

Facturing Femininity: Manet's "Before the Mirror"

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Source: *October*, Vol. 74 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 74-104

Published by: The MIT Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778821>

Accessed: 17-01-2019 17:21 UTC

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# Facturing Femininity: Manet's *Before the Mirror*\*

CAROL ARMSTRONG

## *A Catalogue Entry*

In 1877, at about the time he executed his more famous *Nana*, Manet finished painting the Guggenheim oil titled *Before the Mirror*. In April of 1880, he exhibited it along with, among other things, his 1878 pastel *Woman Fixing Her Garter* in a one-man show, mostly of new works, held in the galleries of La Vie Moderne. After that, *Before the Mirror* remained in his own hands until his death, when it, along with several others of his works including the famous *Nana*, was sold posthumously to a collector-friend who lived in Manet's building, one Dr. Albert Robin.<sup>1</sup>

Of this narration of *Before the Mirror*'s exhibition and ownership credentials, culled largely from Françoise Cachin's 1983 Manet catalogue, I am most concerned with the picture's situation in 1880. At the time of its showing in La Vie Moderne, most critics paid little attention to it *per se*, focusing instead either on the two paintings by Manet that were on offer in the Salon that year—the *Luncheon at Père Lathuille* and a portrait of Manet's biographer, Antonin Proust—or, when they did look to the show at La Vie Moderne, on the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*, or on the general way in which, by implication, the two pictures taken together resonated with Manet's *Nana*, which had acquired notoriety when it was shown in 1877 in the window of Giroux's *biblot*, fan, and picture shop.<sup>2</sup> In his "Salon" of 1880, Joris Karl Huysmans was among those who concentrated on the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*. He was also among those who evoked *Nana* by implication—not surprisingly, since he had written about her extensively when she appeared in Giroux's shop in 1877. He wrote thus:

\* This essay was first given as a Lifton endowed lecture, sponsored by the School for the Art Institute of Chicago, in October of 1993.

1. Françoise Cachin, *Manet 1832–1883* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1983), pp. 390–92.

2. On these two paintings, their exhibition at La Vie Moderne, and the criticism they received, see Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 75–79.



*Edouard Manet. Before the Mirror.*  
1875–76.

One of them, the *Toilette*, representing a woman in her décolletage, the top of a chignon and the tip of a nose advancing on the summit of her chest [Huysmans uses the horsey word *poitrine* for chest and the slangy term *pif* for nose], as she attaches a garter to a blue stocking, reeks of the prostitute who is so dear to us. Enveloping his characters in the odor of the world to which they belong has been one of the constant preoccupations of M. Manet.

His bright work, from which have been scrubbed the mummified mud and tobacco juices which have mucked up canvases for so long, is possessed of a coaxing touch, beneath its swaggering appearance, a brief and concise but somewhat hesitant drawing, a bouquet of vivid marks within paintwork that is both silvery and blond.<sup>3</sup>

Part of this passage is quoted in the 1983 Manet catalogue, in its entry on *Before the Mirror*. The first paragraph, which is specific to the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*, which concerns its subject matter rather than its rendering, which links it to the ubiquitous theme of prostitution, and which addresses the determining milieu of Manet's figures, and by extension the social context of his paintings, is omitted from the quotation. Only the second paragraph, the one that concerns facture—or “paintwork”—and that could refer to either of the two pictures, remains.

Whether it refers to one or to both pictures, run together as if they were one (and I think it is the latter), Huysmans's description is riven, split between a somewhat hackneyed description of *what* is represented (the *de rigueur* theme of prostitution), and a rather glowing account of *how* it is represented (whose thematization of the contrast between dank, dark old canvases and the “blondness” of Manet's manner was a recognizable feature of favorable Manet criticism since Zola's writing of the sixties). In any case, the two paragraphs of Huysmans's passage keep the *what* and the *how* neatly separate. Indeed, there is nothing in the first paragraph that registers that what we are looking at is a *painting*, while there is nothing in the second paragraph to indicate that what we are looking at is anything but an abstract, no-subject, contentless work of painting, a virtual piece of Abstract Expressionism. So it is easy enough for a museum exhibition catalogue to cite Huysmans selectively, mentioning one part and excising the

3. “L'une, la *Toilette*, représentant une femme décolletée, avançant sur la sortie de sa poitrine, un sommet de chignon et un bout de pif, tandis qu'elle attache une jarretière sur un bas bleu, fleur à plein nez la prostituée qui nous est chère. Envelopper ses personnages de la senteur de monde auquel ils appartient, telle a été une des plus constantes préoccupations de M. Manet. /Son oeuvre claire, débarbouillée des terres de momie et des jus de pipes qui ont crassé si longtemps les toiles, a une touche souvent câline, sous son apparence bravache, un dessin concisé mais titubant, un bouquet de taches vives dans une peinture argentine et blonde” (J. K. Huysmans, *L'Art moderne* [1883], in *L'Art Moderne/Certains*, ed. Hubert Juin [Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973], p. 150; second paragraph cited in Cachin, *Manet*, p. 391).



Woman Fixing Her Garter. 1878.

other, thereby maintaining, in this one entry, Manet's place in the formalist history of modern art, as well as conserving the separation of content and form that is part of that history, contributing to the erasure of any content or any reading that might banalize, vulgarize, kitschify, or otherwise diminish the high-art distinction of a work by a modernist master, and promoting a commodified, exhibition-value definition of the image as a formal arrangement made for display, for aesthetic and economic consumption, for delectation and possession.<sup>4</sup>

The question is, what to do with this separation of content and form? What to do with the divided assignment of "content" to one picture, and "form" to the other? As might be evinced in the "facture" part of the title of this essay, my own interests are largely on the "form" side. In giving an abbreviated account of the exhibition and ownership history of this work, I might also seem to be supporting its definition as a luxury commodity with pure exhibition value. And indeed, it is true, I give that history not simply to parody a catalogue entry. I want to make the claim, as well, that such a definition of the modernist work of art is quite specifically appropriate to the actual function and exhibition situation of Manet's *Before the Mirror*, and that we ought to keep its appropriateness in view. It does not, however, follow from this that I agree with the simple excision of the subject-matter part of Huysmans's description, nor that I mean to reproduce that excision myself. For what is interesting about Huysmans's two paragraphs is precisely the way they are fissured and divided, the way, in running two images together, they yet cannot keep "content" and "form" joined, the way they insist on a sort of tension between the two. I wish to account in some way for that tension, and to show how it is accurate to the pictures in question, and so I want to perform a reading that mediates in some fashion between the *what* and the *how*, thematics and paintwork, representation and abstraction—between some sort of iconography and some form of formalism—and between these two pictures, the one of which, in Huysmans's account, is clearly attached to "content" concerns, the other of which gets the language of "form," or at least of *facture*,<sup>5</sup> applied to it.

4. Most of what I have to say about the "exhibition value" of this painting in its exhibition context rests on Walter Benjamin's classic essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 217–51. See also Karl Marx, "Commodities and Money," *Capital I*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), pp. 302–29.

5. So far I have used "form" and "facture" interchangeably. One caveat needs to be issued in that regard. My analysis of *Before the Mirror* is certainly tied to formalist discourse, in its address to the internal system of the painting, to the self-reflexivity of its medium, to its opacity rather than its transparency, and to its status as sign and signifier over and above its referent. But this treatment of *Before the Mirror* distinguishes itself from the discourse of formalism in a number of ways as well. And one of those ways concerns its address to *facture*, and to *facture's* capacity as a form of *un-form*: *facture's* dissolution of form and its readability, its disruption of the singleness and unified *gestalt* of the image, and its attachment to the amorphous regime of color as against the rationality of design.

*Pictures in an Exhibition*

The two images suggest alternate views, if not of the same woman, certainly of the same conventional theme of femininity, that of the *toilette*—various stages of getting dressed in the privacy of a woman's boudoir, from the tightening of the lacings of a corset to the lifting of petticoats to fasten a garter. The one presents a blond woman from the back, standing upright, looking at herself in a mirror, in which we see reflected a tiny bit of the front of her. The other presents a woman from the front, bending over so that we get not only a view of one of her stockinged legs but also of her breasts, pushed up and overflowing her corset, such that we are offered a glimpse of one of her nipples. The two women seem to be proportioned more or less the same—the plump, sloping shoulders, dimpled arms, and wide backside of *Before the Mirror* suggest about as much amplitude as that of the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*, though what passes for her mirror image gives us little information as to the amount of flesh on her front.

