2008

The Poetics of Black: Manet's Masked Ball at the Opera and Baudelaire's Poetry and Art Criticism

Jennifer S. Pride
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
THE COLLEGE OF VISUAL ARTS, THEATRE AND DANCE

THE POETICS OF BLACK: MANET’S *MASKED BALL AT THE OPERA*
AND BAUDELAIRE’S POETRY AND ART CRITICISM

By

JENNIFER S. PRIDE

A Thesis submitted to the
Department of Art History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2008

Copyright © 2008
Jennifer S. Pride
All Rights Reserved
The members of the Committee approve the Thesis of Jennifer S. Pride defended on 19 March 2008.

Dr. Lauren S. Weingarden  
Professor Directing Thesis

Dr. Richard K. Emmerson  
Committee Member

Dr. Adam Jolles  
Committee Member

Approved:

Dr. Richard K. Emmerson, Chair, Department of Art History

Dr. Sally McRorie, Dean, College of Visual Arts, Theatre and Dance

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
In loving memory of Mema,
Gloria Yvonne Griffin Fowler
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee: Professors Lauren Weingarden, Richard Emmerson, and Adam Jolles for their thorough readings and insightful commentary.

I am especially indebted to Prof. Emmerson for believing in my scholarly ability and thus ensuring that I had the opportunity to write a Master’s thesis.

Without the gentle but challenging encouragement, guidance, and support of my advisor, Prof. Weingarden, this thesis would not have come to fruition. Indeed, I am fortunate to study with this distinguished scholar who has the most beautiful mind and heart of anyone I know. It was exactly ten years ago that, as an undergraduate, I spent the summer in Paris studying nineteenth-century art under her tutelage. My predilection for the works of Manet and Baudelaire began that summer and has culminated in this thesis.

Finally, I am particularly grateful to my parents, Melody and John Pride, my family and friends for their generosity and continued support of my *unconventional* life in academia.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Parisian Carnival Imagery and Women at Masked Balls</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Double Identities in Phantasmagorian Modern Paris</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Modernizing the Danse Macabre</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Conclusion</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: FIGURES</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: POEMS</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Édouard Manet. *Masked Ball at the Opera*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 23 ½ X 28 ¾ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. ................................. 59

Figure 2: Charles-Nicolas Cochin. *Decoration of a Masked Ball Given by the King (The Yew Tree Ball)*, 1745. Engraving. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. ................................................................................ 60

Figure 3: Charles Joseph Natoire. *A Masquerade Ball*. 18th century. Pen and ink on paper. Musée Atger, Faculte de Medecine, Montpellier, France. ................................................................. 61

Figure 4: *A Masked Ball at the Academy of Music at Paris (Paris Opera).* *Harper’s Weekly*, April 10, 1858. ................................................................. 62

Figure 5: Paul Gavarni. *Ciel! Anatole! Carnaval Series*. 1846. Lithograph. 19.6 x 16.5 cm (image); 36.2 x 25.3 cm (sheet). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA. .................................................................................. 63


Figure 7: Manet. *La Parisienne, Study of Ellen Andre*, 1874-75. Oil on canvas. Nationalmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden. ....................................................... 65

Figure 8: Manet. *Berthe Morisot with a Hat, In Mourning*, 1874. Oil on canvas. 62.23 x 50.17 cm. Private Collection. ....................................................... 66

Figure 9: Manet. *Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets*, 1872. Oil on canvas. 55 x 40 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris. ...................................................... 67

Figure 10: Pietro Longhi. *Il Ridotto*. 1740’s. Oil on canvas. Raccotta Salon, Venice. ........................................................................................................... 68

Figure 11: Pietro Longhi. *Ridotto in Venice*. 1750’s. Oil on canvas. 84 x 115 cm. Private collection. ................................................................. 69

Figure 12: Luis Paret y Alcazár. *Masked Ball*. 1771. Oil on canvas. 40 x 51 cm. Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain. ..................................................... 70

Figure 13: Luis Paret y Alcazár. *Elegant Company Preparing for a Masked Ball*. 1770. Oil on canvas. 31 x 26 cm. Private Collection. ......................... 71
Figure 14: El Greco. *Burial of Count Orgaz*. 1588. Oil on canvas. 460 × 360 cm. Santo Tomé, Toledo, Spain. ................................................................. 72

Figure 15: Manet. *The Funeral*. c. 1867. Oil on canvas. 28 5/8 x 35 5/8 in. (72.7 x 90.5 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. ..................... 73

Figure 16: Gustave Courbet. *Burial at Ornans*. 1849-50. Oil on canvas. 314 x 663 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris. ................................................................. 74

Figure 17: Hans Holbein. *Plate XXXV, The New-Married Lady, Danse Macabre Series*, 1538. Woodcut. Project Gutenberg Online. ................................. 75

Figure 18: Thomas Rowlandson. *Death’s Dance*. 1815. Aquatint. 24.1 x 14.2 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Florida State University. .......................... 76

Figure 19: Albrecht Dürer. *Melancholia I*. 1514. Engraving. 31 × 26 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. .................................................. 77

Figure 20: Thomas Rowlandson. *Masquerade*. 1815. Etching with handcoloring. 12 x 20.2 cm (image); 13.4 x 22.8 cm (sheet). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA. ................................................................. 78

Figure 21: Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas. 130.5 x 190 cm (51 3/8 x 74 3/4 in). Musée d’Orsay, Paris. ................................................................. 79

Figure 22: Manet. *Déjeuner sur l’herbe*. 1863. Oil on canvas, 81 x 101 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris. ................................................................. 80

Figure 23: Manet. *Masked Ball*, detail of center female figure with bouquet, orange and parasol. ................................................................. 81

Figure 24: Ernest Christophe. *La Danse Macabre*. 1859. Terracotta. Private Collection. ................................................................. 82
Édouard Manet’s *Masked Ball at the Opera* of 1873 shares formal and thematic relationships with Charles Baudelaire’s poetry and art criticism. Although previous scholars have suggested visual sources for Manet’s paintings, I argue that Baudelaire’s poetry was the textual paradigm for Manet’s *Masked Ball*. My argument considers the roles of women, masks and the *danse macabre* in these works as analogous in both form and content. The women in the *Masked Ball* parallel those in Baudelaire’s poetry, such as “To a Passerby” and “The Mask,” and his art criticism in *The Painter of Modern Life*. The women in both the image and text are constructed with oppositional concepts, words and phrases that indicate their role in nineteenth-century Paris and the many masks they wear in daily life. Next I examine the ways in which Haussmannization, the destructive reordering of Paris during the middle part of the century, presented new problems and opportunities for the artist-as-flâneur. Baudelaire’s poem “The Crowds,” corresponds to Manet’s painting in that both use the mask as a means by which the poet/flâneur/masked ball participants assume a double-identity as they experience the spectacle of modernity as part of the crowd but distanced from it. Lastly, I argue that in the *Masked Ball* Manet modernized traditional *danse macabre* schema by conflating it with funereal attributes. Like the painting, Baudelaire’s poem, *Danse Macabre*, is a modernized version of the schema due to its contemporary poetic form comprising oppositional pairs, such as life/death, and thus establishing both as signifiers for the funeral of Parisian culture, specifically word and image, under Haussmannization. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the binary structures of the Manet’s painting and Baudelaire’s poetry develop from the same social milieu and are thus reciprocal objects that signify the prevailing cultural condition of nineteenth-century Paris.
CHAPTER 1:  
INTRODUCTION

My thesis will consider Édouard Manet’s *Masked Ball at the Opera* of 1873 (Fig. 1) and the intersection of class and gender embedded in the structure of the image. In addition, I will investigate the painting’s formal and thematic relationship with Charles Baudelaire’s poetry and art criticism. The overarching questions guiding my project include: How does Manet’s *Masked Ball* interact with contemporaneous literary and visual culture, particularly Baudelaire’s poetry? What sources might Manet have used to configure the image iconographically and formally? What are the relationships among the paintings’ figurative and formal components and what meanings do they convey?

The *Masked Ball* depicts a transitory moment in the course of a traditional yearly event where social and gender conventions were dismissed in favor of anonymous and imprudent revelry. The image is composed of strong horizontal and vertical elements, as well as stark light and dark contrasts. Black is the dominant color, and some punctuations of primary colors are interspersed on the left side of the picture plane to denote exceptional individuals. A crowd of figures encompasses the foreground of the picture plane and forms a web of diverse social types, particularly among women. Above the dark web of revelers is a white horizontal balcony, with two opposing vertical columns on either side, upon which the viewer can see another level of celebrants. Engaged actively with one another, the figures are pushing, pulling, looking, touching, and gesturing. The theatrical arrangement of the figures who are framed by the balcony invites the beholder’s gaze but effectively severs psychological engagement by refusing to regard the viewer—with the exception of one male figure on the right who is generally considered to be Manet.

Similarly, in Charles Baudelaire’s poems *The Mask* and *Dance Macabre*, first published in *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1857, we find masked women and crowds of figures who are celebrating a masked ball. In *The Mask*, Baudelaire creates a narrative dedicated to the sculptor, Ernest Christophe (1827-1892). The poem describes one of the artist’s allegorical statues as a masked female temptress who fools a surprised male viewer. As in Manet’s *Masked Ball*, women are not always who they appear to be. Masked balls were a way for women to escape their quotidian
lives as wives and mothers and become the other. Contemporaneous accounts of masked balls speak of masked women’s deceptive power and the problems that ensue as a result of foolish men who cannot resist their charms. In my project, I will investigate the relationship between written accounts of masked balls, Baudelaire’s poems, and Manet’s painting as part of a larger social commentary on the activities of bourgeois culture.

In addition, Baudelaire’s Dance Macabre describes a ball in which dancing couples are encountered by a corpse who serves to remind them that they are nothing more than perfumed and made-up skeletons. I contend that Baudelaire’s account of a ball is a parody of bourgeois conventions and, in turn, invites a parodic interpretation of Manet’s Masked Ball. According to Linda Hutcheon, “Parody . . . is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text. . . . Parody is, in another formulation, repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity.”¹ Both artists bring into view the follies of the bourgeoisie who continue the modern practice of the traditional masked ball. Hutcheon further notes: “parody is double coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies.”² As in Baudelaire’s poem, by depicting the foolishness of the bourgeoisie at the masked ball, Manet legitimizes their presence and subverts their actions. Moreover, the bourgeoisie’s dominance over the lower social classes signifies the hierarchical social structure of nineteenth-century Paris that was dismissed during Carnival season, of which masked balls were a part, so that all could participate equally as they would in death (as we will see in Chapter 4). Nevertheless, the demi-monde’s presence denotes the mixing of commerce with pleasure. These social/cultural dichotomies reinforce my argument that Manet’s image, like Baudelaire’s poetry, is built upon contrasting pairs. Finally, Manet’s extensive use of the color black is noteworthy in that it reflects Baudelaire’s position in The Painter of Modern Life that black indicates modernity. Black signifies not only modern fashion, but the contemporaneous essence of modern life in light of the rapid and ongoing social and cultural transformations experienced by Parisians in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Each chapter of this thesis deals with the multiple meanings conveyed by both the painter and poet’s use of black as signifier.

Although the historical question of Manet’s personal relationship with Baudelaire does not fit within the scope of this study, it is important to note that they were, in fact, close friends. It is well documented that the two were constant companions from 1859 until the end of Baudelaire’s life almost a decade later. In an 1864 letter to Théophile Thoré, Baudelaire thanks the art critic for coming to the defense of his friend, Édouard Manet. Baudelaire also discusses Manet’s disposition as a “very straightforward, unaffected person, as reasonable as he can be but unfortunately touched by romanticism at birth.”³ Baudelaire’s ability to make such assessments of Manet’s personality and temperament is a testament to the multifaceted nature of their friendship which, in turn, affected their artistic production. The following year, Baudelaire writes to the art critic Champfleury that Manet’s talent is “strong and will endure.”⁴ In addition to the many letters that establish the relationship between the artist and poet, their symbiotic liaison is further supported by artistic endeavors, as well. In 1864, Baudelaire dedicated a prose poem, *La Corde*, to Manet. Also, following Baudelaire’s death in 1867, Manet asked that his etching of Baudelaire in a hat (date unknown) be used as the frontispiece for the posthumous publication of a collection of Baudelaire’s prose poetry, *Spleen of Paris.*⁵ That Manet desired to permanently associate his image with Baudelaire’s words indicates the artist’s respect for, and alignment with, the poet’s aesthetics.

**State of Literature**

Scholarship to date on Manet’s *Masked Ball at the Opera* has been mainly political in that scholars attempt to relate the painting to contemporaneous political events. Thus, an

---


⁴ Ibid., 153.

