gallery, Washington) of 1862.<sup>17</sup> An approach to this "method" had already been formulated in still earlier pictures, notably *Fishing in Saint-Ouen*, near Paris (Metropolitan Museum), of 1860/61,<sup>18</sup> though in the earlier cases Manet reversed the chronology: contemporary people appear as old-master figures. Among the last of these is *A Boy with a Sword* (1861) in the Metropolitan Museum, in which Léon Koëlla-Leenhoff, the son of Manet's future wife, Suzanne Leenhoff, assumes the role of a seventeenth-century Spanish page boy.<sup>19</sup> Beginning with *La Nympe Surprise*, old-master figures become modern people. And from that time forward, Manet's method was to pose a model in modern dress or undress in an approximation of the posture of the old-master prototype, while giving the whole picture an increasingly "modern" content.<sup>20</sup> The culmination of this

13. See Joanna Richardson, *The Courtesans* (Cleveland and New York, 1967). Photographs reproduced on pp. 109, 116, and 210 show famous courtesans of the 1850s and 1860s in male attire.

14. This correspondence was noted in 1910 by Emil Waldmann. See his "Französische Bilder in Amerikanischem Privatbesitz," *Kunst und Künstler* 9 (1910) p. 134. These costume items, with the singer's guitar, also appear as a still-life painting in the Musée Calvet at Aix-en-Provence. That composition was repeated in an etching intended, but not used, as the frontispiece of the portfolio of etchings Manet brought out in October of 1862.

15. See Nils Gösta Sandblad, *Manet: Three Studies in Artistic Conception* (Lund, Sweden, 1954) pp. 36–37, and for additional sources for Music in the Tuileries, A. G. Barskaya, "On Sources for the Early Work of Edouard Manet" (in Russian), *Works of the National Hermitage 8: Western European Art 3* (Leningrad and Moscow, 1964) pp. 109–123. On the subject of Manet and popular prints, see Hanson, *Manet*, especially p. 43; on Courbet in the same connection, Linda Nochlin, "Gustave Courbet's *Meeting*: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew," *Art Bulletin* 49 (1967) pp. 209–222.

16. See Sterling, "Manet et Rubens"; also Barskaya, "Sources," and by the same author, "Edouard Manet's Painting,

'Nymph and Satyr,' on Exhibition in Russia in 1861" (in Russian), *Academia Republicii Populare Romine, Omagiu lui George Oprescu cu prilejul implinirii a 80 de ani* (Bucharest, 1961). An article I have written on "Manet's *La Nympe*" will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*.

17. See Alain de Leiris, "Manet, Gérault and Chryssypos," *Art Bulletin* 46 (1964) pp. 401–404.

18. See Bazin, "Manet et la Tradition," pp. 153–155.

19. Sterling and Salinger, *French Paintings*, III, p. 31, relate this painting to a work of Ribera. I believe it is also related to two early paintings by Manet, *The Spanish Cavaliers* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyons) and *Scene in a Spanish Studio* (Galerie Lorenceau, Paris), both of 1860. In the first, Léon Koëlla-Leenhoff appears as a page carrying a tray. The second has evidently been cut down, since part of a similar page boy appears at the left. He may have been carrying a tray like the first, or possibly the sword of one of the visitors, and may be presumed to have represented Léon Koëlla-Leenhoff also. See color reproduction in Hanson, *Manet*, frontispiece.

20. Nils Gösta Sandblad, *Three Studies*, p. 97, says of this development: "Manet, who, in his figure-compositions from around 1860, had still accepted the recognized subjects, even when he

trend is the great Olympia of 1863, as unabashedly displaying her source in Titian as she does her “modern” and realistically painted body.

The *beau idéal* is nowhere better demonstrated to be a departure from reality than in Manet’s attempt to put a live human being into an idealized posture. The anatomically impossible stance of Marcantonio’s Temperance requires the body to face in three different directions at once and to stand with both feet on the same groundline. Its fluid and graceful movement, enhanced by curving drapery, is immobilized and rendered less graceful by the nearest approximation Victorine could assume in her harshly silhouetted costume. For Temperance’s bridle, Manet substituted the improbable cape, permitting its fall to provide some slight movement to mitigate the figure’s relative immobility; perhaps he also saw in the flying folds of the scarf on her head a modern analogy to the wavy, flying locks of Marcantonio’s elegant personification. Victorine’s bland, individualized features assume a strangely new meaning in view of the prototype. One could almost believe that Manet took a dare from an artist or poet friend in creating this image: modern, chic, unlovely, enigmatic, and in the end poetic in its Baudelairean mysteriousness. It was during 1862 that Manet’s friendship with the great poet was most intimate.

The discrepancy between the enigmatic quality of Manet’s imagery and the realism of its execution has always been disconcerting to his critics, especially those who have seen in his art little more than a transition from realism to impressionism. To be sure, the living model was the heroine in his art, and it was the visual presence of the living model from which his inspiration as a painter sprang. It is in this that he was

a realist, more than in his subject matter or his method of composition, and it is this that he had in common with the younger impressionist generation, who understood best this particular element in his art. Spots of color, judiciously chosen and cunningly applied, form an equivalent of direct visual experience. The impressionists, however, applied this method to the entire composition of their canvases. Manet did not, until later in his career, and even then only in a qualified manner. His schooling was with the old masters, and he synthesized his compositions as they had done before him.

It has been fashionable since the 1930s to claim that Manet lacked imagination and therefore leaned on others for his pictorial ideas.<sup>21</sup> The undeniable power and astringent freshness of his work had to be acknowledged, however, and to explain that power, critics have traditionally relied on the facility and the felicity with which Manet, a painter’s painter, chose his colors and applied his paint. Much the same could be said for John Singer Sargent. But who would place these two at the same level of artistic achievement? It took thought, imagination, wit, and courage to risk a painting such as this one, and though it is less well known, I do not hesitate to place it in the same category of achievement as the *Déjeuner sur l’Herbe* and the *Olympia*. Like them, once seen, it is unforgettable.

It was Degas who said to Daniel Halévy in 1912, “Oh, literature—writers—no, what’s underneath is no one’s business. There must be a certain mystery. Works of art must be left with some mystery about them.”<sup>22</sup> I submit in justification of this study that Manet’s poetry remains mysterious enough to withstand all scholarly onslaughts and is just as pleasurable now as it was before the discovery of its source, if not more so.

made fun of their time-honoured conventions, had displayed, in his general approach to a new realism in 1862, a tendency similar to Vermeer, to resolve the conventions into charades. For example, he painted Victorine Meurent and his brother Eugène [*sic*] as Spaniards, but allowed them to keep their own identities, and even drew attention, in his titles, to the fact that these were costume-pieces.”

21. This attitude is to be found in Jacques-Emile Blanche, *Manet* (London, 1925); Paul Colin, *Manet* (Paris, 1937); Michel Florisoone, *Manet* (Monaco, 1947); and Zervos, “Manet créateur” and “A propos de Manet.”

22. Quoted in Daniel Halévy, *My Friend Degas*, trans. and ed. Mina Curtiss (Middletown, Conn., 1964) p. 109.