The contrast between the two works has to do with what is given to the gaze—quite a lot (in the case of the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*) and quite a bit less (in the case of *Before the Mirror*, and in spite of its provision of a mirror image). The mirror, of course, is a familiar accoutrement of the boudoir, and of pictorial thematizations of the feminine, but here it does not properly serve its usual function in such scenes, which is not only to double a face and/or body, but to present us with the other side of it, so as to reward the gaze with more, and to further the visual fiction of possession.<sup>6</sup> (In this case, that usual function of the mirror is given over to the two pictures taken together, one of a front and one of a back.) All we are given in *this* mirror, however, is some indication of the function of such mirrorly doubling—in the briefest suggestion of an hourglass shape rendered in a curving dash of blue. But because of the odd point of view onto the mirror image, so that it is cut off at the neck, and because of the quick, brushy manner of facture and the abbreviated style of notation that characterizes that mirror image even more than the rest of the painting, that usual function of the mirror is almost entirely elided. And so what is given to the gaze in *Before the Mirror* is given entirely in the form of suggestive but insufficient glimpses, and mediated prominently through self-announcing facture. Whereas, in the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*, much of what one would want to see of the woman's body is given directly and frontally to the gaze, is swiftly and broadly caricatured in the graphic rendering of her contours, and, in a visual joke about upholstery-like fashions in clothing and bodies that was common currency at the time, doubled in the plump, overstuffed piece of furniture seen in the lower right corner, whose blue-and-white patterns and black marks mimic the coloration of the woman. In short, facture in the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* is used for the purposes of bodily exaggeration and

6. See Leo Steinberg, "The Algerian Woman and Picasso at Large," in *Other Criteria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 180–81 ("Drawing as if to Possess: The Reflected Reverse").

emphasis, and for salacious directness, whereas in *Before the Mirror*, it is used for the purposes of bodily occlusion and elision, and erotic indirectness. In the one, facture serves the representation of a body and its delivery to the gaze; in the other, it strains somewhat against both.

In describing a woman's *pif* and *poitraille*, not to mention her garter and blue stocking, Huysmans could only have been referencing the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*. Not only is that description an accurate inventory of the bodily and sartorial contents of that image, its slanginess is also appropriate to the quality of caricature, which is found in it to a much greater degree than in *Before the Mirror*. Obviously, then, the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* lent herself more easily to the allusions to prostitution that we find in the writing about her—because of her evocation of caricature and popular-press imagery, because of the broadness and bawdiness of her bodily rendering in the graphic language of pastel.

On the other hand, Huysmans's description of facture in his second paragraph does seem better fitted to *Before the Mirror*, in spite of the allusion of the "bouquet of vivid marks" to the pastel-notation of the wallpaper in the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*. Let us read that second paragraph again: "His bright work, from which have been scrubbed the mummified mud and tobacco juices which have mucked up canvases for so long, is possessed of a coaxing touch, beneath its swaggering appearance, a brief and concise but somewhat hesitant drawing, a bouquet of vivid marks within paintwork that is both silvery and blond." Detached from the first paragraph's subject-matter indications, this description of Manet's facture is general enough to cover either of these images. But its language suggests the domain of oil painting rather more than that of pastel: the contrast between canvases "mucked up" by "mummified mud and tobacco juices" and a "bright work" whose facture is both "silvery and blond" points us to a conventional contrast between styles of *oil painting*—that of the *pompier*s on the one hand, and Manet's on the other. Moreover, its celebration of the "blondness" of Manet's painting is taken straight from Zola's criticism of the sixties in reference to the palette of Manet's *oil paintings* of those years. In this context, its emphasis upon *peinture* surely references oil painting much more than it does pastel. In other words, Huysmans's second paragraph refers the reader to a discourse on the domain of high-art oil painting that is better suited to *Before the Mirror*, much more than the world of caricature and popular-press imagery that the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* evokes. (Of course, *Before the Mirror* also references popular-press imagery—specifically, earlier nineteenth-century erotic lithographs of women at their *toilettes*, either alone or attended by their lovers, tightening the laces of their corsets.<sup>7</sup> But *Before the Mirror* complicates that reference, as the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* does not, by its oil-painterly

7. See David Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism: A Social History of the Corset, Tight-Lacing and Other Forms of Body Sculpture in the West* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982).





*Anonymous. Nineteenth-century lithograph.*

handling: a handling that threatens to tear its bodily referent apart at the seams, and to make the familiar corset-lacing gesture almost illegible.)

“Silvery and blond” is also simply a better description of the palette of *Before the Mirror*: note the brushy, golden rendering of her hair and of the gilt frame of the standing mirror, and the equally brushy, silver-suggesting, white-and-blue rendering of corset, shift, and glazed mirror surface, of the white flesh of the woman’s back and of the fabric hanging from the upper-right-hand corner of the painting—adding up to a contrast between warm and cool registers that is suggested in Huysmans’s evocation of a palette that is both “silvery and blond.” Moreover, Huysmans’s description of silvery and blond “paintwork,” of Manet’s “coaxing touch,” suggesting a sort of seductive rococo handling, and his evocation of Manet’s “swaggering,” “brief,” and “concise” but “hesitant drawing” and “vivid marks” evoke the foregrounding of brushwork *per se* that is everywhere evident in *Before the Mirror*, to a much, much greater degree than in the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*.

For *Before the Mirror* contains a virtual catalogue of possible kinds of brushmarks and of their relationship to the business of representation at hand: ranging from the variegated array of short, thick, green, white, pink, brown, and yellow hatchmarks rendering the wallpaper; to the swirling, circular, green and brown-gold marks suggesting the woman’s chignon and escaping neck-curls; to the horizontal blue strokes indicating the lacings of the corset; to the longer vertical strokes of blue and white calling forth the transparency of the shift; to

the thinner paint application evoking the mirror's surface and the bit of an image caught upon it; to the combination of thick and thin, opaque and translucent marks that characterize the blue-and-white fabric in the upper-right-hand corner; to the swift pink, white, and brownish dashes rendering arm, elbow, and hand; to the overlay of yellow on brown that represents the mirror frame; and so on. If we consider that cataloguing of marks together with the contrast between the woman's back and her mirror image—a contrast, worked out in degrees of relative brushiness and abbreviation, between marks that successfully coalesce into an image, and more dispersed marks that more or less fail to do so—together with the comparison between two areas of blue above white—rendering corset and shift on the one hand, and we don't quite know what on the other hand—*Before the Mirror* begins to read as a kind of self-reflexive meditation on its own constitution out of paint. Indeed, there is a kind of insistence to the comparison of areas of blue above white, one of which serves the representation of a semiclothed three-dimensional body, the other of which flattens out into a declaration of palette, pigment, and paintedness associated with the enframing edge of the picture, just as the blue-and-white corset is enframed by the edge of the mirror. What that comparison suggests is a sort of deconstruction of the transparency of representation, of the illusion of content, and hence of the imagistic thematics of female body and boudoir, of dress and undress, and their contemporary erotic associations—in short, of all that is on more direct, frontal offer in the titillating, similarly coiffed and semiclothed buxomness of the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*. Thus, *Before the Mirror* merits the selected-out formalist half of Huysmans's account of the works on display at La Vie Moderne.

So it might be said that in *Before the Mirror* Manet was meditating on precisely that definition of painting as formal arrangement, aesthetic commodity, and object of the space of exhibition that a twentieth-century museum catalogue like that of the 1983 Manet show would come to privilege. Certainly Manet had meditated on that definition of painting many times before, as in his museum quotations of the sixties. Certainly Manet, following on the example of Daumier, Degas, and others, occasionally sketched the space of exhibition, in which paintings were defined as commodities, and by the exhibition value of being looked at as pure objects of display. Indeed, I want to suggest that *Before the Mirror* thematizes a conflict between two levels of commodity, two kinds of exhibitionism, not to mention two kinds of erotic spectacle—that she establishes a tension between the fact that as a painting she *is* a commodity and the fact that as a representation she also *depicts* a commodity, or a related series of commodities, namely, the woman, her corset, her femininity.