⁵ In a letter to publisher Charles Asselineaur, Manet writes: “I believe you are working at this time on an edition of the works of Baudelaire? If you put a portrait at the beginning of ‘Spleen de Paris,’ I have one of Baudelaire with a hat, in other words, as a flâneur, which might not look bad at the start of this book.” Letter translated in Françoise Cachin, *Manet 1832-1883* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983), 158.
examination is warranted of the painting’s underlying contrasting pairs and the ways in which these structural elements form a cohesive view of contemporary Parisian culture. The most recent scholarship dates to the 1980’s and early 1990’s. Only a few catalogue essays and a handful of articles deal primarily with the Masked Ball. Initially, Alain de Leiris argues for a formal connection between Manet’s painting and earlier Spanish precedents, such as El Greco’s Burial of Count Orgaz of 1588. De Leiris denies that Manet’s image signifies any meaning beyond that which is evident iconographically—a masquerade ball at the newly built opera in Paris. Linda Nochlin’s “A Thoroughly Modern Masked Ball,” published in Art In America in 1983, argues that the painting itself is a synecdoche in that it is a cut-off, partial depiction of a whole image that takes place beyond the picture frame. She further argues from a feminist perspective that the cut-off legs hanging over the balcony are a synecdoche of the commodified female body. Regarding the formal structure of the painting Nochlin rejects Alain de Leiris’ correlation between the Masked Ball and El Greco’s Burial of Count Orgaz. She proposes that a source for Manet’s image is Jean-Francois Bosio’s The Ball at the Opera of 1804. However, she admits uncertainty as to whether Manet was familiar with the print and that the differences between the two far outweigh the similarities. Like those who follow her, Nochlin fails to offer a plausible visual source for the Masked Ball and ignores references to textual sources.

In his 1987 article, “The Clown at the Ball: Manet's Masked Ball of the Opera and the Collapse of Monarchism in the Early Third Republic,” John Hutton presents a political reading of the Masked Ball in which he argues that Manet’s painting signifies the death of monarchical power following the fall of Napoleon III in 1871 France by relating it to El Greco’s Burial of Count Orgaz. Hutton builds on de Leiris’ formal association between the two works, particularly the frieze-like arrangement of black-clad figures, to argue that the Masked Ball is a modern political funeral.

Although these authors and others offer noteworthy theories as to visual sources for Manet’s painting, they fail to look outside of visual imagery in an era when artistic expression in all media worked in similar ways to convey what it meant to truly experience modern life. I will show that the formal similarities between painting and text signify the fragmentary traits of modernity. As such, these attributes provide a foundation for my argument that Baudelaire’s poetry was the textual paradigm for Manet’s Masked Ball.
Methodology

I intend to study Manet’s *Masked Ball* using a variety of methods simultaneously. I will build my argument based on formal description, iconographic analysis, semiotics, and post-structuralism by examining the techniques employed by Baudelaire and transcribed by Manet. From this methodological synthesis I will be able to examine fully the painting’s binary structures in relation to those in Baudelaire’s poetry. By looking at shared techniques specific to each medium, I will show how these signifying devices represent a social discourse on modernity. Both the painter and the poet reveal social conditions in medium-specific binary terms that play against one another to create meaning, such as male/female, bourgeoisie/working class, light/dark, primary colors/black, horizontals/verticals, masked/unmasked, virgin/whore, modernity/tradition, transitory/eternal, life/death. In like manner, Baudelaire’s poetry comprises analogous binaries that function as producers of meaning. Both Walter Benjamin and Roman Jakobson have contributed critical studies regarding the binary structure of Baudelaire’s poetry. Although neither scholar has examined the particular poems I will be analyzing in this project, their analyses will help to guide my argument.

My methodological approach draws from theoretical models put forth by literary historian Elizabeth Abel and art historian Lauren Weingarden. Abel uses post-structuralist theory to compare Baudelaire’s art criticism and Delacroix’s painting within a Romantic discourse. In doing so, she emphasizes that the relationship between signifiers, or formal elements, is more important than the signified, or subject matter, and that it is not primarily the elements themselves that are important, but how they function in relation to each other. Weingarden’s theoretical model calls for the unification of formal and iconographical analysis

---

6 It should be noted that my methodology derives from word-and-image studies and differs from the way T.J. Clark approaches Manet and Baudelaire. Whereas Clark views these artist’s works from a Marxist viewpoint, I examine the works as verbal/visual analogues that work within and extend a specific social discourse.

and emphasizes the affinities between visual and literary techniques, such as parody, that serve to “articulate a social and aesthetic discourse on modernity.” In my project I will reveal the parallels between the formal and iconographic elements of the Masked Ball and selected poems from Baudelaire to show that they are indeed analogous on multiple levels. I will also demonstrate that the binary structures of the painting and the poetry develop from the same social milieu and are thus reciprocal objects that signify the prevailing cultural condition of nineteenth-century Paris.

Précis of Chapters

This thesis comprises five chapters: Chapter 1: Introduction; Chapter 2: Parisian Carnival Imagery and Women at Masked Balls; Chapter 3: Double Identities in Phantasmagorian Modern Paris; Chapter 4: Modernizing the Danse Macabre; Chapter 5: Conclusion.

Chapter 2: Parisian Carnival Imagery and Women at Masked Balls traces the history of masked ball imagery in Europe, specifically the tradition of European Carnival, and examines the function of female figures in the Masked Ball. I argue that the female figures in Manet’s painting are analogous to those in Baudelaire’s poetry, such as “To a Passerby” and “The Mask,” and his art criticism in The Painter of Modern Life. The women in both the image and text are constructed with oppositional concepts, words and phrases that indicate their role in nineteenth-century Paris and the many masks they wear in daily life. Both the painter and the poet place great emphasis on the value of artifice, and this is exemplified in their descriptions and representations of women.

Chapter 3: Double Identities in Phantasmagorian Modern Paris offers a brief history of mask iconography in European visual and textual sources. I argue that the mask, as used in Manet’s Masked Ball and Baudelaire’s poem “The Crowds,” is an apparatus that both conceals and reveals identities. Masks also enabled the poet/painter/flâneur to move about the city and experience the spectacle of modernity uninhibitedly. I further purport that Haussmannization,

the destructive reordering of Paris during the middle part of the century, presented new problems and opportunities for the artist-as-flâneur. In this milieu, he assumed a double-identity as he traversed the city’s shifting scenery—while remaining both part of the crowd, but separate from it. Again, both the poet’s and painter’s use of analogous binary oppositions provide a point of reference by which to view the relationship between their works.

Chapter 4: Modernizing the Danse Macabre positions the *Masked Ball* within the European *danse macabre* tradition. Modernized and adapted for a contemporary audience, Manet’s painting differs in many ways from traditional danse macabre imagery. However, I argue that it maintains the same structural elements and conveys similar meaning. As well, Baudelaire’s poem, *Danse Macabre*, is similarly a modernized version of the traditional schema that conforms to contemporary poetic form. Oppositional pairs, such as life/death and present/absent, inform both the painting and the poem, thus establishing both as signifiers for the funeral of Parisian culture under Haussmannization.

Chapter 5 concludes my examination of the analogies between Manet’s *Masked Ball* and Baudelaire’s poetry and art criticism. Additionally, I will present other problems that need further attention and possible directions for future scholarship regarding the *Masked Ball*. 
CHAPTER 2:
PARISIAN CARNIVAL IMAGERY AND WOMEN AT MASKED BALLS

Masked ball imagery has a strong traditional association with the written and spoken word. It was the subject of short stories, such as Alexandre Dumas’ “Masked Ball,” published in 1835, and it was enacted in dramatic performances such as the Goncourt Brother’s play, *Henriette Maréchal*, first performed at the Théâtre-Français in 1865, and Verdi’s opera, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, performed in 1861 at Paris’ Théâtre des Italiens. As part of a contemporary discourse surrounding masked opera balls in Paris, Manet’s painting comprises numerous elements that align it with literary and pictorial works produced during the nineteenth century. However, formal and iconographical similarities are most evident in Baudelaire’s poetry. Previous depictions of masked balls differ significantly from Manet’s in that they do not appear to signify meaning beyond their immediate context as illustrations of an event. The scheme originated in Paris and dates to the early fifteenth century, and also has a long history in the Italian *Commedia dell’arte* satirical theatre tradition. Masked balls in France can be traced to the reign of Charles VI around 1400. Masked opera balls, however, only date to 1713, when the French Royal Music Academy gave permission for the balls to be held annually during Carnival season.

Eighteenth-century depictions of masked balls focus on the ball’s frivolity. An engraving by Charles-Nicolas Cochin (Fig. 2) represents a masked ball given by Louis XV at Versailles in 1745 as an innocent account of participation in masked ball activities that seems to be intent upon recording a moment in history as opposed to signifying greater meaning beyond the illustrated surface. A crowd of masked figures is shown dancing at the lavish royal affair held in Versailles’ Hall of Mirrors to honor the Dauphin’s marriage. The calm grandeur of Versailles’ architecture takes precedence in Cochin’s design, as the celebrants are arranged horizontally across the picture plane and are suppressed in the bottom third of the image. The text on the

---

9 *Un Ballo in Maschera* was first performed in 1859 at Rome’s Apollo Theatre.

10 The Commedia dell’arte is a form of Italian satirical theatre that dates to the fifteenth century.

bottom of the engraving indicates that the scene is meant to be about masked ball decoration. In fact, many of the figures are dressed as yew tree topiaries and function as an extension of the château’s mirror-and-glass interior architectural decoration, which, in turn, reflects the real trees in the garden. Moreover, the figures themselves function as mere decoration in that they do not interact with one another, they are not dancing, and their attention is focused on the two figures in the center of the image for whom the mundane masked ball was held, the Dauphin, Louis, and Marie-Thérèse. Another engraving from about the same time, Charles Joseph Natoire’s *A Masquerade Ball* (Fig. 3), depicts a group of figures in a ballroom. The scene includes two sets of musicians arranged on rows of descending stairs on either side of the picture plane and a stock clown-figure in the background who marches across the dance floor. On the whole, the image is complacent and docile. The figures appear lethargic and are sprawled out along the edges of the ballroom. Like Cochin’s engraving, Natoire’s scene is a conventional representation of a sedate and proper masked ball.

By the nineteenth century, masked ball imagery had evolved from innocuous documentary prints into a form of satirical illustrations printed in newspapers and journals. An illustration in *Harper’s Weekly* shows a masked ball at the Paris Opera in 1858 (Fig. 4). The swirling mass of dancing figures emphasizes gluttony and bacchanalian revelry by means of slothful, corpulent, costumed figures dancing arm in arm in the center of the composition. The convivial conclave includes men dressed as women, women dressed as men, figures in animal costumes, and figures with caricatured heads. This particular representation of a masked ball as caricature is specific to Manet and Baudelaire’s social experience during a time when caricature was utilized as a formal device to convey political and cultural anxieties about the Second

---

12 A portion of the text reads: “Decoration du Bal Masque Donné par le Roy.”


14 *Harper’s Weekly*, April 10, 1858.
Empire, the Third Republic, and the degradation of French culture. Such satirical accounts of masked balls became the norm for printed illustrations by the mid-nineteenth century. Henceforth, masked ball imagery was informed by and part of this new discourse.

In the 1840’s and 50’s, the popularity of masked ball peaked. Gavarni now served as the primary social commentator by producing several series of lithographs that were reprinted in the popular press, such as Carnival and Masques et Visages. Gavarni’s images illustrate the follies of the bourgeois populace who participate in the unsavory festivities of masked balls during carnival season. In her book, The Charged Image: French Lithographic Caricature, 1816-1848, Beatrice Farwell writes: “The majority of Gavarni’s carnival lithographs reflect his interest in the small groups that drift away from the crowd as a consequence of the romantic liaisons that preoccupied many of the participants at a masked ball.” As part of the Carnival series, Ciel! Anatole! (Fig. 5) likely depicts a dramatic moment when a perfidious sexual liaison has been revealed and the male figure, dressed as a woman, is walking away from an encounter. A masked women, whose identity is concealed from the viewer, is wringing her hands to convey her emotional distress at either having been discovered interacting with men other than her husband or her displeasure at discovering her husband’s identity despite his feminine guise.

In 1873, the same year as Manet’s Masked Ball, Alfred Grévin continued the tradition of satirical masked ball engravings, such as his publication in the Petit Journal pour rire entitled The Ball of the Opera (Fig. 6). Grévin’s image depicts a mass of intertwined figures at a masked opera ball. Here, all of the women are masked while the men are unmasked. The stiff, erect posture of the male figures counters the soft, billowy composition of the female figures wedged in-between and hints at the sexual transgressions that occur at masked balls. Moreover, the up-turned noses of the unmasked male figures indicate their implicit superiority and pride as

---

15 The Second Empire, under the rule of Napoleon III, lasted from 1852-1870 and included advances in freedom of the press during both Baudelaire and Manet’s lifetime. The Third Republic, during which Manet painted his Masked Ball, lasted from 1870-1940.