#### *A Shop-Window Ware*

With its exhibition value in mind, it makes sense to consider *Before the Mirror* not only in relation to the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*, but also in company with the

The Plum. 1878.



rest of what was on display at *La Vie Moderne*, which included some portraits in pastel, the late-1860s painting of Manet's wife called *Reading*, a couple of café pictures, and the so-called *Plum*—of a woman dressed in pink seated in a café. With the exception of the painting of his wife, these were recent works by Manet that were still in his studio in 1880, simply putting on display the latest of the wares he had to offer. Not much else is held in common by these works, except that they all do betray a concern for different registers of clothing, fashionable or otherwise—the clothing of a proper bourgeoisie at home (his wife, in *Reading*), the social distinctions indexed in the garments worn by aproned waitresses, top-hatted and cravatted gentlemen, blue-smocked laboring-class men, and women of the street (in the café pictures), the more elaborately rendered pink dress with embroidered sleeve edges and white ruffle at the throat worn with such lassitude by the woman in *The Plum*. In some senses, then, the exhibition of *Before the Mirror* and the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* in tandem with these pictures suggests the linking of one kind of commodity with another—articles of clothing with articles of painting—which together reinforce the commodified, exhibition-value definition of the image, especially in the context of the galleries of Georges Charpentier's *La Vie Moderne*, the new illustrated weekly celebrating modernity—including its fashions in clothing—that had, since its inception the year before, exhibited modern art on its premises as well.<sup>8</sup>

8. The first such exhibition was a one-man show by de Nittis in 1879, followed shortly thereafter



Nana. 1877.

Also thematized across the various pictures in Manet's exhibition at La Vie Moderne were two related contrasts: between dress and undress on the one hand, and between the *femme honnête* and the *fille* on the other hand. Which brings me back to the critics' association of both *Before the Mirror* and the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* with the earlier-exhibited *Nana*. For more than any other of Manet's paintings, *Nana* displayed the *fille* as the commodity she was—the woman for sale, dressed in her fancy undergarments, engaged in her own painterly artifices—putting on makeup—perfecting her function as object of delectation, surrounded by the *bibelots* of her boudoir, gazed upon by her buyer, as a piece of pure erotic spectacle, and glancing out, with an attitude of flirtatious come-on, at her other customers, *us*, that is, the viewers of the painting. And *Nana's* place of exhibition had also matched her thematics, particularly

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by a show of Renoir's pastels in June of the same year. In June of 1880, Monet would have a show there too, and Sisley would have one in 1881 (John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism* [New York: Museum of Modern Art, 4th ed., 1976], pp. 430–31, 447). The following is the notice regarding these exhibitions that was published by La Vie Moderne in 1879: "How often people interested in art have told us how much they would like to visit the studio of this or that artist if they did not hesitate to go there on their own, which they can really do only on condition of having themselves announced as prospective buyers, especially if they have no occasion of being introduced by a mutual friend. Well then, our exhibitions will merely transfer momentarily the artist's studio to the boulevard, to a hall where it will be open to everyone, where the collector can come when he pleases, thus avoiding possible friction and having no fear of imposing" (cited in Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, p. 430).

since she had been displayed in a window, presumably along with other wares sold by Giroux—with knickknacks and other feminine articles—both advertising those other wares with her own depicted *bibloterie* and taking her place among them as a crafted object, thus underlining her double status as commodity: representationally, as courtesan and as article of fashion and cosmetic artifice, and literally, as painting.

Of the two *Nana*-recalling images displayed in *La Vie Moderne* in 1880, *Before the Mirror* is visually closer to *Nana*, in spite of the fact that it was to her garter-fixing companion that most critics looked for reminiscences of *Nana*.<sup>9</sup> For not only does the female figure in *Before the Mirror* stand in front of a mirror just as *Nana* does (though it is not the same mirror), not only does she wear the same blue corset and white shift or bloomers, not only is her coloration closer to that of *Nana*, but in addition the same bit of blue-and-white fabric is to be found in both paintings—it is just that in the larger context of *Nana*, that smaller piece of blue-and-white fabric more clearly signals a dress about to be donned, and hence the next step in the narrative sequence of the *toilette*. Whereas in *Before the Mirror* that piece of fabric is representationally much more ambiguous, and it more clearly declares itself to be just what it literally is, a piece of painting. Thus, *Before the Mirror* would seem to be an alternative version of *Nana*—whether an earlier and less resolved try at *Nana* or a later revision of *Nana*, or simply two variants worked on at the same time, it is hard to say. In any event, *Before the Mirror* is actually a closer relative of *Nana* than the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* is.

As a relative of and alternative to *Nana*, *Before the Mirror* also represents a kind of painterly argument with *Nana*. In other words, the narrative of feminine artifice, the male gaze, and sexual consumerism that *Nana* enacts so fully in paint is denarrativized, denaturalized, and somewhat undermined in *Before the Mirror*. Not only are all the well-known puns and anecdotes of *Nana* lacking: the curving burgundy-velvet sofa with its gilt frame and legs and its pillows mimicking the bodily form of *Nana*; the top-hatted, starch-shirted, black-vested, frock-coated gentleman visitor replete with cane, whose gaze at *Nana* is reinforced by the embracing line of the back of that same sofa; the blue screen or wall fabric with its decorative crane, which in French (*la grue*) is slang for prostitute; the ornamental embroidered blue stockings, black slippers, white undergarment, and gold bangle and ring, not to mention the white ruffling on the fancy blue corset worn by *Nana*; the potted plant on an ornate Second-Empire side table; the little oval mirror on a stand mounted with candles; the powder puff and lip rouge; and of course the chair with a bit of dress thrown over it—all of this is missing from *Before the Mirror*, though it is recalled in much abbreviated fashion in the blue corset, white shift, and blue-and-white fabric hanging from the upper-right corner. Not only is the triangulation of gazes and glances found

9. One exception was Paul Alexis, who called the Guggenheim oil *Nana before the Mirror* ("Manet," *Revue Moderne et Naturaliste* [1880], p. 293; cited in Clayton, *Painted Love*, p. 78).

in *Nana*—between *Nana* herself, her gentleman caller, and us, the viewers of the picture—absent from *Before the Mirror*, though it is suggested (only to be refuted) in the mirror image that we are and are not given. (Indeed, *Before the Mirror* seems to set out to be *Nana* from behind, as if the viewpoint of the gentleman in *Nana* had been swiveled around and aligned with our, the viewers', viewpoint, with the aim of seeing that mirror image which is hidden from our gaze in *Nana*. But of course, with the viewpoint swiveled around and a piece of the mirror image given, we really end up seeing nothing but a lot of paint.) In addition, the complicity of facture in manufacturing the narrative illusion of *Nana* is undercut in the factually explicit *Before the Mirror*, in all the ways that I have already described.

What all of this suggests is that *Nana*'s equation of different kinds of commodity becomes rather strained, if not altogether pulled apart in *Before the Mirror*. Which is to say that the equivalence between the various commodities that are the represented subject matter of *Nana* and the commodity that the painting of *Nana* literally is, is undermined by *Before the Mirror*, while the union of woman as object of the consuming gaze and painting as the object of that same gaze is countermanded—and it is facture that is the barrier to that union. Instead of the union of the two in *Before the Mirror*, the one stands in the way of the other, reinforcing the either/or-ness of painterly illusionism, in which one cannot see both the illusion and the paint that produces the illusion at the same time—one cannot have one's cake and eat it too.<sup>10</sup> In *Before the Mirror*, one can have the paint but one cannot really have the woman too: which stands in contradiction of what *Nana*, that shop-window ware of 1877, had proposed.

#### *A Passage in a Novel*

Several things happened in 1880, right around the time of Manet's exhibition at La Vie Moderne, that bore on *Before the Mirror*. A couple of months before that exhibition, in February of the same year, Zola's naturalist novel about the violent upward climb and dramatic descent into misery of *Nana*, the starlet-prostitute-turned-courtesan finally destroyed by syphilis, was published by the same Charpentier who was the director-owner of *La Vie Moderne*, after having been out in serial form. Thus, it was likely that the critics had the newly published novel on their minds when they referred Manet's two paintings of women at their *toilette* to *Nana*. This must have been particularly true in Huysmans's case, given the follower of Zola that he was at that time, and that he himself had published a novel about a

10. On the "duck/rabbit" quality of the cognition of illusionism, see E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 5. There are other places in Manet's work where I think this either/or-ness does not hold up so well—for example, in much of his work of the sixties, as well as in the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère*, with which I will end. For a larger discussion of Manet and illusionism, see my "Manet/Manette: Encoloring the I/Eye," in *Encoding the Eye, Stanford Humanities Review*, vol. 2, nos. 2–3 (Spring 1992), pp. 1–46.

prostitute (*Marthe, histoire d'une fille*) earlier, first in Brussels in 1876, and then in Paris in 1879.<sup>11</sup>

As for Zola, in his novel he undertakes an elaborate description of Nana's process of putting on her stage makeup while three of her "admirers," the Prince, the Marquis de Chouard, and the hapless Count Muffat look on:

After rubbing cold cream over her arms and face, she laid on the grease-paint. . . . For a moment she stopped looking at her reflection in the glass, and glanced smilingly at the Prince, but without putting down the grease-paint.