16 Gavarni’s full name is Hippolyte Guillaume Sulpice Chevalier (1804-1866). The Carnival series, which includes the print Ciel! Anatole!, dates to 1846.

opposed to the scandalous gesticulation of the masked female figures. On the left side of the
group a woman wraps her arm around a man from behind while another man has his arm around
her. On the right side, another woman positions her hand on her out-thrust hip. In the center of
the image, a woman is positioned tightly between two male figures who face one another
antagonistically as if they are dueling for the courtesan. The sexually charged group of
intertwined figures foreshadows formal elements later used by Manet. Accordingly, the use of
satire to represent current events in popular culture media became the standardized configuration
for masked ball imagery by the time Manet painted his version in 1873. However, Manet’s
masquerade imagery shifts from satirical to ironical. Rather than creating an image that mocks
the masked ball tradition, Manet’s image illustrates the activities of the masqueraders without
open disapproval.  

Masked ball imagery is intermingled with European carnival tradition which occurred
annually during the weeks immediately preceding Lent. The popularity of the masked balls is
documented in popular travel guides during this time, as well. Baedeker’s 1878 Paris travel
guide, *Paris and Its Environs*, describes the public masked balls as “the most striking and
extravagant of the peculiar customs of Paris” and further notes that although “the rules of
decorum are tolerably well observed . . . it need, however, hardly be said that ladies cannot
attend these balls with propriety.” Another contemporaneous commentary on opera
masquerades calls attention to the many paradoxes of the event. Théophile Gautier describes the
concurrence of classes, discernable by their clothing, as part of the frenzy of shifting identities:

> At the opera, one must give up all claim to individuality, all
privacy. You are but an atom in a whirlwind. You may be
handsome or hideous, stupid or witty, clad in rags or in satin; you
may dance like a bear or like Carlotta Grisi in *La Favorite*. It’s all

---

18 For further information regarding Manet’s use of irony see: Lauren S. Weingarden, “Art
Historical Iconography and Word & Image Studies: Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* and the
Naturalist Novel,” *The Pictured Word: Word & Image Interactions* 2 (Amsterdam: Rodopi,
1988).

19 K. Baedeker, *Paris and Its Environs: With Routes from London to Paris, and from Paris to
the same. Stay, go: your presence or absence makes no
difference. Even if your lungs were made of brass, your voice
would be lost in the general tumult. Though you were Hercules,
you could not struggle against the current. You must surrender and
stay in line. Therein lies the beauty of the Bals de l’Opéra as well
as the drawback: there are so many people around that no one is
really there.20

The present/absent paradox is evident in Manet’s Masked Ball in that although the figures
interact with one another, most do not appear to have any vested interest in their activities or
those with whom they interact. The superficiality of the event, as conveyed by Gautier, fostered
the participant’s ability to attend the event uninhibited by social masks. In particular, bourgeois
women were able to cover the mask of wife and mother with a mask of sexual availability.
During carnival, class and gender distinctions were dismissed so that all citizens could seek
sensual pleasures together as part of the festive season. In his discussion of carnival, Mikhail
Bakhtin writes that carnival was a time to “celebrate temporary liberation from the prevailing
truth of the established order . . . [and] . . . marks the suspension of all hierarchical rank,
privileges, norms and prohibition.”21 In nineteenth-century Paris, the consequences of class
liberation at masked balls were recorded in the many engravings that illustrate the events.
Moreover, Manet’s painting, like Baudelaire’s poetry, presents a thoroughly modern, fleeting
moment that encompasses dichotomies which signify the liberating aspect of masked balls. This
assemblage of symbols, such as masking, class-mixing, and sexuality, is a commentary on the
conditions of nineteenth-century Parisian society.22

211.

21 Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. by H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT
Press, 1965).

22 In a letter to Suzanne Manet dated March 19, 1889, Eugène Manet discusses the conflation of
classes and the visual splendor of Carnival: “Everyone takes part. I overheard a laundress who
was laying out her laundry saying that she had spent 80 francs for Carnival. The whole
population is in gauze, as Columbine, Folie, Harlequin, white or ink dominoes; you see the effect
of all these colors, of all these fresh fabrics. The carriages mix in, brightly draped; they drape
The symbols that form the discourse surrounding masked ball imagery are part of a larger sign system creates meaning. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, a sign cannot exist without the presence of other signs, making a whole sign system necessary for the existence of signs. Thus, female cannot signify without its opposition, male; bourgeois women cannot signify except against working class women. Signs are dependent for their meaning on the existence of their opposite and meaning is established by what a sign is not rather than by what it is. In Manet’s *Masked Ball* and Baudelaire’s lyric poem, “The Mask,” the bourgeois women signify leisure and pleasure while the demimondes signify the working class. For example, a portion of Baudelaire’s poem describes a woman who is born to be “enthroned upon sumptuous beds . . . and charm the leisure of a Pope or Prince.” In describing a prostitute, the author signifies her opposition, the bourgeois wife and mother. The signification is rooted in historical pictorial and written tradition and relies on the fact that in nineteenth-century French culture, a woman’s class could be determined by her clothing style, her participation in cultural conventions, and her level of sexual availability. Because signs are arbitrary, conventional, and are created and agreed upon by a hegemonic community, such cultural conventions make the synchronic particularities of the image understandable by a specific culture. Thus, while Manet’s and Baudelaire’s specialized use of masked ball schema may differ from previous and future renderings, it is created to speak to and from (the context of) nineteenth-century Parisian culture. The artist’s alteration of the signifier forced a conceptual change in that the image and poem do not hold didactic functions, but are ironic commentaries on the ambiguous activities of the bourgeoisie. As irony, the painting and poem are open to multiple meanings and can be interpreted in

the bleachers in white with garlands of flowers. In the old days even the shops were decorated like theater boxes. Everyone dances to the sound of orchestras . . . or carried on floats, with charming grace. Confetti rains down in such a manner that the city is all whitened for two days. We were able to view all this at the center of the spectacle, in the Place de la Prefecture, where the draped bleachers are and where the prize-winning masquerades come to parade.” The letter is housed in the Tabarant Archives at the Morgan Library in New York City.


24 For the poem in its entirety, see Appendix.
different ways by contemporary and future audiences, depending on the audience’s frame of reference.

The female figures in Manet’s *Masked Ball* comprise numerous binaries that correspond to those found in Baudelaire’s poetry in *Les Fleurs du Mal* and his art criticism in *The Painter of Modern Life*. These meaningful oppositional pairs form a signification system in that they suggest something beyond their iconographical context. For example, the virgin/whore pair suggests a larger discourse on the role of women in the nineteenth century—they could fill the conventional role of dutiful wife and mother, a role that parallels the virtues of the virgin type, or they could work as prostitutes. This, in turn, suggests another binary: the issue of class relations during this time—bourgeois/working class—and ultimately signifies the socio-economic conditions of late nineteenth-century Paris. Accordingly, Baudelaire’s art criticism and poetry describe women in binary terms, such as upper/lower class.

In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire expresses his views concerning women and their representations in art in two sections entitled *Women* and *Women: Honest Ones and Others*. In the latter section, the critic delineates the various types of women that can be found in the bars, streets, and art of Paris. Each social stratum has its own female types which are further stratified within each echelon. For example, the working class includes the courtesan, the demimonde, the lorette, the actress, and the slave. It is worth noting that the sexual availability of working class women was understood by their male counterparts as part of daily life in nineteenth-century Paris. Bourgeois women, on the other hand, were not seen as sexually available but as virtuous wives and mothers. Their participation in the activities of modernity were limited and mediated by their husbands so as to maintain the appearance of a proper and chaste home life. During Carnival, however, bourgeois women were allowed to attend masked balls in costume without their husbands. Therefore, the dualistic disposition of the figures within the image calls for a deeper reading regarding behavioral or conventional masks that are, in turn, disguised beneath tangible masks. In her 2001 article, “Parisian Women at the Opera Balls,” Ann Ilan-Alter discusses women’s motivations for participating in the annual event:

It was her desire to attend the masked balls at Carnival, but particularly those at the Opera, that inspired her to forge a more flexible bourgeois identity within nineteenth-century French
The masked opera balls enabled bourgeois women to shed the restraints and limitations of propriety to which she was subjected in her everyday life. She was an unidentifiable, masked, sexually available woman, much like her opposition, the working class woman. At the masquerade balls, women were positioned as both subject and object—as objects to be procured by male consumers in real-life and as subjects to be looked at in paintings. Moreover, the public suggests the private, such as the buying of sexual encounters in a public space that will occur later in a private area. Thus, their presence in Manet’s painting signifies numerous binary pairs analogous to those found in Baudelaire’s poetry, such as interior/exterior, masked/unmasked, virgin/whore, and nature/culture.

Similar ideas regarding women’s roles were related specifically to Manet’s Masked Ball by Linda Nochlin, who discusses the commodification of women’s bodies in her 1983 article, “A Thoroughly Modern Masked Ball”: “For in the Ball at the Opera Manet sets forth erotic pleasure as mutually engaging for prosperous men and marginal or anonymous women, no matter what its ultimate price, literal and figurative—which can hardly be the same for both.”

However, it seems that the women are unidentifiable not in regard to their class but only in so far as their personal identity is concerned. In Women: Honest Ones and Others, Baudelaire discusses women of the “lowlier theatrical world” who “exist very much more for the pleasure of the observer than for their own.” The critic also praises artist’s portrayals of “differences of class and breed [that] are made immediately obvious to the spectator’s eye.” In the same way as Baudelaire’s criticism describes and calls for the categorized portrayals of modern women, Manet’s painting presents women from differing social classes intermingling at a masked ball. The artist positions opposing female types on canvas to signify the stratification inherent in modern society and the momentary lapse of these divisions during Carnival.

---


In addition, formal contrasts, such as light/dark and primary colors/black, supplement the conceptual and social binaries. Class distinctions are evident in the women’s contemporary fashion. While the working class women are dressed in colorful garments, the bourgeois women are dressed in fashionable black attire. Thus, another contrast can be observed between the festive event and the funereal ambience of black. Manet’s striking use of black and strong light/dark contrasts elicits an emotional response in the viewer and functions as a multivalent signifier. Black is the dominant color in many of Manet’s works during this time, such as *La Parisienne: Study of Ellen André, Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets, and Berthe Morisot with a Hat in Mourning* (Figs. 7-9). In his *Salon of 1846*, Baudelaire explicates black clothing as a mark not only of contemporary fashion, but as a symbol of contemporary social practices and psyche, Baudelaire’s statement will be examined thoroughly in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

As both the eternal color of mourning and as fashionable ladies apparel, black signifies the primary binary that informs all of Baudelaire’s writings—that beauty comprises the transitory and the eternal. Like the color black, female beauty encompasses the fleeting and the interminable and is the underpinning of Baudelaire’s poetics.27 In his poem, “To a Passer-by,” Baudelaire describes a woman who has passed the poet on the street as thrilling but deadly:

A woman passed, with a glittering hand
Raising, swinging the hem and flounces of her skirt;
Agile and graceful, her leg was like a statue's.
Tense as in a delirium, I drank
From her eyes, pale sky where tempests germinate,
The sweetness that enthralls and the pleasure that kills.

27 In his *Salon of 1846*, Baudelaire writes at length concerning his notion that black is the color that best conveys the meanings of modernity. I will elaborate this point in Chapter Four’s discussion of the funereal aspects of Manet’s *Masked Ball*. Charles Baudelaire, *Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life* in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 105.
A lightning flash . . . then night! Fleeting beauty
By whose glance I was suddenly reborn,
Will I see you no more before eternity?²⁸

This poem calls forth the transitory/eternal Baudelairean binary as the poet wonders if the fleeting beauty of an unknown, mysterious woman will exist throughout the ages. In like manner, Manet’s *Masked Ball* comprises the fleeting and timeless dichotomy in its representation of an ephemeral moment in a traditional masked opera ball. Moreover, the women in the painting, like those in the poem, possess a beauty that is wholly contemporary in fashion, make-up, and gesture. Yet, as their poses and silhouettes suggest, this beauty will exist in perpetuity with the classic form of the female figure in art. Similarly, Baudelaire compares the passer-by’s leg to a statue, the classical form by which artists represent ideal feminine beauty. Another dichotomy evident in both the poem and the painting is light/dark. The poet describes the sublime moment in which he encountered beauty as a flash of lightning that immediately turned to darkness upon beauty’s passing. In his painting, Manet uses light and dark contrasts in the figures’ clothing to separate the dichotomous beauty of class types—eternal beauty and contemporary beauty. Further tonal oppositions are evident in the formal arrangement of the image such as the isocephalic row of men in black top hats which is positioned as a counterpoint to the white of the balcony.

Finally, Baudelaire’s poem, “The Mask,” also contains numerous dichotomies analogous to Manet’s *Masked Ball*. In this poem, Baudelaire creates a narrative dedicated to the sculptor, Ernest Christophe (1827-1892). The poet describes the artist’s allegorical statue, *The Mask*, in which a masked female temptress fools a surprised male viewer. A portion of the poem reads:

> Why no! It’s but a mask, a lying ornament,
> That visage enlivened by a dainty grimace,
> And look, here is, atrociously shriveled,
> The real, true head, the sincere countenance
> Reversed and hidden by the lying face.

As in Manet’s *Masked Ball*, in this poem women are not always who they appear to be and they evoke dichotomies such as upper/lower class, working women/women of leisure, and

²⁸ To read the poem in its entirety, see Appendix.
masked/unmasked. Not only are the women in the poem and painting structurally analogous, they are iconographically similar, as well. The poem describes a masked woman whose “dainty face” is “framed in a veil of gauze.” In the painting, two of the women in the center of the composition are both masked and veiled. According to social psychologist Efrat Tseëlon, “In that theatre of life people who engage in situation-appropriate behavior are playing ‘roles’ or wearing masks.”29 Masking and veiling serve as signifying devices that denote women’s function in both Parisian life and in representations of social constructs of femininity. Parisian women were subjected to a figurative mask that served to silence and contain their association with irrational and immoral disposition as evident in the female/nature dichotomy. At masquerades, women were able to put on a literal mask that freed them from domestic restraints imposed by male/culture. Another analogous binary set can be found in the description and representation of women as signifiers of the transitory and eternal. The woman in the poem is weeping because she lives and will always continue to live, thus setting up the life/death dichotomy:

She is weeping, fool, because she has lived!
And because she lives! But what she deplores
Most, what makes her shudder down to her knees,
Is that tomorrow, alas! she will still have to live!
Tomorrow, after tomorrow, always! — like us!

Despite its absence, death is evoked by what it is not—it is not life. The woman shudders at the thought that she will not face death. Without the opportunity to face death, she will never obtain equality and will always be set apart from humanity in the form of art. In Manet’s *Masked Ball*, the life/death binary is suggested in the women’s funereal appearance and the arrangement of the central group of figures, as if in a funeral procession, while participating actively in life. Both the painting and the poem grapple with the transient nature of life and the equalizing nature of death with women as the focal point. Life and death are present in both the painting and the poem and will be addressed in the fourth chapter of this thesis. Moreover, the women in Manet’s painting evoke a sense of Baudelarean ennui in their expressionless

faces. A particular type of boredom, ennui, in this case, suggests that the incredibly cultured, over-refined, and over-cultured women experience a type of inescapable, sophisticated boredom in that they have already experienced all the pleasures of the ball. Although they are part of the masquerade, they appear bored, as if they have been to countless balls and attending this one is, ironically, part of fulfilling the social role.

In the first stanza of the poem, Baudelaire sets up physical contrasts evident in the masked female figure who comprises “Those divine sisters, Gracefulness and Strength . . . [and is] adorably slender, divinely robust.” A further opposition is put forth in the poet’s statement that the woman is “made to be enthroned upon sumptuous beds/And to charm the leisure of a Pope or a Prince.” These lines suggest the virgin/whore or wife/courtesan dichotomy that, in turn, reveals class issues. The masked beauty in the role of a prostitute or courtesan would be aligned with the charming of men in power, while her antithesis, the wholesome mother, is suggested by her blatant absence from the stanza. Such contrasts become more striking as the poem progresses and direct correlations can be made with Manet’s painting in that the artist positions both working women and women of leisure at the masked ball.

Another important contrasting pair found in both the text and image is good/evil. Set up in such a way as to evoke further dichotomies, the good/evil dynamic is played out over the course of the poem. In order to tease out the tensions embedded in the text, it is necessary to consider two passages from the poem. The first passage presents all that is good about the masked figure while drawing out contrasts between the negative aspects of the affable characteristics:

And see that smile, voluptuous and delicate,
Where self-conceit displays its ecstasy;
That sly, lingering look, mocking and languorous;
Whose every feature says, with a triumphant air: “Pleasure calls me and Love gives me a crown!”
To that being endowed with so much majesty
See what exciting charm is lent by prettiness!
Let us draw near, and walk around its loveliness.
Here Baudelaire sets up pleasure, love, beauty, and goodness in the true feminine form. A woman whose loveliness is majestic and triumphant could easily charm all with whom she comes in contact. Virtuosity and respectability are intertwined with beauty so that the role of wife and mother, as expressed in the poem and painting, is inextricably bound to cultural mores in nineteenth-century Paris. As the poem progresses, the poet creates a set of contrasting connections that link evil to good. Baudelaire juxtaposes phrases such as “majesty,” “prettiness,” and “loveliness,” with their oppositions, “lying, dainty grimace, atrociously shriveled” in the proceeding lines. The author then continues to lament the fallibility of womanliness:

Poor glamorous beauty! The magnificent stream  
Of your tears flows into my anguished heart;  
Your falsehood makes me drunk and my soul slakes its thirst  
At the flood from your eyes, which Suffering causes!

The negative feminine attributes expressed in these verses serve as a counterpoint to the more positive characteristics conveyed in the previous stanza. Deceit, agony and unattractiveness are revealed when the mask of the perfected feminine construct is removed. For the poet, good and evil dwell together in the masked woman who concealed her malevolent, immoral role as seductress by donning the guise of a moral and virtuous woman. In like manner, Manet’s Masked Ball depicts women who usually play the role of wife and mother, but instead are playing the role of sexually available women by way of masking. Accordingly, what we have is an image and a poem that conceal and reveal figures who concealed and revealed their own identities at masked balls in nineteenth-century Paris.

---

30 Upon close scrutiny of Manet’s Masked Ball at the National Gallery in Washington, DC, I noticed a female figure in the far upper right portion of the crowd. Although barely visible, her head is clear and wrapped in a pale blue cloth. She holds a half-mask up to her face so that she is only partially concealed. The durable form of the mask matches the half-mask that is conspicuously placed in the open space of the floor at the lower left of the painting. Although previous scholars have suggested that the discarded mask on the floor belongs to the female figure standing directly above the mask, I suggest that the mask belongs to the female figure in the upper right background. For one thing, the female figure above the mask is holding a mask of her own, making it unlikely that the mask on the floor would be hers. For another, the half-mask on the floor would fit like a puzzle piece to the half-mask on the shrouded female figure. I have not found any mention of this particular female figure in previous studies and would like to pursue this idea further outside of this thesis.
CHAPTER 3:
DOUBLE IDENTITIES IN PHANTASMAGORIAN MODERN PARIS

This chapter will consider masquerade and identity as well as the historical association between masks and theatricality as exemplified in Manet’s *Masked Ball* and Baudelaire’s art criticism and poetry. In addition to their use in Carnival festivals, masks are also used in ceremony and funerary rites, such as burial or death masks. Moreover, “masks” function in several ways: psychological, as evidenced in my discussion in Chapter 2 of women who wear multiple conventional masks, both material (physical, tangible) and metaphorical (social/cultural roles); ceremonial/ritual, which we will see in Chapter 4 as part of a funerary scheme; and as performance. Masking as performance in both subject matter and formal elements in painting and poetry are the focus of the present chapter. Masks signify the hidden face and altered personality. Whether one dons a mask to hide their personal identity or to assume a public persona, masking facilitates transformation, embodies double identities and enables duplicity. Thus, masks function to both conceal and reveal identities, as we have observed in the representation of women in Manet’s *Masked Ball* and Baudelaire’s writings.

Mask iconography in Europe can be traced through both textual and visual sources. Although masks have been used throughout history and all over the world, the specificities of masking are unique to each culture. European masking alone differs from one country to another and across time. For example, eighteenth-century Italian masquerade masks, as seen in the works of Venetian genre painter Pietro Longhi, are different for men and women in that men wear angular white masks that only cover the upper portion of the face, whereas women wear round, black masks that cover the entire facial area (Figs. 10, 11). In addition, Spanish masks, as seen in works by Paret y Alcazár (Figs. 12, 13), are small black masks that only cover the area

---

31 However, it is not necessarily easy to discern male from female figures in the images since men often dressed in drag at masquerades. Therefore, it is not always clear from the mask’s color alone if the figure is a man or a woman. For examples see Longhi’s *Il Ridotto* (1740s), *Ridotto* (1740s), and *Ridotto in Venice* (1750s). In addition, Francesco Guardi painted similar scenes comprising masked figures in 1750s Venice, such as *Ridotto*. Ridotto translates as both public entertainment in the form of music and dancing, and/or as a gambling parlor.
around the eyes and are worn by both men and women. While these masks differ somewhat from those found in nineteenth-century Paris, the scheme and function remain the same: to conceal identities at events, such as masked balls, where men and women were free to interact in risqué activities. Another commonality among these examples is the juxtaposition of masked female and unmasked male figures within the same scene, which seems to signify the importance placed on maintaining bourgeois women’s virtuosity by means of anonymity.

Textual accounts of masking, in addition to those mentioned in the previous chapter, include Edgar Alan Poe’s “The Masque of the Red Death” first published in 1842. Both Baudelaire and Manet interacted and were familiar with Poe. Baudelaire translated some of Poe’s tales into French and wrote several essays on the author, such as “Edgar Allan Poe, his Life and Works,” while Manet illustrated some of Poe’s short stories such as “The Raven.” The setting for Poe’s “Masque” is a masquerade ball at a castle in which a dense crowd of a thousand guests gather to escape the plague. The short story’s main character, Prince Prospero, assumes a mask of indifference in the face of death. Similarly, the subject of Baudelaire’s poem “The Crowds” takes on a mask of indifference as he moves through the crowd. Crowds were a fascinating phenomenon in nineteenth-century Paris and were often the theme of artists and writers such as Manet and Baudelaire. The reconstruction of Paris under Baron Haussmann in

32 For examples see Alcazár’s Masked Ball and Elegant Company Preparing for a Masked Ball, both dating to the 1770s.

33 Linda Nochlin, “A Thoroughly Modern Masked Ball,” Art In America (November 1983): 196. Nochlin proposes that women’s identities are deleted by their masks and dominoes so that they appear only as anonymous fragments, while the men are identifiable (though she fails to explain how so).


35 Published posthumously in Le spleen de Paris in 1869.

36 Examples include, Edgar Alan Poe’s tales, such as Man of the Crowd and Masque of the Red Death; Emile Zola’s novels, such as Le Ventre de Paris (1873), and paintings such as Monet’s Garden of the Princess (1867), Boulevard des Capucines (1873), and Dance at the Moulin de la
the latter part of the century opened up the once narrow and secluded streets and passageways of medieval Paris. The process of Haussmannization transformed the city by creating large public squares and boulevards where Parisians could stroll among the crowds which the open spaces encouraged. According to Baudelaire, the poet should strive to remain separate from the crowd in which he finds himself immersed.

Likewise, the crowd in Manet’s *Masked Ball* functions as expected in that they are positioned closely together and interact with one another. However, in Baudelairean fashion, some figures manage to remain aloof, such as the two women clad in black at the center of the image and the Polichinelle figure that is cropped by the left side of the canvas. While Manet’s use of mask iconography is informed by the entire history of visual and textual imagery, it draws from traditional Parisian illustrations of masked balls, such as those by Cochin and Natoire discussed in Chapter 2, and is analogous to Baudelaire’s writings. However, Manet’s *Masked Ball* breaks with traditional conventions by depicting the event with references to contemporary satire. Manet, however, shifts from witty satire, which functions as a negative stratagem, to irony, which is a paradox of modernity itself in that it comprises irresolvable binaries such as those found in poetry and painting. Thus, Manet selected the most appropriate elements from masked ball pictorial and literary tradition and combined them to express the sentiments of nineteenth-century Paris and he employs irony to most effectively convey cultural meaning to his modern audience. Figurative masking, as seen in Poe’s tale, is another means of identity-shifting practiced in nineteenth-century Paris. In his prose poem “The Crowds,” Baudelaire writes about

---

*Galette* (1876); Renoir’s *The Great Boulevards* (1875), and *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (1881); Caillebotte’s *Boulevard des Italiens* (1880) and *Paris, A Rainy Day* (1877); Manet’s *Music at the Tuileries* (1862), and *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882).