. . . She had picked up the hare's-foot, and was lightly dabbing at her face, giving all her attention to this operation.

. . . she . . . turned around for a moment with her left cheek very white, in the midst of a cloud of powder. Then she suddenly turned serious, for it was time for her to put on her rouge. With her face once again close to the mirror, she dipped her fingers in a jar and began applying the rouge below her eyes, gently spreading it back towards her temples. . . .

. . . She had dipped her paint-brush in a pot of kohl; then, putting her nose close to the glass, and closing her left eye, she passed it delicately between her eye-lashes. Muffat stood behind her, watching. He saw her reflection in the mirror, with her round shoulders and her breasts half hidden in a rosy shadow. . . . When she shut her right eye and passed the brush along it, he realized that he belonged to her.

. . . Her face and arms were finished now, and with her finger she put two broad strokes of carmine on her lips. The Comte Muffat felt more disturbed than ever. He was fascinated by the perverse attraction of Nana's powders and paints, and filled with a frantic longing for the young woman's painted charms, the unnaturally red mouth in the unnaturally white face, and the exaggerated eyes, ringed with black.<sup>12</sup>

The idea for this Baudelairean scene (which provides us with the face that is missing in *Before the Mirror*) probably came to Zola from having seen Manet's

11. Huysmans's description of Manet's "silvery and blond" palette, for instance, rings with several of Zola's descriptions of Nana's *bibelots* and of her attire found in the novel: "Twice already she had redecorated the bedroom . . . the second [time] in blue silk. . . . The furniture was lacquered blue and white with silver filigree patterns. . . . The keynote of the room was again old gold"; "She was wearing the blue and white colours of the Vandevres stable in a remarkable outfit. This consisted of a little blue silk bodice and tunic, which fitted closely to her body. . . . Then there was a white satin dress with white satin sleeves, and a white satin sash . . . the whole decorated with silver point-lace which shone in the sun" (Emile Zola, *Nana*, trans. George Holden [Hammondsworth, England: Penguin, 1972], pp. 313, 345–46).

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 154–57.

*Nana* in 1877—for many of its ingredients, from the Count watching from behind, to the mirror, to the putting on of powder and rouge, to the flirtatious glancing and the seductive dishabille of *Nana*, were already in that painting. But the emphasis upon a disappearing mirror image, upon cosmetic materials, upon the painterly process of makeup application, on a face and body reduced to, virtually replaced by *facture*—paint and brushwork—and on the erotic adoration of such feminine *facture* as much as, if not more than, the body and face of the woman herself: in some ways, this conjures up the *facture*-celebrating world of *Before the Mirror* more than it does *Nana*, *per se*. At any rate, Zola's text, written after the painting of both pictures, published just before the exhibition of *Before the Mirror*, and very much on the minds of the critics, itself contains, as all ornately descriptive writing of its kind must, some of the tension between the forward-moving erotics of narrative content on the one hand, and the narrative-stopping erotics of form and *facture* on the other, not to mention between the thematics of sexual possession and that of eroticized unpossessability, which is suggested in the contrast between Manet's two *Nana*-alternatives: between *Nana* herself and *Before the Mirror*.

#### *Pictures in Another Exhibition*

The exhibition of *Before the Mirror* coincided as well with the exhibition, in 1880, of very similar imagery—such as Degas's *Toilette*, displayed in the Impressionist show of that year, which was also held in April. Degas's version of the same theme suggests some rivalry with Manet on a motif made popular in the illustrated press, that of the corset and other female underwear—a motif tied inevitably to the titillating thematics of the courtesan and the prostitute, but also signaling an obsession with femininity and the market it represented.

Another image was shown in the Impressionist exhibition of 1880 which partook of the concerns of *Before the Mirror*, and that was Berthe Morisot's *Young Woman at Her Toilette*, painted some time between 1875 and 1880. Given the Morisot/Manet friendship and family connection (Morisot married Manet's brother Eugène in 1874), it is quite possible that Morisot saw Manet's painting in his studio before it was exhibited at *La Vie Moderne*. Or perhaps it was the other way around, and Manet saw the *Young Woman at Her Toilette* in Morisot's studio and then took to painting his own version. Whichever way it went, there was undeniably a strong current of borrowing and mutual referencing that flowed both ways between Morisot and Manet at this moment, such that the two paintings exhibited in 1880 were linked in an intimate dance. (Morisot also painted a *Young Woman Putting on Her Stocking* in 1880, which surely had something to do with Manet's *Woman Fixing Her Garter*.)<sup>13</sup>

13. It should be noted, as well, that Manet's friend Alfred Stevens also engaged in a series of images of women at their *toilettes*, replete with mirrors and underwear, at about this time, as, for example, his



*Berthe Morisot. Young Woman at Her Toilette. 1875–80.*



But I would like to make the claim a bit stronger, and suggest that it was really *Morisot's* theme, *Morisot's* engagement with this topos of femininity, that Manet took over and exhibited as his own in 1880. For back around 1876, the *toilette* was actually *Morisot's* theme much more insistently and repeatedly than it was Manet's. It was a theme that she tried her hand at several times, depicting it from several different angles—in fact, the *Young Woman at Her Toilette* was part of a whole series of depictions of women with mirrors suggesting a meditation on *Morisot's* own act of dressing and self-preparation, rather more than the thematics of the courtesan.<sup>14</sup> It seems more than likely that Manet was referencing this set of images in his *Before the Mirror*—giving an abbreviated rendition of another one of them, a full-length depiction of a woman in her shift in front of a mirror which includes a fuller mirror-image, surrounded by floral wallpaper, what is perhaps a hanging dress on the left, a curtained window on the right (which Manet's ambiguous bit of blue and white also resembles), and an easy chair or sofa beneath it (which, again, is recalled in the piece of furniture in

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detailed, anecdotalized *Memories and Regrets* of 1875, with a blond woman in a petticoat, peignoir, and blue corset shown seated with her back to a vanity with a little mirror upon it (see William A. Coles, *Alfred Stevens* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1977]). Manet's painting enters into dialogue, therefore, with a pictorial discourse on the *toilette* that was not only very current, but also very close to him—it was a sort of sign of the picture-making world in which he circulated, and of its intimacy.

14. On this series, see Anne Higgonet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 159–68.

Manet's later *Woman Fixing Her Garter*). Manet, then, reclaimed Morisot's image of the space of femininity for himself, shifting it back to the domain of courtesanly imagery, and associating it again, though now with a difference, to the thematizing of voyeurism, the male gaze, and the commodification of the female body.

It is also striking that in *Before the Mirror*, Manet's manner of facture, particularly in his rendering of flesh, is especially Morisotian: a reference to a style of brushwork associated with Morisot's work since at least the mid-1870s. That style of brushwork was particularly in evidence in Morisot's submissions to the Impressionist show of 1880, not only in the *Young Woman at Her Toilette*, but also in an 1878 painting entitled *Summer* (possibly a self-portrait), and in an 1879 image of a woman in a ball gown, in response to which critics attended particularly to her brushwork, calling it "pretty," "delicate," "subtle," charming and seductive, refined, vague and amorphous, implying its womanliness at every turn, and tying her "palette and brush" to the eighteenth century and to Fragonard.<sup>15</sup>

The concentration on brushwork was a signature of Morisot criticism in general—but it was nowhere more acute than in 1880. Like her other submissions to the Impressionist show of that year, Morisot's *Young Woman at Her Toilette* was also described preeminently in terms of its facture. Here is Charles Ephrussi on Morisot's painting:

Berthe Morisot is French in her distinction, elegance, gaiety, and nonchalance. . . . She grinds flower petals onto her palette, in order to spread them later on her canvas with witty, airy touches, thrown down a little haphazardly. These harmonize, blend, and finish by producing something vital, fine, and charming that you do not see so much as intuit. . . . All are seen through fine gray tones, matte white, and light pink, with no shadows, set off with little multicolored daubs, the whole giving the impression of vague and undecided opaline tints.<sup>16</sup>

Now Morisot's manner is labeled as "French," rather than eighteenth-century or feminine *per se*, but in this context, to say she was "French"—that she had "distinction, elegance, gaiety, and nonchalance," that she was "fine and charming"—was almost to say the same thing—that she was rococo. And the remark that she ground "flower petals onto her palette, in order to spread them later on her canvas," which is a gesture to both the form and the content of her work (note the

15. See, among others: Philippe Burty, "Exposition des oeuvres des artistes indépendants, avenue de l'Opéra," *La République Française*, April 10, 1880; Paul de Charry, "Le Salon de 1880: Préface, les impressionnistes," *Le Pays*, April 10, 1880; A. E. [Arthur d'Echerac], "L'exposition des impressionnistes," *La Justice*, April 5, 1880; Paul Mantz, "Exposition des oeuvres des artistes indépendants," *Le Temps*, April 14, 1880 (all cited in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886*, ed. Charles S. Moffett [San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986], pp. 326–28).