38 See Baudelaire’s essay *The Painter of Modern Life*.

39 In “Semiology and Visual Interpretation,” Norman Bryson argues that the present is informed by the past. Also, Robert Herbert discusses the influence of caricature on oil painting in *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (40).
the poet who loses himself in the crowd. The poet adopts a type of public mask that enables him to be a lone observer in a diverse crowd of people. As such, the poet assumes a double identity as part of the crowd but isolated from it. The crowd in the Masked Ball mimics the crowd in modern life where the poet masks himself.

The prevailing dichotomies between the Masked Ball and “The Crowds” are public/private, exterior/interior, external/internal and crowd/individual. Present both visually and textually, crowds dominate both works and signify what is absent by their presence. The fluidity of these binaries is essential to uncovering their meaning given that they overlap and cannot exist independently. Significantly, the isolated individual as part of the crowd is integral to Parisian modernity in that honed-in observation skills are necessary to discern the fantastic optical assemblage of the city’s shifting scenery. Recognized by poets, painters and critics, as the cityscape took on a new form that accommodated and fostered crowds, the individual became more sequestered and detached from his/her surroundings and compatriots even while in their midst. The arcades that were built along the old narrow streets during the first half of the century and new wide boulevards provided the public with a safely roofed outdoor area for buying and selling as well as mingling and observing. The early modern form of crowd activity took place in the glass and iron construction of the arcades, a product of industrialization. In his discussion of Parisian modernity, Walter Benjamin links the flâneur’s roaming to the recently installed arcades and newly built boulevards:

The arcades were a cross between a street and an intérieur . . . . The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls . . . . News-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done.

Consequently, finding meaning in virtual isolation while analyzing strangers came to be regarded as a sign of an individual who could rise above the mundane and recognize the beautiful and the bizarre in the exterior turned interior spaces of modern Paris and its inhabitants. Among the

40 To read the poem in its entirety, see Appendix.

arcades and the boulevards, the spectacle of the crowd becomes infinite. The poet/painter-observer weaved his way through the masses while absorbing the endless, ineffable examples of human physiognomy. Baudelaire placed great value on the role of the flâneur and challenged poets and painters to develop their ability to avoid psychological engagement with the crowd. Baudelaire explains his model of the artist-observer in this way:

The crowd is his domain, just as the air is the bird’s, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd. For the perfect idler, for the passionate observer it becomes an immense source of enjoyment to establish his dwelling in the throng, in the ebb and flow, the bustle, the fleeting and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world, such are some of the minor pleasures of those independent, intense and impartial spirits, who do not lend themselves easily to linguistic definitions. The observer is a prince enjoying his incognito wherever he goes.

Functioning as a veil, the crowd becomes a transparent barrier that separates the poet/painter-observer from himself and the crowd of which he is a part. Walter Benjamin discusses this peculiar characteristic of the crowd in his essays on Baudelaire when he writes, “The crowd is a veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria—now a landscape, now a room.” The poet-turned-flâneur had to maintain a sense of distance and mask his emotional and psychological reactions and feelings with a blank expression. Only by remaining detached in the face of visual spectacle can the poet consume and contemplate the spectacle itself.

42 The artist and poet as part of the crowd but separate as observers can also be seen in Manet’s work as early as 1862 in his *Concert in the Tuileries*. Here, Manet depicts a modern crowd that includes portraits of his friends, including the poet, Baudelaire.


The poet in Baudelaire’s “The Crowds” becomes bathed in endless multitude as part of the crowd but separate from it just as brushstrokes bathe the surface of Manet’s painting. The poet is constantly changing masks, or masquerading, in order to become one with the world while, at the same time, withdrawing from the multitude so as to discern the human spectacle through thoughtful retrospection. Baudelaire writes that “The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or someone else, as he chooses.” The poet can assume another personality at will just as the women discussed in chapter one could take on the role of wife and mother or working women. The binary opposition between multitude/solitude is repeated throughout the poem:

It is not given to every man to take a bath of multitude . . . .
Multitude, solitude: identical terms, and interchangeable by the active and fertile poet. The man who is unable to people his solitude is equally unable to be alone in a bustling crowd. The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself or someone else, as he chooses.45

In the crowd, the poet/painter loses his identity but is also aware of the dissolving of the physical, tangible things of this world as they become ineffable, universal and beyond the individual.

In like manner, Manet’s Masked Ball displays the fortuitous features of modern life by means of animated brushwork that captures a temporal moment that contrasts with the permanence of the masked ball tradition practiced by the bourgeoisie. Perpetual self-doubling where the poet/painter loses himself, but maintains self-awareness and brings himself back mirrors the flux of modernity that is manifest in the crowd. Similarly, the loose, painterly brushwork in Manet’s painting is an element of chance that is not bound by the defined contours that viewers were accustomed to seeing in academic painting during this time. Dissolving boundaries in both the painting and the poem signify modernity in that fluidity is necessary so that the poet/painter/flâneur can oscillate between masks as a “solitary and thoughtful stroller

45 For poem see Appendix.
[who] finds a singular intoxication in this universal communion.”\textsuperscript{46} This phrase also denotes the opposition between the interior, subjective individual who observes in isolation and the exterior, objective poet who participates in the ineffable, external world. The notion that being part of the crowd is comparable to being drunk is present in almost every paragraph. Phrases used in “The Crowd,” such as “mysterious drunkenness,” “ineffable orgy,” and “universal communion,” function to engage the reader in euphoric sentiment that conveys the experience of modern Parisian life. The enrapturing quality of the words and themes is heightened by the innovative form of the prose poem that reads like the spoken word without the continual line breaks and boundaries of lyric poetry. The rhythmical cadence of “The Crowds” parallels the seemingly spontaneous element of chance in the \textit{Masked Ball}. Both art forms break with academic conventions that are bound by strict codes for artistic production and offer the viewer glimpses of ever-changing modernity in both subject matter and in newly developed, loosely structured formal elements.

In this poem Baudelaire continues his discussion of the flâneur’s attributes and predisposition to flexible and fluctuating identities:

\begin{quote}
The man who loves to lose himself in a crowd enjoys feverish delights. Enjoying a crowd is an art; and only he can relish a debauch of vitality at the expense of the human species, on whom, in his cradle, a fairy has bestowed the love of masks and masquerading.
\end{quote}

Masquerading involves prostitution of the soul by means of letting go and becoming another in a similar way to the women discussed in Chapter 2 who vacillate between the virgin/whore roles. The poet as prostitute lets go of his authentic self and becomes part of the crowd as he plays with the dichotomy between the self and the non-self. Such an absence or loss of self is comparable to the absence or loss of contour and modeling in modern French painting, such as Manet’s \textit{Masked Ball} where the austere black of the figures’ clothing and top hats are juxtaposed directly against the luminous whites of the balustrade. The figures themselves are not clearly delineated as their forms meld into each other creating a black mass that spans the picture plane much like

\textsuperscript{46} Baudelaire, “The Crowds.”
the crowd in Baudelaire’s poem. Moreover, the masses of colors, composed of tonal
oppositions, match the crowded masses of figures in the image and the poem.

The crowds in Manet’s *Masked Ball* and Baudelaire’s *The Crowds* are composed of
disconsonant individuals who effectuate incongruous experiences of modernity. Both the painter
and the poet demonstrate the irony of the carefully constrained bourgeois who lament the lot of
the seemingly serendipitous poet/painter. People who take chances as opposed to those who do
not are the theme of the final paragraph of the poem:

> It is a good thing sometimes to teach the fortunate of this world, if
> only to humble for an instant their foolish pride, that there are
> higher joys than theirs, finer and more uncircumscribed. The
> founders of colonies, shepherds of peoples, missionary priests
> exiled to the ends of the earth, doubtlessly know something of this
> mysterious drunkenness; and in the midst of the vast family created
> by their genius, they must often laugh at those who pity them
> because of their troubled fortunes and chaste lives.

Here Baudelaire contrasts people of fortune, who are restricted, rigid, and refuse to expose
themselves to new horizons, to the seemingly less-fortunate helpers of humanity, with whom he
equates the poet/painter. The privileged ones become the under-privileged because they “will be
eternally deprived of . . . all the joys and all the sorrows that chance offers.” The author draws
out the irony of the situation in which the bourgeoisie do not allow themselves to undergo the
losing and regaining of the self as part of the modern experience and consequently deny what
will bring about personal growth. In the end, the poet and the reader can laugh at the people of
fortune because of their lack of genuine wealth. Those who usually pity the poet are, in fact, the
ones who should be pitied, according to Baudelaire. Irony plays a similar role in Manet’s
*Masked Ball* in that the artist uses the same class of citizens cast in a crowd set at a masquerade
who are focused on pleasure and leisure without regard for lessons to be learned through
observation and introspection. However, while Baudelaire is critical in an ironic way of the
people who play various social roles and don various masks but, unlike the poet/painter, do not
change in the process, Manet captures the irony of people playing roles and wearing masks
without being critical of the fact that they resume their lives unchanged.
In their book *Masks: Faces of Culture*, John Nunley and Cara McCarty state: “Masks are the most ancient means of changing identity and assuming a new persona. From the beginning, putting on a mask has never been a singular activity. In order for masking to have meaning and relevance, it needs an audience, a minimum of one observer.”

Like works of art, masks presuppose an audience. In the case of Manet’s *Masked Ball*, the need for an audience is multiplied by the layering of masks within the painting that calls for reception in order to implement their performative and signifying functions. Likewise in the “The Crowds,” the poet’s audience is the crowd in which he immerses himself. He is like a performer who wears different masks, particularly that of detachment. Manet’s viewer is able to behold and become entranced by the theatrical aspect of the many masks worn by the crowd of figures in the *Masked Ball*. As discussed in Chapter 2, the women wear social and behavioral masks upon which is placed a masquerade mask. Also, despite their lack of masquerade masks, men, too, wear masks required by their role in Parisian society. The performative and signifying aspects of the masks also extend to the painting’s formal elements. As in the poem where Baudelaire made creative use of poetry’s structure as prose to break from conventional poetic form, so in the painting Manet utilizes unconventional artistic schemes to convey modernity. The artist’s formal techniques function as a device used to capture the viewer’s attention and engage him in the theatricality of technique. The energetic brushwork matches the frenetic subject matter—a crowded gathering of Parisians at a masquerade ball. Theatrical formal elements absorb the viewer into the subject matter that, in turn, mirrors Paris in flux. Loose, irregular brushwork along with the awkward juxtaposition of figures, imposing interior architecture that closes off spatial depth, and the concentrated use of black next to brilliant primary colors and white, are some of the elements that absorb the viewer. These theatrical techniques enliven the image and cause the viewer’s eye to roam actively around the painting, rather than fixating on one aspect.


48 Although my use of the terms “absorption” and “theatricality” draws from Michael Fried’s *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), I do not base my argument on his work. Fried’s categories as defined in his book are rather convoluted and are extraneous to this study particularly because they pertain to the eighteenth century.
The figures, absorbed in the activity of the masquerade, engage actively with one another without acknowledging the beholder. Such a denial of psychological engagement, like that employed by the flâneur, enables the viewer to absorb the scene despite the distraction caused by the disjointed formal elements. Thus, there is no direct engagement between artist and subject, nor between subject and viewer. The frenetic brushwork and formal contrasts, however, energize the picture plane and create a lasting impression in the viewer’s mind. Consequently, the subject matter of the painting denies a beholder while the theatricalized formal elements attract a beholder. Thus, absorption and theatricality function as binary devices that play off one another in Manet’s image and serve to engage the beholder while turning the image, like the crowd it portrays, into spectacle.