16. Charles Ephrussi, "Exposition des artistes indépendants," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, May 1, 1880 (cited in *The New Painting*, p. 327).

flowers and the brushy suggestions of floral patterning in the *Young Woman at Her Toilette*), also calls up her femininity and genders her facture, by connecting her paintwork to the remains of floral arrangements. And through it all is writ a repeated emphasis upon the amorphousness, insubstantiality, and evanescence, the disembodied formlessness of Morisot's style of painting, the production of "something . . . that you do not see so much as intuit," "the impression," produced by "fine gray tones, matte white . . . light pink . . . [and] little multicolored daubs," of "vague and undecided opaline tints."

Since these pictures by Manet and Morisot were shown in contemporaneous shows, one might simply want to say that it comes down to a matter of coincidence, and leave it at that. But it is, for me, something more than that—it is a matter of the particular conjunction, in 1880, of, first, a pronounced and gendered discourse on facture (*vis-à-vis* Morisot's imagery); second, of the shared theme of a woman's *toilette*; and third, of what I take to be a generalized reference, on Manet's part, to both the femininity of Morisot's theme and of Morisot's signature style of handling.

And it is a question of difference as well: the most marked difference in the reception of the two works lies in the way subject matter is attended to—in the case of the writing on Manet's work, through generalized references to *Nana* and to prostitution, which were tagged to the other painting that was shown with it, while such prostitution-suggesting allusions to subject matter were missing from the writing on Morisot's *Young Woman at Her Toilette*. And the subject matter of the two paintings *is* different. With her earring, black neck-band, and what appears to be a white ball gown, Morisot's young woman seems to be at the end of the narrative of the *toilette* that Morisot had traced in 1876. She seems to be situated in a boudoir of upper-class distinction and propriety; particularly given her association with Morisot's other portraits on exhibition in 1880, she seems to declare herself as belonging to Morisot's class. And so, partly because she was painted by a woman as well, there were no ungentlemanly moves to associate a scenario of libidinous voyeurism, illicit dalliance, and sexual commodification with her: hence the absence of the ubiquitous chatter about prostitution; hence the refusal of all discussion of subject matter.

More is given of the young woman's profile in Morisot's image, while even less is given of her mirror image. Indeed, we do not see her image in the mirror at all—instead, we find a reflection of the flowers and cosmetic glassware on the shelf beside her, and a series of white strokes indicating a reflected glimpse of the edge of her gown. The mirror itself is oriented differently, as is her body, *vis-à-vis* our gaze, so that both the mirror and her body are placed at an angle that intersects the background wall with all its suggestions of floral patterning—and in between her body and the mirror we find that shelf with flowers and glassware on it that is then reflected in the mirror; we find the illusionistic rendering of the glassy edge of the mirror; and we also find the mirror frame, which divides the space occupied by her body and that occupied by the mirror into separate domains. And in the

play between glassware and glassy mirror edge, and between the floral patterning of the wall surface, the flowers on the shelf and the reflection of flowers in the mirror, is to be found a play on the different kinds of surfaces associated with cosmetic and painterly artifice, as well as a suggested statement about the indistinctness of the line that divides the different illusory objects and substances which paint can achieve. That gentle play on paint and its illusionism is condensed in the triangulation of three highlights—the glimmering white earring on the pink earlobe, the pink-and-white floral top to the lid of the glass jar, and its pink-and-white reflection in the mirror. Perhaps most important, the mirror surface, the young woman's back and gown, and the wall behind her are each displayed as distinct surfaces, each offering its own scattered world of drifting, amorphous facture: only here and there, and rather indistinctly, resolving itself into some kind of notation—into the representation of some-*thing* (note, for instance, the suggestion of the flower on the wall to the right), reminiscent not only of the rococo, but also of the combination of transparently blended veils and thicker, more articulated application, at once effacing and announcing itself, that constitutes the art of cosmetic facture—of *makeup*.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, Manet's painting of *Before the Mirror* deploys that cosmetic light touch mainly in the facturing of the woman's flesh. Moreover, Manet's painting aligns the back of the woman, the mirror surface, and multicolored background wall on a single plane—the flat plane of the picture—underscoring that alignment in the fitting of the woman's golden head to the gilt frame of the mirror, the bleeding of the brown of the mirror stand into the brown gesture delineating the edge of her right hand, and the fusion of the left edge of her body with the mirror surface and the suggestion of a reflection glimpsed upon it. Body, mirror, wall: these are not separate surfaces here, but one—and it is the surface of representation, the surface on which facture is so evidently deployed. And that facture is much more distinct than Morisot's—the cataloguing of different kinds of painterly gesture that goes on in Manet's work, with its “bouquet of vivid marks,” is not evident in Morisot's painting, with its airy, floral arrays of light-handed touches. Which is simply to say that, for all the thematic and painterly points of convergence between Morisot's and Manet's images, Morisot's work is much less concerted and self-conscious in its display of the artficed materiality of facture, much less determined to isolate facture from the illusions it is used to create, and thus much less dismantling of those illusions. As the critics sought to indicate, Morisot's facture retreats from objecthood along with the body it portrays; it flees the vision it solicits, dissolving and disembodying itself before the gaze, marking itself and the world of *bibeloterie* it represents alike with the signs of fragility, incorporeality, and unpossessability, seeking, impossibly, to situate itself in a private world of eroticized decorative

17. See Higgonet, *Berthe Morisot's Images of Women*, p. 155, for a related, but slightly different reading of this painting.

effects *apart* from the domain of the commodity. Not so Manet's *Before the Mirror*, not so at all.<sup>18</sup>

### *Millinery and Makeup*

Morisot returned to the theme of the *toilette* once later on; Manet did not—though he did return to the subject of a woman in relationship to a skewed mirror in his famous, final *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère*. Before and after his show at La Vie Moderne, however, he did keep on at the particular manner of facture found in *Before the Mirror*: 1880 is surrounded on either side by works done in this style, works that accumulated after the production of *Before the Mirror* in 1877, and all of which feature his interest in the clothing and commodities of women.

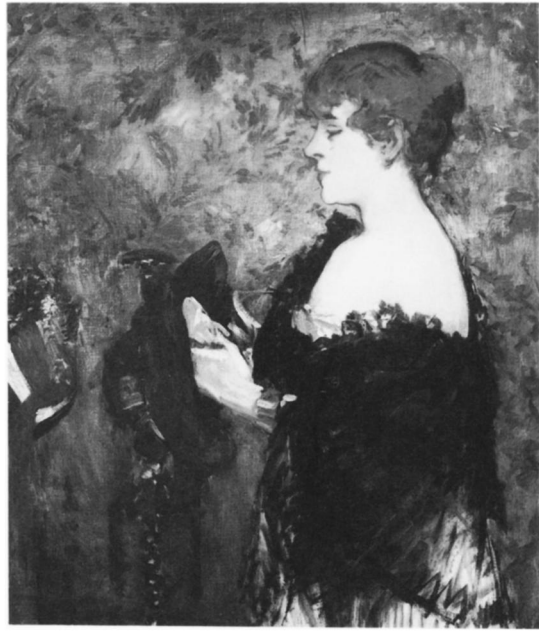
Among the particularly fashion-attentive works exhibited at La Vie Moderne in 1880 was the very un-Morisotian *Plum*. Probably not shown at La Vie Moderne was an 1879 work that was extremely similar to *The Plum* in its subject matter, though very different from it, indeed a kind of alternative to it, in its facture: this was *The Reader of the Illustrated Magazine*. One of the most rococo of Manet's paintings in its handling, *The Reader of the Illustrated Magazine*, like *The Plum*, shows us a female consumer in a café and places a good deal of emphasis upon her costume—in this case, proper street wear: black and beruffed, covering her from chin to wrist, showing some blue lining, with matching black hat and yellow kid gloves. The manner of *The Reader of the Illustrated Magazine* is different from that of the café occupant in *The Plum*—she is upright, confident, and immersed in reading, rather

18. Readers will note that though my inclination is to assign Morisot's image priority in the Morisot/Manet relay of references (rarely is that the tendency, even in feminist readings—usually the assumption is that Morisot must always have acted the student to Manet), Manet's painting still gets more attention in my account, and appears, ultimately, to be deemed the more radical, indeed the "superior" picture, as it would be judged in any canonical modernist account, where production by women automatically would be seen to be qualitatively secondary to production by men. In fact, it has been suggested to me that this aspect of my argument, at least, is antifeminist. I suppose I simply must plead guilty to the latter charge—that is, if feminism is an orthodoxy that enforces agreement on all of its points, including the notion that its brief is either to enlarge the canon to include women or to dismantle the canon altogether. The project of canon critique, while I understand its necessity, does not particularly interest me—either here or elsewhere; I leave it for others, whom it does interest. And yes, Manet's painting, not Morisot's, is the prime object of my discussion—in that sense, I look at Morisot's painting mainly to see how it serves Manet's. It is true also that, while I grant a certain subtlety and decorative delicacy to Morisot's image (and I am not so much of a modernist devout that I mean to devalue those qualities), nonetheless I do see Manet's work as the more challenging and problematizing one of the two—at least, in the terms of this essay. Whether it follows from this that Manet's is the "superior" painting, that it is "superior" because it is a masculine production, that it is "superior" in canonically modernist terms, and that therefore I must subscribe to the (masculinist) doctrine of modernism as a total package—in other words, if I subscribe to it at all, I must subscribe to it *in toto*—is another matter entirely. I can only say that I don't think that any of those propositions follow, and that this essay is meant to show how they do not. I can say also that I am no more interested in arguing superiority and inferiority than I am in the canon *per se*—it is, rather, the peculiarity of Manet's project, the sheer strangeness of it, that I value. Finally, I can say that I believe this to be an essay in another kind of feminism from the one suggested above.



The Reader of the Illustrated Magazine. 1879.

than morose, bored, and slothfully available, and though the beer on the table beside her and her presence alone at a café would seem to mark her, like the woman with the cigarette in *The Plum*, as something other than a *femme honnête*, the image suggests no possibility of transaction with her—that, at any rate, seems not to be its theme. Rather, its theme seems to be that of her own act of consumerism: not only of buying a beer at a café, but of reading what is clearly supposed to be an illustrated journal of the type represented by *La Vie Moderne*—as rapid and illegible as they are, the scribbles on the front and back of the paper on its wooden mount nevertheless suggest images rather than letterpress alone. Included in this woman's consumerism, of course, are the clothes she wears—clothes that were advertised in illustrated journals such as the one she reads. The entire image, including what is probably supposed to be a window giving onto a garden behind her, is rendered brushily—quite differently from the large, flat areas of opaque local color that constitute *The Plum*. Singled out as being of particular interest are the areas—these are areas which are particularly Morisotian—rendering hat, bangs, ruff, gloves, journal, and especially the cosmetized face of *The Reader of the Illustrated Magazine*. Her lips and the flesh of her face are rendered in such a way as to suggest the layering of rouge *on top* of skin, rather more than the skin itself, and thus to align painterly with cosmetic facture. Which is to say that Manet's producerly marks are joined to a thematization of feminine consumerism—the kind of consumerism involved in the production of the effect of femininity—rather than feminine objecthood *per se*. Again, as in



At the Milliner's. 1881.

*Before the Mirror*, those marks refuse to coalesce into the illusion of the flesh-and-blood body that they represent—their suggestion of cosmetics seems to support that refusal: rather than flesh, paint suggests paint, in other words—paint of the feminine kind.<sup>19</sup>

In 1881, the year after the exhibition at *La Vie Moderne*, Manet painted another picture that possesses what I take to be particularly Morisotian facture and that also thematizes female consumerism, albeit somewhat ambiguously: I am referring to the so-called *At the Milliner's*. Despite its posthumous title, the world this picture represents is again that of the female consumer: a world in which production and consumption are collapsed together, in which the consumption of fashion is the production of femininity, and vice versa. *At the Milliner's* is also reminiscent of *Before the Mirror*—in her naked shoulders, her state of dishabille and her implied act of dressing, and in her suggestion of the space of the boudoir. And the floral facture of the wall behind her is strongly reminiscent of Morisot's handling once more, so that the cosmetic space of femininity—the boudoir—the thematization of feminine fashion-consumerism, and the signature of “feminine” painterly style are all brought together yet again.

Neither *The Reader of the Illustrated Magazine* nor *At the Milliner's* were isolated experiments in this conjunction of obsessions with the signs of femininity—

19. See Jean Clay, “Ointments, Makeup, Pollen,” *October* 27 (Winter 1983), pp. 3–44, for a related account of Manet's overall production that has been extremely important to my thinking about it.



Autumn. 1882.

with “feminine” facture and feminine fashion. We find it over and over again in Manet’s work from the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties: for example, in the four-seasons series commissioned by Antonin Proust in 1881, a set of portraits of chic female friends of Manet’s, inspired by both French fashion plates and Japanese-print depictions of courtesans, depicting Méry Laurent, Jeanne Demarsy, and others in terms of seasonal apparel and accessories. In some senses, this series simply represents dressed and finished versions of Manet’s women in boudoirs—women fully transformed into the fashion plates that in their dressing-room processes they prepare themselves to reproduce.

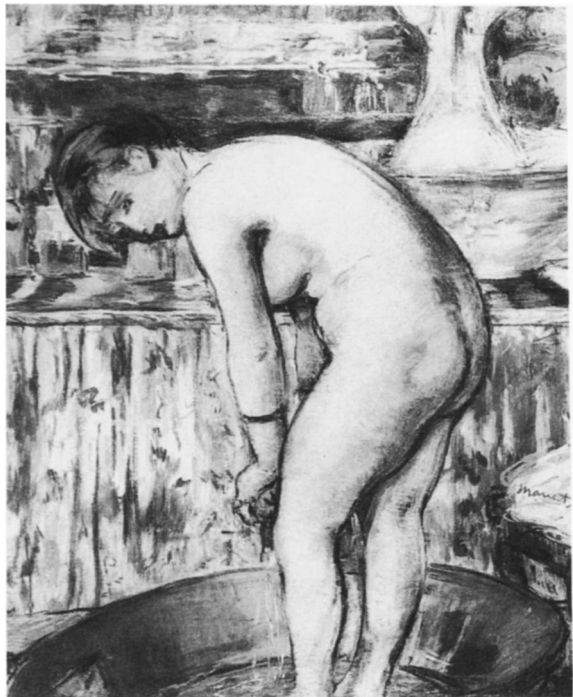
In the last five or six years of his career, Manet was particularly preoccupied with female fashion. In addition to his fashion-thematizing portraits and genre pictures done in pastel and oil, he also dashed off a series of quick fragmentary sketches of fashion fetishes like hats, stockings, and half-boots, sometimes with and sometimes without their female wearers. And then, picking up the threads of a topos from the Venetian Renaissance, Manet went so far, during the same years, as to match his engagement in feminine chic to the bust-length female nude, pairing exposed breasts with a head in an up-to-date hat, the palette of flesh with that of fashion. Manet’s engagement with the nude was, though notorious in the sixties, actually rather rare—and usually the naked female body was not the prime locus of painterly or visual pleasure anyway—usually the terrain of *jouissance* was to be found in accessories and ornament, in everything *around* the body,





Blonde with Bare Breasts. 1878.

*Below:* Woman in a Tub. 1878–79.



everywhere *but* the body itself.<sup>20</sup> By the turn of the seventies into the eighties, even when the body was available to view, it was always in the context of fashion, and self-fashioning.