Finally, I would like offer a brief analysis of the implications of the Polichinelle figure in Manet’s *Masked Ball* and suggest an alternative reading of the clown as the displaced poet meant to parallel Baudelaire’s outcast poet described in his prose poem, “The Old Clown.” As such, the clown connotes Manet’s attitude regarding the negative reception of his work by the Academy, as opposed to the politicized readings offered by Linda Nochlin, John Hutton, and Beth Archer Brombert. Hutton offers several questions pertaining to the depiction of Polichinelle/Pierrot/MacMahon as a possible signifier of morality and the passing political regime of Napoleon III. Similarly, Nochlin suggests the inclusion of the half-figure of Polichinelle in Manet’s *Masked Ball* was a deliberate criticism of President MacMahon’s moral monarchy by placing him in a depiction of the immoral world of which Manet is a part. In Brombert’s brief discussion of the Polichinelle character in the painting and in four subsequent

49 Published posthumously in *Le spleen de Paris* in 1869. To read the poem in its entirety, see Appendix.

50 In fact, Manet might have intended to associate the Polichinelle figure with death in light of the Franco-Prussian war and the Paris Commune (1871). However, such arguments are beyond the scope of this word-and-image study of Manet’s *Masked Ball*.


single figure works by Manet, she agrees with Nochlin and Hutton’s assertions that Polichinelle is a satire of government and Salon officials, specifically President MacMahon.\footnote{Beth Archer Brombert, “Polichinelle,” in \textit{Edouard Manet: Rebel in a Frock Coat} (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1996), 338-363.}

I disagree with the aforementioned political readings of the Polichinelle figure. It seems plausible that there is a specifically modern and funereal meaning to the Polichinelle figure. Cut-off by the frame on the left side of the \textit{Masked Ball}, the character likely signifies the Baudelairean poet who, like the clown, is no longer en vogue and is dead to modern Paris. In “The Old Clown,” Baudelaire equates the clown with the poet—both useless to society. As the narrator of the poem, Baudelaire acts as a flâneur as he moves through the spectacle of the crowd scrutinizing the scene of Parisians of all classes at the annual fair. However, his attention focuses on a clown who has separated himself from the spectacle. The poem speaks of the distress of the poet-clown who once played an integral role in Parisian culture. The forgotten clown, no longer a valued member of society, is pushed into the fringes of culture by reveling masses. Like the poet in “The Crowds,” Manet’s Polichinelle is part of the crowd but separate from it. The first half of the poem, which describes the chaotic atmosphere of the fair and its multitudes, contrasts sharply with the second half that reveals the isolation and solitude of the individual poet. Baudelaire contrasts the impoverished poet-clown against the excessive materialism of the crowd: “as if—ashamed—he had exiled himself from all of these splendors.” Instead, he is watching the frivolous activities of the crowds introspectively—not so he can observe and learn, rather so he can ponder the degradation of the crowds who, in their quest for superficial pleasures, have relinquished their yearning for meaningful intellectual stimuli. The crowds at the fair have become complacent in their decadence while the old clown has been reduced to despicable poverty:

\begin{quote}
Everywhere joy, success, debauchery; everywhere the certainty of bread for tomorrow; everywhere the frenetic explosion of vitality. Here, absolute misery, misery decked out—as a crowning horror—in comic rags, upon which need rather than art had introduced contrast. He didn't laugh, this poor wretch! He didn't cry, he didn't dance, he didn't gesture, he didn't shout; he sang no song, either
\end{quote}
happy or sad; he didn't plead. He was mute and immobile. He had renounced, he had abdicated. His fate was fixed. But what a probing, unforgettable gaze he paraded upon the crowd and the lights[
.
]

Despite his social displacement, the poet-clown, ever the flâneur, continues to survey and examine his surroundings. The poet-clown’s natural proclivity toward absorbing and discerning the movements of the crowds continues to the very end, leading Baudelaire to link the clown to the poet:

[And] I said to myself: I have just seen the very portrait of the old man of letters who has outlived his generation, which he had brilliantly amused, of the old poet without friends, without family, without children, degraded by his misery and by the ingratitude of the public, and into whose booth the forgetful world no longer wishes to enter!

Likewise, in Manet’s *Masked Ball* the Polichinelle character maintains a double identity as part of, but separate from the masqueraders. As such, the figure is like the poet-clown in the poem who watches the crowd but has abdicated his role as active flâneur. Manet’s Polichinelle is turned to face the crowd with his back to the viewer. His gaze, as in the poem, is fixed on the spectacle of the crowd while his position is fixed and he is rendered immobile. He is not strolling as a poet-observer would; rather he has “exiled himself from all [the] splendors” of the masked ball, in the same way as the poet-clown in the Baudelaire’s poem.

Considering the parallels between the poem and the painting, Manet’s Polichinelle encapsulates Baudelaire’s conception of modernity as manifest in the crowd and of the poet/painter/clown as a flâneur who is both in and out of the crowd. In addition, the clown in the *Masked Ball* is analogous to the poet-clown in *The Old Clown* in that both are outcasts, situated on the periphery of crowded vistas. Moreover, if the figure of Polichinelle is

---

54 In fact, despite Linda Nochlin’s association of the Polichinelle in Manet’s *Masked Ball* with President MacMahon, in *A Thoroughly Modern Masked Ball*, she notes that “the partially visible figure of Polichinelle . . . seems more like an observer than a participant.” Thus supporting my claim that the figure is meant to be the poet-observer described by Baudelaire.
intrinsically political, as previous scholars have suggested, it remains doubtful that Manet would have included him in a scene of urban pleasure. Thus, it is my contention that Manet made reference to Baudelaire’s poem which was meant to be self-referential. As such, the poem is an example of ironic self-reflexivity utilized by the poet to call attention to his own role in life—that of the formerly admired, presently displaced poet. I propose that Manet carefully placed the clown on the fringes of the canvas to signify the death of art in light of the Academy’s continual rejections of his works and of society’s rejection of Baudelaire’s writings—hence the funeral of image and word.\footnote{I anticipate developing this notion in a separate study to follow this thesis.}
CHAPTER 4: MODERNIZING THE DANSE MACABRE

In this chapter, I will situate Manet’s *Masked Ball* within the European *danse macabre* tradition to argue that it is a thoroughly modern and specifically constructed dance of death. Like Baudelaire’s poem, *Danse macabre*, Manet’s painting dances between polarities such as life/death, mortality/immortality, preservation/decay, beautiful/sublime, eternal/contingent, nostalgia/modernity. In addition, I will consider possible visual and textual iconographic and formal sources for the *Masked Ball*, including that put forth in 1980 by Alain de Leiris, who argues for a compositional correlation between Manet’s painting and El Greco’s *Burial of Count Orgaz* of 1588 (Fig. 14). I propose that although Manet may have borrowed iconographical and formal elements from El Greco, the *Masked Ball* is structurally analogous to Baudelaire’s poetry and art criticism. Moreover, de Leiris disregards any symbolic content in Manet’s painting in favor of a strictly formalist reading, whereas I contend that Manet’s extensive use of funereal elements indeed suggests meaning beyond painterly technique. Furthermore, I will examine the iconographical and formal similarities between Manet’s *Masked Ball*, his earlier painting, *Funeral* of 1867 (Fig. 15), and Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans* of 1849-50 (Fig. 16). *Funeral* depicts a crowd of black-clad figures in a funeral procession similar to the grouping in

56 I should point out that historically, funerals and the danse macabre tradition are entirely separate concepts. I argue that Manet’s *Masked Ball* is a type of funeral that contains funereal attributes as discussed throughout this study, and that the image conforms to and deviates from traditional *danse macabre* imagery as discussed specifically in Chapter 4. The danse macabre is a reminder of death whereas a funeral is a signifier of death. It is possible, however, that Manet conflated the two concepts. It seems to me that they intersect in this painting as Manet continues to conflate and blur the boundaries between traditional and conventional representations.


58 According to de Leiris, Manet’s *Masked Ball* is similar to El Greco’s *Burial* in its formal arrangement and not in content: “[A]nd the blacks of the *Opera Ball*, unlike the blacks in El Greco’s *Burial*, convey no sense of mourning or death.” It is my contention, as will be argued throughout this chapter, that Manet’s blacks do convey a sense of mourning and are intended to evoke a funereal scene in the tradition of the danse macabre.

42
the *Masked Ball*. In like manner, Courbet’s *Burial* presents a crowded gathering of unidealized, mourning townspeople dressed in black and arranged in a freize-like formation across the picture plane. By relating these images, I intend to further qualify Manet’s *Masked Ball* as a funereal scene in the tradition of the danse macabre. The danse macabre is a reminder of death, whereas a funeral is a signifier of death. In the *Masked Ball* Manet funeralizes the danse macabre. Finally, I propose further textual sources for the *Masked Ball* can be found in Baudelaire’s poem, *Danse Macabre*, and his art criticism in *Salon of 1846*.

Like masked ball schema, the danse macabre scheme originated in Paris and dates to the late fourteenth century. The conventional schema includes a skeleton that functions as a visible reminder of mortality, and individuals who are the subjected to Death’s antics. Death iconography continued to be used in various settings such as the fourteenth-century Campo Santo frescoes in Pisa by Francesco Traini, the Church of the Innocents in Paris commissioned by Duc de Berry in 1408, illustrations published by Guyot Marchant in 1480’s Paris, poetry by Jean le Fèvre and François Villon in Paris and John Lydgate in London, and in church and cemetery frescoes all over Europe. Initially, the theme was the dance of the dead in which a hollow, decaying corpse of an individual dead human served to represent the future of the mortals he encountered from all walks of like. By the sixteenth century the corpse had become a skeleton and, as such, the personification of Death. In Hans Holbein the Younger’s woodcuts and engravings, the skeleton is a frail, thin, active representation of the concept of Death (Fig. 17). The scheme is meant to remind the viewer that all must face death, the great equalizer. Accordingly, the iconography of Death in dance macabre imagery includes a skeleton, mortals, a procession of individuals ranked according to social class, and a dance or moment of deception by Death.

Nineteenth-century artists transformed and reconfigured the dance of death schema so as to better convey a modern zeitgeist. In England caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson illustrated a book titled *The English Dance of Death* (1814-16) in which Death takes many forms as he interacts with the living. However, Rowlandson’s key image, *Death’s Dance* (Fig. 18), does not depict any living beings. Rather, the etching portrays a skeleton sitting astride a globe surrounded by deadly and corrupt paraphernalia including drugs, compounds, gun powder, opium, arsenic, mercury, swords, guns, bullets, a hatchet, cards and dice. The skeleton, as the
personification of Death, holds an arrow in his left hand and wears a lop-sided crown on his grimacing skull. With his skull in his hand, Rowlandson’s Death recalls the melancholia type used notably by Dürer in his sixteenth-century engraving, *Melancholia* (Fig. 19). In Rowlandson’s image, Death and his accoutrements are rendered inactive and ineffective, and his expression is one of ennui. On the whole, the scene has little to do with the Dance of Death since it deviates from previous imagery representing the theme in that only Death is depicted. In fact, if it were not for the text included in the form of a book that reads: “Death’s Dance,” the viewer would not likely associate this image with the medieval danse macabre. Traditional depictions of the danse macabre differ from Rowlandson’s representation in that Death is shown consistently dancing or courting living individuals of all ranks and types. *Death’s Dance*, however, presents Death personified but not in the act of deceiving mortals and leading them to their demise. *Death’s Dance* breaks with traditional conventions by showing an ineffectual caricatured skeleton that does not interact with the living. Rowlandson’s image, therefore, is a satire on the follies of modern progress while his Death is a caricature of traditional depictions of the figure. Thus, *Death’s Dance* continues the traditional personification of Death, but it is a contemporary variation of the theme.

---

59 The arrow could be meant to signify martyrdom, such as that of Saint Sebastian, but would require further research beyond the scope of this thesis.

60 Although the viewer immediately recognizes the skeleton as Death personified, due to Rowlandson’s conventional scheme, the viewer (excluding contemporaneous viewers) would not readily make the association with the danse macabre tradition.

61 Another difference can be found in the shifting function of the schematic representation. During the fourteenth century’s wars, famine and Black Death, the danse macabre was used as a type of *momento mori* that served a didactic function to remind the viewer to be prepared for their inevitable death—something Rowlandson’s image fails to do.