The one exception to this rule is the pastel *Woman in a Tub*. In spite of its nudity, however, this figure nonetheless belongs to Manet's *toilette* sequence: between the *Woman in a Tub*, *Before the Mirror*, *Nana*, the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*, the so-called *At the Milliner's*, and the fashion-plate pictures of the late seventies and early eighties, we have a kind of catalogue of the important moments in a woman's *toilette*, in which a woman fashions herself and produces her femininity—either implicitly or explicitly under the gaze of a man, or not. Moreover, of all Manet's depictions of femininity, the *Woman in a Tub* is perhaps the most summary, and the least sensuous—the quick, heavy dark lines defining this body's contours enclose fleshly contents without much appeal to the eye, or reward for its perusal—as if stripping the female body of its fashionable coverings and accessories inevitably brought with it a withholding of pleasure, if not outright “de-Venustation.” Surrounding the nude figure in the *Woman in a Tub* is an array of floral marks helping to link it to the *Woman Fixing Her Garter* and all of Manet's other Morisotian works of the late seventies—it is there, not in the naked female body, that Manet disseminates *jouissance*.

*Coda: One Last Painting*

For me, there is no question but that the rather froufrou *Before the Mirror*, and in general the phase of work to which it belongs, is much less compelling than Manet's disruptive work of the sixties had been. Her counterpart, *Nana*, for instance, while on the one hand a narrativized recapitulation of the thematics of Manet's most notorious picture of the sixties, *Olympia*, also represents a regression, an unctuous reversal of the gender politics of that gaze-confronting and gaze-resisting picture. And the gender politics of *Before the Mirror*, or at least of its subject matter, are clearly related to those of *Nana*. But to the degree that Huysmans was right in producing a divided reading of “content” and “form,” the gender politics of *Before the Mirror* are fissured from within, and in that they begin to diverge from *Nana*. For what *Before the Mirror* does is to celebrate a kind of feminized facture which stands *in place of* the gazed-at female body. It locates erotic interest in facture rather than corporeality, and in so doing, it identifies the painter's process of production *with* the commodity of femininity: *with* the feminine process of producing femininity rather than with the “male gaze” onto it. That is the way its “silvery and blond” palette and its “bouquet of vivid marks”

20. On this aspect of Manet's work of the sixties, see my “Manet/Manette.” See as well my “To Paint, To Point, To Pose: Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*,” in *Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, ed. Paul Tucker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 1996).



strains against its own *Nana* subject matter, and its own inscription of and in the culture of the commodity.

It is my view that *Before the Mirror*, triangulated with the series to which it belongs and the images to which it responds, engages with the Third Republic's commodification of the feminine in a number of ways. To start, it is pictorially responsive to the fact that, as a painting, it is itself a spectacular ware, and that when exhibited at a place like *La Vie Moderne*, it implicates itself quite specifically in the larger commodity culture of the day. Then, it is sympathetic to the self-fashioning of women—it is not too much to say that it identifies painting with cosmetic making, with the play of fashion, and with feminine self-commodification. Moreover, it claims the feminized facture identified with Morisot for Manet, and uses that facture to complicate and undermine the strict othering of the feminine that went along with its commodification. And it displays its own factual devices in order to dismantle its own illusion of the female body—and to contradict what was offered up in its less complicated companion, the *Woman Fixing Her Garter*: that is the sense I make of Huysmans's pairing of the two pictures and his critical fissuring of the facture and topos of femininity. In short, I want to contend that the involvement of Manet's *Before the Mirror* in the reciprocal enterprise of commodifying the feminine and feminizing the commodity that marked the nineteenth century distinguishes itself from other such involvements by its identification with the feminine, its making overt the imbrication of painting and

its illusions in commodity culture, and its denaturalization of the related spectacles of painting and femininity.<sup>21</sup>

*Before the Mirror* is not an isolated experiment on Manet's part. It takes part, I believe, in a larger, picture-by-picture analysis of the relationship between painterly illusionism, femininity, and commodity culture that seemed to preoccupy Manet toward the end of his career. As that project culminated critically in the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère*, and as the *Bar* picks up many of the threads of *Before the Mirror*, twists them together, and gives them back some of the sharp edge of Manet's work of the sixties, that is where I wish to end.

Several major claims have been made about this painting: that it is a representation of an emergent class (that of the clerk); that the encounter in its disjunctive mirror image calls up the fascination with clandestine prostitution; that it exemplifies the masculinity of public space.<sup>22</sup> To that list could be added its apparently verbatim illustration of the structure of the "male gaze," in which the subject position, with which the spectator is meant to identify, is masculine, while the object of the gaze is feminine.<sup>23</sup> I wish to make a few brief counter-suggestions about this tremendously complicated painting. First, I believe it is a picture of commodity culture, more than of class *per se*, dividing that culture into two pictorial zones—that of the commodity, on the counter (replete with a signature on a bottle label, punning on the commodity status of the painting itself), and that of consumers, in the mirror.<sup>24</sup> Second, I believe the *Bar* is a painting that uses the

21. According to the Freudian logic followed in a lot of feminist writing, what I have proposed as "identification" with the feminine would be possible on the part of a male subject only in pre-Oedipal terms—only when the feminine is equated with the maternal. I simply do not share the conviction that this is the only possible scenario of masculine identification with the feminine. Anyway, it is more a matter, here, of fashioning a painterly identity within the discursive terms of femininity than a story of the psyche. But since I believe Manet rather insistently used female figures to substitute for, and to figure, himself (this is one of the main points concerning Victorine Meurent made in "Manet/Manette," and of "To Paint, To Point, To Pose"), and since I wish to mark my own departure from another line of feminist orthodoxy on this matter, I shall nonetheless insist on speaking of "identification."

22. See T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 205–58; Clayson, *Painted Love*, pp. 151–52; and Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 51–55.

23. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 14–26.

24. Much of this last section is a variation, in condensed form, of my "Counter, Mirror, Maid: Some Infra-thin Notes on the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère*," forthcoming in *Current Methodologies: 13 Views of Manet's Bar at the Folies-Bérgère*, ed. Bradford Collins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). My reading of the *Bar* as a kind of pictorial self-analysis of its own status as a commodity falls somewhere between seeing Manet as a Marxian prophet of the Frankfurt school and asserting that he shared an awareness, common to most picture makers of his moment, whether "modernist" or *pompier*, that he was producing for a market in luxury commodities. On the latter count, other artists certainly knew they were producing commodities—but only Manet thematizes and de-natures the commodity, and only he paints the intersection between painting-as-a-commodity and other aspects of commodity culture in the way that he does: by means of what the Russian formalists called "impeded form," and "making strange" (see Boris M. Ejzenbaum, "The Theory of the Formal Method," in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1959), p. 13. As for Manet as a Frankfurt school precursor, well, he isn't quite

devices of modern painting precisely to destabilize the structure of gender positionality pertaining to the commodity culture it depicts: its disjunctive mirror unfixes the place of the viewer in front of the painting, such that no identity can be assumed between the spectator of the painting and the male customer depicted within it, and neither can the folded-out barmaid be firmly secured as a safely othered object of the gaze—instead the *Bar* suggests a constant oscillation between the same and the other. Not only that, it argues against its own absolute collapse with the structures of commodity culture that it celebrates by everywhere insisting on its critical *difference* from the world it depicts—by insisting on its status as a *painting* rather than a reflection. This is not a mirror, it seems to say about itself. And third, the *Bar* foregrounds Manet's fascination with fashion and the production of what we might call the femininity effect—in the sartorial splendor of the barmaid in all her store-bought finery (it is not without significance, in this regard, that the spectacular space of the Folies-Bérgère had once been a department store).<sup>25</sup> In this regard, the *Bar* would seem to me to suggest a fairly feminized space, replete with *female* consumers and gazers in the background (one of whom is supposed to be the same Méry Laurent whom Manet depicted over and over again in different hats, dresses, and coats—here she appears, yellow-gloved in the background, in the same pose as Manet's female bar and café customers of the preceding several years).