62 The weapons, concoctions and gambling paraphernalia are encased in fire at the base of the world on which Death sits. This assemblage of symbols is a commentary on the conditions of early nineteenth-century England and the country’s interaction with the world at large—notably, the globe shows America and India, indicating England’s geo-political associations. The detritus of modern life and so-called progress has led the world down a retrograde and dangerous path. Death seems to have given up and sits in the traditional melancholy pose, stripped of the effectiveness of his accoutrements and he does not seem to care.
Another image by Rowlandson in the danse macabre tradition is *Masquerade* (Fig. 20). Like Manet’s *Masked Ball*, Rowlandson’s dance comprises crowds of figures who are participating in a masquerade at an opera house. However, despite the painting’s ambiguous title, Death takes center stage at this masquerade. In fact, the skeleton seems to have just removed his mask, which he holds in his left hand, to expose his true identity as Death. By revealing his once concealed identity, Death is able to confront the crowds (as in Poe’s *Masque* discussed in the previous chapter) with their own mortality. In turn, the revelers cower and stumble around him in order to avoid his wrath. In an ironic twist, the figures who stumble on the right side of the picture plane appear humbled and scared, while those on the left seem to rise up in anger as if to oppose the message of mortality. The crowds in the background, along with the musicians playing in the balcony, fail to take notice of Death’s appearance and continue to revel in the foolhardy atmosphere of the ball. Death is dancing actively while perched precariously above a robe and crown lying on the floor to the right. The latter is likely meant to signify Christ and the idea that all must face death even as Christ who was relegated to the same fate. Accordingly, like medieval versions of the danse macabre, these objects serve to remind the viewer of the transitory nature of life and the importance of living a modest and moral life in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven. As in *Death’s Dance*, Rowlandson’s *Masquerade* maintains some aspects of the medieval dance macabre tradition, such as the confrontation of the living by the dead, yet it is modified to speak to his contemporary audience. Although the structure of the myth remains intact, they myth’s content has shifted for conventional purposes.\(^{63}\)

Manet’s *Masked Ball*, like Rowlandson’s *Death’s Dance* and *Masquerade*, can be viewed as a modernized version of the medieval dance macabre schema. As we shall see, by intermingling funereal attributes with aspects of conventional danse macabre iconography, Manet creates a modernized version of the schema. The modernization of traditional themes is indicative of Manet’s work. Variations on old schemata can be found throughout the artist’s

---

\(^{63}\) In Peircean terms, the icon, Death’s skeleton, the indexical mark of caricature (the artist’s time-specific medium), and the conventional symbol of death’s universality are all part of the artist’s effort (conscious and unconscious) to represent the idea of the life vs. death, and to participate in the discourse of the danse macabre pictorial tradition. Also, this idea could be read as: The *Dance Macabre* functions as the sign-vehicle; Death/skeleton functions as the referential object; book-reader/image-viewer function as the interpretant.
œuvre such as Olympia (Fig. 21) and Déjeuner sur l’herbe (Fig. 22). In these images, Manet interprets traditional subject matter differently than his predecessors. His Olympia is not the traditional idealized nude of previous artists; rather, she is a realistic depiction of a model and aspiring artist known to the artist and contemporary viewers. Likewise, the Déjeuner sur l’herbe presents a time-honored gathering of companions in nature, but the image comprises atypical elements that modernize the pastoral theme such as figures identifiable as the artist’s friends and relatives, including an unidealized model, the same Victorine who posed for Olympia. Here Victorine, masquerading as a generic, yet modern prostitute type, has shed her clothes to reveal her nakedness as she stares out of the picture plane into the viewer’s space. As well, the compositional disunity of these images, such as the disorganization and ambiguity of spatial composition, carries over into Manet’s Masked Ball. In the same way that Manet parodies the conventional female nude and pastoral scene, so he parodies the tradition of the danse macabre.

In the Masked Ball, Manet creates a scene that contains all the elements of the danse macabre with the exception of the personification of Death. However, by the late nineteenth century Death did not necessarily need to be personified as his presence could be powerfully suggested by his absence from the schema. Indeed, by the 1850s danse macabre schema was already being adapted for contemporaneous audiences by Baudelaire, whose Dance Macabre demonstrates a departure from the traditional theme in part by ascribing beauty and pleasure to

Art historian Lauren S. Weingarden discusses this characteristic of Manet’s method in her 2008 essay, “The Photographic Subversion: Benjamin, Manet and Art(istic) Reproduction”: “For Manet, parody became the means to achieve this Baudelairean effect. By inscribing both ‘continuity’ with, and ‘critical distance’ from, the old masterpieces in the new ones, Manet sought to subvert the viewer’s aesthetic expectations, promote critical self-reflection and, thereby, advance an ongoing process of cultural renewal” (11).

In an 1879 essay on Manet, Zola praises Olympia as a modernized, truthful version of the classic theme of Venus: “When other artists correct nature by painting Venus, they lie. Manet asked himself why he should lie. Why not tell the truth? He has introduced us to Olympia, a girl of our own times, whom we have met in the streets pulling a thin shawl of faded wool over her narrow shoulders. As usual the public took good care not to understand what the painter wanted.”
death’s skeleton as opposed to the fear inscribed in previous representations. Within a few years, poets such as Henri Cazalis were adapting the theme as well. In 1874, Cazalis composed a symphonic poem, *La Danse macabre*, which was contemporaneously transposed into a musical score by the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns. Because these are musical scores rather than images, these adaptations do not personify Death according to tradition; rather, they interpret and abstract the standard schema for a modern audience—thus maintaining continuity with the past while breaking with limited visual and narrative traditions. By continuing to modify and adapt the traditional dance of death schema, Manet was able to participate in the discourse of the danse macabre.

Manet selected the most appropriate elements from the danse macabre pictorial tradition and combined them to express the sentiments of nineteenth-century Paris. In doing so, he employs parody most effectively to convey meaning to his modern audience. In the *Masked Ball*, Death is signified by its physical absence from the festivities. Manet modified the conventional schema by shifting danse macabre iconography from satirical, as evidenced in Rowlandson’s imagery, to parodic. Parody is apparent in his ambiguous depiction of modern cultural practices and in his disregard for the standardized schema of the dance of death. Claude Levi-Strauss argues that the structure of the image/myth itself, the *langue*, exists in reversible time. Moreover, although the theme’s underlying structure/overarching scheme remains the same, it can be translated and manipulated by expansion or reduction. The myth has a malleability that lends itself the ability to conform to social conventions in specific periods, synchronically, yet maintain its basic structure across time, diachronically. Certain patterns or themes develop concerning the ways in which Death appears or does not, interacts with mortals, and his accoutrements—these structural relations form binary oppositions that can be understood by different cultures throughout time since the oppositions that comprise the structure of the danse macabre remain the same: tradition/modern, past/present, eternal/transitory, mortality/immortality. Ultimately, however, danse macabre imagery is composed to reveal a

---

66 In *The Poetry of Villon and Baudelaire: Two Worlds, One Human Condition* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1997), 146-47, Robert Daniel argues that Baudelaire left out the definite article “La” so as to distinguish his poem, “Danse Macabre,” as an individual adaptation that is to be viewed separately from the medieval tradition of La Danse Macabre.
single encompassing binary: life/death. The concept of death, signified here by funereal accoutrements, and danse macabre imagery exists in the past, present, and future but what changes is the parole, or specificities of the narrative or representation. These include the formal method of illustration (in this case, parodic painting), the appearance of Death (here he is connoted by his omission) and the funereal attributes included in the iconographical scheme, such as the women wearing veils, holding flowers, parasols and fruit. This particular representation of the danse macabre, as parody, is specific to Manet’s social experience during a time when parody was utilized as a formal device to convey political and cultural anxieties about the changes occurring in Parisian daily life.

The life/death and present/absent binaries evident in Manet’s Masked Ball can be found in the presence of living beings adorned in funereal raiment against the absence of Death’s physical manifestation—since what is not shown, but is suggested, is as important as what is depicted. For Manet, the signifier of the myth is a funeral; in particular, the funeral of Parisian culture at a time when the city was undergoing extensive rebuilding under Baron Haussmann as discussed in Chapter 3. As well, both the artist and his friend, Baudelaire, were marginalized continually by the academic establishment due to their radical artistic methodologies that broke from tradition so as to express the multiplicity of modernity. Thus signifying the funeral of image and word, as the Polichinelle figure discussed in the previous chapter, Manet’s Masked Ball presents masked and veiled figures dressed in black and arranged in a complicated freeze-like formation along the picture plane.

In his 1980 article, de Leiris compares Manet’s arrangement of male figures to El Greco’s Burial of Count Orgaz of 1588 (Fig. 14). El Greco’s Burial presents a funeral scene that is divided into two horizontal bands similar to those found in the Masked Ball. However,

67 In his article, “The Clown at the Ball: Manet’s Masked Ball of the Opera and the Collapse of Monarchism in the Early Third Republic,” Oxford Art Journal 10:2 (1987): 76-94, John Hutton argues that Manet’s painting signifies the death of monarchical power in 1873 France by relating it to El Greco’s Burial of Count Orgaz (1856). Hutton acknowledges de Leiris’s earlier association of the two images based on formal grounds such as the frieze-like row of black clad figures across the picture plane. However, Hutton notes that de Leiris neglects to provide any plausible reasons beyond formal elements as to why Manet would base a painting of a masked ball on a funeral painting. In addition, the author suggests that the assassination of the Swedish King at a masked ball is the obvious reason for an association between masked balls and death (Auber and
whereas Manet’s bands are divided by a solid architectural structure, El Greco’s zones are divided by ephemeral clouds. Like the isocephalic row of male figures in the *Masked Ball*, those in the *Burial* are spread evenly and deliberately across the picture plane and engage actively in the commemorative event.

A similar arrangement of elegiac figures are portrayed in Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans* (Fig. 16), painted only twenty years before the *Masked Ball* and within a few years of Baudelaire’s appraisal of black clothing as the quintessential sign of modernity. However, at this point in time black is specifically and traditionally the dress for funerals but becomes modern apparel in both rural and urban settings. Courbet’s image offers a horizontal band of villagers, clothed in black, attending an interment in the rural countryside. Lastly, Manet’s previous painting of a funeral (Fig. 15), likely that of Baudelaire, also portrays a grouping of black-clad mourners traversing across the picture plane in a funeral procession in an identifiable part of southeast Paris, Butte Mouffetard. Like those in the *Masked Ball*, the figures form an interconnected web or mass of figures whose bodies cannot be distinguished from one another as they participate actively in an historically documented occurrence. Again, the isocephalic display of funeral participants, like that found in El Greco and Courbet, prefigures the composition of the *Masked Ball*. This pattern, then, extends through time and into the artist’s own oeuvre to become an integral component of funeral imagery. That Manet likely adopted the formal arrangement of figures from a painting of a funeral enhances the notion that the *Masked Ball* is intended to convey a funereal message in line with the danse macabre tradition. Both the formal and iconographical content of these images parallel the same found in Manet’s *Masked Ball*. As opposed to de Leiris, who contends that Manet did not borrow content, I propose that the funereal message is indeed adopted and adapted by the artist to convey the decrepitude of Verdi based operas on this event) and hence their association with the death of the monarchy in Manet’s painting. Thus, Hutton argues for the link based on political reasons.

68 Baudelaire’s funeral, which Manet attended, was held on September 2, 1867, about the same time Manet painted this unfinished canvas.

69 To the left of the cortege is a member of the Imperial Guard that bears a strong resemblance to and same placement as the Polichinelle figure in the *Masked Ball*. 
modernity as it is linked with the negation of artistic authenticity and the subjectivity of the artist to his audience.

By participating in an intertextual dialogue with El Greco, Courbet, and Baudelaire, as well as his own work, Manet extends the tradition of danse macabre imagery in a contemporary way that serves to contextualize the notion of death in a non-didactic fashion. Form and content work together in a symbiosis of oppositions to create an ambiguous image of a festive occasion that evokes melancholic sentiments. Interestingly, the figures are dressed appropriately for both a masked ball and a funeral. Indeed, the black-clad female figures in the center are both masked, and the centermost woman is also veiled and carrying a bouquet, further denoting symbolic funeral participation (Fig. 23).70 She also holds an orange that signifies the passing of time and, thus, the trajectory of life leading to the grave.71 As a symbol of contemporary social

---

70 According to the Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, bouquets of flowers have been associated with funerals for most of recorded history: “The Greeks crowned the dead body with flowers, and placed flowers on the tomb also. The Romans decked the funeral couch with leaves and flowers, and spread flowers, wreaths, and fillets on the tomb of friends. When Sulla was buried as many as 2,000 wreaths were sent in his honour. Most of our funeral customs are derived from the Romans; as dressing in black, walking in procession, carrying insignia on the bier, raising a mound over the grave, called tumulus, whence our tomb.” E. Cobham Brewer, Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1894).

71 The other object held by the central female figure, which has not been identified by previous scholars, seems to be a collapsible parasol. A popular and fashionable accessory during the nineteenth century, the parasol likely indicates the artifice of the image itself, as well as the artifice of the bourgeoisie. Manet often used props in his paintings in order to draw attention to the machination of image making. Like Manet, Baudelaire priviledged the artificial. In The Painter of Modern Life, for example, he praises the use of cosmetics, costumes, and props in painting so as to improve on nature.

It should also be noted that parasols provided a cover and protection for women, not only from the sun, but also from the gaze of others. In this way, the item would function in a similar way to the mask and veil worn by the female figure. Thus, she is masquerading on several levels as a bourgeois woman who is fulfills the role of wife and mother, attending a masked ball where she is sexually liberated; these social masks are supplemented, then, by her tangible mask, veil and parasol.
practices and psyche, black clothing, according to Baudelaire, best suits the mood of the age in which the artists lived and the *Masked Ball* was painted:

> Regarding the attire, the covering of the modern hero, . . . does it not have a beauty and a charm of its own? . . . Is this not an attire that is needed by our epoch, suffering, and dressed up to its thin black narrow shoulders in the symbol of constant mourning? The black suit and the frock coat not only have their political beauty as an expression of general equality, but also their poetic beauty as an expression of the public mentality—an immense cortege of undertakers, political undertakers, amorous undertakers, bourgeois undertakers. We all observe some kind of funeral.\(^2\)

According to Baudelaire, black is a signifier of equality, in the same way as death democratizes all of mankind who are unwilling participants in the danse macabre.