Finally, the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère* takes up Manet's several-year-long fascination with Morisotian facture and insinuates it into the sharp contrast between the loosely painted mirror image and Manet's more familiar flat foreground mode. That contrast of manners is apparent on first glance: the barmaid who stares out at us is a hard, flat cutout of a figure inserted between two other surfaces, that of the counter with its range of glistening objects, and that of the glittering mirror. In contrast, her reflected body is soft and blurred at its edges, her hair is veiled by the white scumbling that indicates the glare of the mirror, her customer is rendered in quick, broken marks, and all around her is a crowd of flecks and dashes. Aside from its illusionistic function, the logic of this contrast between the finished and the unfinished, the Manetian and the Morisotian, is severalfold—it can be seen to inflect each of the painting's intertwined thematics, from its encounter with commodity culture, to its destructuring of the gaze, to its engagement with fashion and femininity.

On the first count, Manet's *fini* manner is attached to the rendering of objects, of products, of consumables ready for the marketplace; on the other

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that either: for one thing, his analysis of commodity culture is undertaken utterly within the technical terms of painting a pictorial illusion, and for another, that analysis is performed less as a critique (in the negative sense) than as a full-on celebration of the world of commodities of which the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère* is part.

25. See Robert Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 79–81.

hand, the *non-fini* Morisotian manner, which more clearly suggests the process of producing an illusionistic painting, is aligned with subjective acts of consuming—figured everywhere in the reflected crowd, and pinpointed in the figures of female consumers. Thus, in the zone of the bar, several consumable products are aligned with one another; while in the zone of the mirror, two processes are conflated, that of producing a painterly illusion and that of consuming a spectacle, such that not only are the spectacles of painting, fashion, and nightlife folded together, but so are the activities of production and consumption.

On the second count, the barmaid first presents herself to the viewer's gaze as a fully fashioned, perfectly packaged commodity, brand-new, unopened, and unused, not unlike the other wares for sale upon the counter—indeed, her corset-molded hourglass shape, as well as her black-and-white-and-blondness, is rhymed with the shapes and colors of the gold-foil-topped champagne bottles next to her, while the cuff of one of her sleeves mimics the labels on those bottles, the corsage at her bodice echoes the flowers on the countertop, and so on. Clearly the barmaid is a thing among other things for sale, as the glossy impasto of her rendering helps to advertise: the repeated readings of the sexual nature of the reflected encounter between her and the male customer follow in part from that. A view of her as an illustration of the positionality of the “male gaze” follows from that as well, I think.

And yet. Having assimilated experiments such as those surrounding *Before the Mirror* to a more complex meditation on the society of spectacle, the *Bar* destabilizes every formula it proposes, beginning with the sexual commodification of femininity. The sexual innuendo of the reflected encounter between barmaid and customer is undercut by the fact that at every point Manet defines the commodity and its consumption as strictly optical—the mirror, with all of its differently factured games of false scintillation and mismatched reflections (and they are many, not just the one that has so often been remarked), is nothing less than a statement to that effect. Furthermore, while the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère* does not deploy facture to contest its illusions in the same way as *Before the Mirror* had done, on the other hand, in insisting on the disjunction of the mirror reflection with that which it is supposed to reflect, and in underlining that disjunction with its contrasting manners, the *Bar* rends the act of consumption that it depicts in two, and divides it against itself.

The barmaid herself is not simply a piece of commodified femininity; rather, she poses as a sign for the doubleness and dividedness that is both internal to the painting as a whole, and characteristic of the culture of the commodity in which it takes part, and which it analyzes. She figures the relation between consumer and commodity—for she belongs to both zones. And here we arrive at the third count, for the barmaid also figures the feminization of both zones—at once purveyor and purveyed, she leads to our noticing that there are female consumers out there in the audience as well. Standing at the juncture between the painting's marks of production and its objects of consumption, she figures the splicing of

production into consumption, and vice versa too, as integral to the femininity effect: for she stands right in the middle of Manet's associating of painting with the production (as much as the consumption) of femininity.

And it is the barmaid who shows most of all how the apparent opposition, not only between the zones of countertop and mirror, commodities and consumers, but also between Manetian and Morisotian facture, is not after all so neat and clean. For in fact, inasmuch as those two manners are contrasted, they are also interwoven in such a way as to fissure and splinter Manet's handling everywhere across the falsely scintillating surface of the painting. And it is on the decorative surface of the barmaid—for example, in the lace edging of her bodice and sleeves, and in the flowers of her corsage—as well as in her folding out into her reflection, that that interweaving is most marked: as if she serves to locate the infinitesimal place of intersection where a boundary becomes a threshold, where distinction shades into elision, where division merges into collapse. Thus, if the barmaid serves as a hinge between the worlds of the commodity and the consumer, she also functions as a marker of the meeting between two kinds of facture, and of the fact that those two kinds of facture are both contrasted and yet everywhere sewn together, so as to refuse their (gendered) binary opposition, and to refute both the (virile) oneness and the (feminine) two-ness of Manet's signature style.<sup>26</sup>

In these ways, the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère* returns to the thematics of *Before the Mirror*, setting it fully within a complex pictorial analysis of the culture of the feminine commodity. If Manet had not lived long enough to paint the *Bar*, it would have been harder to speak of *Before the Mirror* as I have. For *Before the Mirror* needs the criticality of the *Bar* (or, at least, the *Bar's* complex combination of the celebratory and the critical, the self-promotional and the self-analytical) to reflect back on it. It needs the *Bar's* return to the mirror, this time more thoroughly to drive its wedge between representation and the world, and this time to splinter into pieces. And more than anything else, it needs the *Bar's* return to Manet's earlier manner and its pairing with his later one. (In fact, Manet's style of the sixties was not nearly as univocal as this might suggest, any more than was his style of the seventies: sixties' paintings like the *Luncheon on the Grass* were also characterized by a certain doubleness of facture.<sup>27</sup> And then, where in most of the paintings of the seventies that I have analyzed here Manet used the loose, rococo mode, in others, like *The Plum* and *The Conservatory*, he isolated out the harder, flatter, more finished manner—separating the two factures from each other until he arrived at the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgère*. I am inclined to think, sometimes, that it is

26. It was Zola who termed Manet's sign-board manner of the sixties "virile" (*puissant* is the term he used, over and over again): see "Mon Salon," and "Une nouvelle manière en peinture," in *Emile Zola Salons*, ed. F. W. J. Hemmings and Robert J. Niess (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), pp. 64–68, 70, 102. As for "feminine" at-least-two-ness, see Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 27–30.

27. See my "To Paint, To Point, To Pose."

that division of an essentially double manner into two separate, single ones that accounts for the uncertain quality of Manet's production during the seventies.) All of which is to say that if the *Bar* was a culmination, it was also a return with a critical difference. And if it was an ending, it ended rupturally in the middle, in the place of between-ness where the barmaid was.<sup>28</sup>

28. I want to use the supplemental space of this last footnote to say a few words about the larger project of which this essay is part: and that is a revision of the terms in which Manet's "modernism" is understood. Famously, Manet has been located at the beginning of the teleology of Greenbergian modernism. Repeatedly in Greenberg's own writings, for instance, the name of Manet is used to mark the origin of the history of modernist flatness and of its project of Kantian self-reflexion: "And with Manet and Courbet Western painting reversed its direction" ("Abstract Art," *The Nation*, April 15, 1944); "When, as Manet and the Impressionists began doing . . ." ("The Crisis of the Easel Picture," *Partisan Review*, April 1948); "The apostles of the modern movement, from Manet on . . ." ("Cézanne and the Unity of Modern Art," *Partisan Review*, May–June 1951), etc., in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986–93), vol. 1, p. 201; vol. 2, p. 221; vol. 3, p. 82. It is interesting, however, that when Greenberg actually addresses Manet's work in some depth, Manet begins to function as a figure of strangeness, inconsistency, and eccentricity to his moment rather than of teleology or of the "unity of modern painting" (see "Manet in Philadelphia," *Artforum*, January 1967, in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, pp. 240–44). In brief, it is the latter view of Manet's production that I would like to pursue: by describing Manet's painting in the discursive terms of "difference" rather than of "autonomy," "essence," or "unity." (The notion of "difference" that is at work here, though it is meant to retain its other resonances, including that of gender, is intended first and foremost as a concept about painting *per se* that comes from a tradition other than that of German aesthetics or American formalist criticism, going back to Roger De Piles's definition of color, or *coloris*, as the "difference"—rather than the "essence"—of painting [*Dialogue sur le coloris*, Paris: XXX, 1673]. See Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *La couleur éloquente: Rhétorique et peinture à l'âge classique* [Paris: Flammarion, 1989]; and "Making Up Representation: The Risks of Femininity," *Representations* 20 [Fall 1987], pp. 77–87.)