There are six female figures in plain view in the *Masked Ball*: three masked and veiled bourgeois women dressed in black and three masked but non-veiled working women dressed in colorful attire.\(^3\) In nineteenth-century Paris, the veil signified class since only bourgeois women were encouraged to wear the mediating facial covering that quickly became a trendy accessory.\(^4\)

---


\(^3\) Two of the three bourgeois women wear their veils pushed back over their heads. The three demi-mondaines wear ornate hats rather than veils which were typically worn by bourgeois women.

\(^4\) For a discussion of veils in Haussmann’s Paris see: Marni Reva Kessler, *Sheer Presence: The Veil in Manet’s Paris* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Kessler argues that due to the renovation projects by Baron Haussmann under Napoleon III’s rule, Paris was covered in construction dust. Bourgeois women were encouraged to wear veils to protect themselves from diseases and conditions that could be caused by excessive inhalation of old Paris. As a result, the veil affected women’s views of the city and the ways in which women were seen. However, the veil primarily served to deny and invite the viewer’s gaze in that it obscured a woman’s identity, but it also called attention to her presence. Kessler suggests there were three simultaneous veiling in late nineteenth-century Paris: the veil of dust caused by
As discussed in Chapter 2, the women’s social rank can be determined by their clothing and accessories so that the hierarchical organization of figures in traditional danse macabre imagery extends to Manet’s painting. As in the dance of death visual tradition where class was demarcated merely to indicate that all were equal in death, at masked balls class distinctions were overlooked so that Parisians of all classes participated equally in the festivities. Moreover, the solemn black attire of the bourgeois men, with their stiff black top hats, complements the mournful apparel of their female counterparts. Because the figures are cloaked in black, masked, veiled, ranked, arranged in a procession and carrying funereal accoutrements, the image as a whole conforms to Baudelaire’s description of a modern cultural funeral while maintaining minimal aspects of traditional danse macabre schema. Together these elements function as a reminder that life and worldly pleasures are fleeting and that regardless of one’s social/cultural status all are united in death’s dance.

Manet’s progressive take on dance of death imagery also parallels Baudelaire’s poem “Danse Macabre.” The poet’s unorthodox mingling of the sublime and the beautiful in powerfully descriptive words matches the painter’s amalgam of comparable oppositions in the Masked Ball. The verbal-visual parallels between the painting and the poem are founded on and substantiated by the concept of death. Both present modernized versions of the danse macabre in which Death is not personified and the subject does not participate in traditional dance of death antics such as trickery of the living. Inspired by Ernest Christophe’s sculpture, La Danse Macabre (Fig. 24), Baudelaire penned the poem following a brief description of the statue in his Salon of 1859. Using the statue as a starting point, Baudelaire proceeds to create a lyric poem that speaks directly to his modern audience. The poem begins with a four stanza ekphrasis wherein he ascribes corporeal characteristics to a non-living skeleton. A fitting description for a

Haussmannization, the façades of Haussmann’s new Paris, and the veils worn by women as protection from the effects of Haussmann’s renovations.

Hutton also notes the similarities between Baudelaire’s description of modern bourgeois society and the portrayal of funeral attire in the Masked Ball (76-77).

bourgeois woman dressed for a masquerade, the stanzas are easily attributable to the central female figure in Manet’s *Masked Ball*:

Proud as a living person of her noble stature,
With her big bouquet, her handkerchief and gloves,
She has the nonchalance and easy manner
Of a slender coquette with bizarre ways.
Did one ever see a slimmer waist at a ball?

The noble stature of the living person depicted in the painting seems a likely counterpart to Baudelaire’s fantastic vision of this inanimate feminine skeleton. That the poet notes she is *like* a coquette, indicates that she is something else—doubtlessly a member of the bourgeoisie due to her meritorious constitution. By anthropomorphizing the skeleton and fabricating an existence for a non-existent thing, the poet brings together numerous binaries, such as life/death, transitory/eternal, beautiful/sublime, presence/absence, and mortality/immortality. Baudelaire’s poem indicates repeatedly his pleasure and repulsion at the physicality of the skeleton:

Her deep eye-sockets are empty and dark,
And her skull, skillfully adorned with flowers,
Oscillates gently on her fragile vertebrae.
Charm of a non-existent thing, madly arrayed!

Some, lovers drunken with flesh, will call you
A caricature; they don’t understand
The marvelous elegance of the human frame.
You satisfy my fondest taste, tall skeleton!

Baudelaire takes sublime pleasure in the skeleton whose beauty is misunderstood or ignored by humanity in favor of the temporal delectations of earthly life. Whereas humankind fails to see the ironic beauty of Death, the poet, whose sensibilities are heightened, is able to appreciate Death’s poetic pulchritude.

The sensuous pleasures felt by the poet at the sight of the skeleton connote the ironic position of the skeleton that both entices and seduces the poet with her evil charms. In the same way, the women in the *Masked Ball* are participating actively in the art of seduction. The
working women in colorful garb are both soliciting and receiving the affections of men. In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire explains the opposing qualities necessary to best portray women in painting and sculpture as “nothing but pure art, in other words the type of beauty peculiar to evil, the beautiful in the horrible.” Thus, Manet and Baudelaire utilize contrasting pairs to construct the form and content of the women in their works. Baudelaire builds his poem by composing verses about women that comprise contrasting pairs within single lines, such as “charms of horror,” abyss of your eyes, full of horrible thoughts,” “funereal charms,” and “caricature . . . marvelous elegance.”

The meaning Baudelaire’s female figure conveys is that of Death personified as indicated in the closing lines of the poem when Death is quoted as speaking to all of humanity. Likewise, Manet’s painting comprises two different types of women who are distinguishable by the artist’s use of formal elements—bourgeois women in black; working class women in primary colors. The same is true for the symbolic meaning these women carry. The women signify the transience of life, the permanence of death and the eternal pursuit of pleasure. Ironically, the bourgeois women convey a sense of ennui toward their role in the Parisian cultural activity of a masquerade ball and in their ultimate role as a participant in the dance of death. The working class women, on the other hand, signify those who will work until the end. Even at a masquerade, where hierarchy is dismissed, these women are working to support themselves and/or their families. The irony is in the idea that working class women can be viewed as noble counterparts to the bourgeois women and that the coquettes, in fact, will be their equals in the danse macabre. These curious cases of irony, in turn, create a parody of the bourgeoisie’s apathetic attitude toward their less-fortunate counterparts and their own promise of death.

The ability to take pleasure in the face of death is essential to Baudelaire’s and Manet’s modernized versions of the danse macabre. As in the painting where the figures are enjoying the activities of the masquerade without regard for their fateful meeting with death, in the poem Death, speaking in the third person, both commends and condemns the living for their frolicsome capers:

> In all climes, under every sun, Death admires you  
> At your antics, ridiculous Humanity.

---

77 *The Painter of Modern Life*, 432.
And frequently, like you, scenting herself with myrrh,
Mingles her irony with your insanity!

What is ironic is the beauty and pleasure evoked by the skeletal figure of Death. Also ironic is
the voice’s simultaneous commending and condemning, with alternating positive and negative
terms within a single verse. In an ironic way, Death admires the ridiculousness of mankind and
its nonchalant attitude toward its own ephemerality. In the *Masked Ball* the crowd is taking
pleasure in the sensual aspects of the masquerade without regard for its own transience.

Manet’s ironic depiction of the event mirrors the ironic description offered by Baudelaire.
Both the poet and the painter use irony to create a parodic interpretation of the bourgeoisie’s
disregard for the vicissitudes of life in that they continue to play at the ball as if society were
stagnant. In reality, Parisian culture and social order were changing rapidly and both the
painting and the poem signify the bourgeoisie’s detachment from the effects of Haussmanization
on the less-fortunate, displaced working class. Forced to move to the outskirts of the city and
separated from the products of their labors, the working class, represented by the women in
colorful garb in Manet’s painting, indicate a distinct opposition to the bourgeois women both in
form and in content. By juxtaposing the two classes in a single scene, Manet is able to draw a
striking contrast between those who are cognizant of the fleetingness of this life and the
vicissitudes of society and those who seek pleasure and are safely removed from the hazards and
exigencies of everyday life in nineteenth-century Paris. In this way, Manet creates an acuminous
binary that ensures and enhances the parodic position of the *Masked Ball*. Baudelaire’s poem
likewise addresses the differences between the living and the dead when the skeleton speaks to
those who are dancing at a masquerade:

Noseless dancer, irresistible whore,
Tell those dancing couples who act so offended
‘Proud darlings, despite the art of make-up
You all smell of death! Skeletons perfumed with musk. . . .
The universal swing of the danse macabre
Sweeps you along into places unknown!
In this case, the masqueraders are unaware that they are part of the danse macabre—they are merely participating in a masked ball. However, at the urging of the poetic voice, Death conveys the message of mortality’s universality to the revelers who are always already dead.

As we have seen in earlier examples, the danse macabre schema has a fluidity that lends itself to multifaceted uses and conceptions. Until now the signifiers of the danse macabre have been overlooked in Manet’s *Masked Ball* in favor of strictly formal or political interpretations. However, as I have demonstrated, Baudelaire’s “Danse Macabre” and Manet’s *Masked Ball* are modernized and adapted versions of traditional danse macabre schema that follow a trajectory of funereal imagery signifying the universality and egalitarian functions of death. This study might lead to an expanded iconography of traditional myths or symbols wherein Manet’s modernizing of traditional schemata goes beyond current discourses on his art historical references.
CHAPTER 5:
CONCLUSION

As I have demonstrated, Manet’s *Masked Ball* parallels Baudelaire’s poetry and art criticism both in form and content. Rather than viewing the image as an anomaly among the works of an artist whose career was intertwined with the writings of Baudelaire, I contend that because the works of both artists developed out of the same historically-specific cultural conditions, they are analogous formally and thematically. Built on contrasting pairs, both art forms indicate a paradoxical insight into nineteenth-century Parisian modernity.

My consideration of the role of the female figures in Manet’s painting demonstrates the multivalent function of women in nineteenth-century Paris who wear multiple masks as wives, mothers, prostitutes, and masqueraders. Baudelaire’s poem, *To a Passerby* and his art criticism in *The Painter of Modern Life* parallel Manet’s representation of women in that they are composed of binary pairs such as virgin/whore, present/absent, morality/immorality, bourgeoisie/working class. Moreover, by situating the painting within the larger discourse of masked ball imagery, I show how Manet shifted the traditional scheme from satirical to ironical so that his image is not a disparaging commentary on the mores of modernity, but an subtly subversive representation of a modern event.

By examining the tradition of the mask in historical texts and images, I positioned Manet’s *Masked Ball* as a continuation of the traditional function of masking: to conceal and reveal identities. The shifting role of the mask worn by the figures in the *Masked Ball* mirrors the social masks worn by the crowds in Baudelaire’s poem, *The Crowds*. Comprised of numerous binaries, such as contingent/eternal, crowd/individual, public/private the poem and painting epitomize the fleetingness of modernity. This contingent element, whereby modern painting and poetry derive from the same destabilizing residual tension of structural oppositions, mirrors the destabilization of daily life in Paris under Haussmann’s destruction and reconstruction of the city and the consequential reordering of the quotidian. Traversing the crowds as an artist/poet/flâneur required the ability to assume a double identity as simultaneously part of yet distanced from the crowd as we have seen in the both the poem and the painting. In addition, I reveal a new way to consider the Polichinelle figure as a signifier of the Baudelairean
poet who, like the clown in Baudelaires poem, *The Old Clown*, has been pushed to the fringes of culture, and the picture plane, as an antiquated facet of Parisian modernity.

Finally, I position Manet’s *Masked Ball* within the traditional danse macabre schema as a modern version of death iconography. As part of the danse macabre, the painting signals a continuation of the trajectory of visual reminders of the equalizing function of death. However, Manet’s image breaks from tradition in so far as it is not didactic nor satirical, but parodic. Like Baudelaire’s poem, *La Dance Macabre*, the painting is parodic in its ambiguous representation of the bourgeoisie at the masquerade and in its blatant disregard for the standardized danse macabre schema. Contrasting pairs such as life/death, transitory/eternal, sublime/beautiful and traditional/modern inform both the painting and the poem so that each functions as a modernized and adapted version of the danse macabre.

Such a contextual reading better demonstrates the effects of social and cultural conditions inscribed in the painting than the strictly political readings offered by previous scholars. Thus, my thesis project contributes to a better understanding of the image and its meanings in the context of Manet’s oeuvre and late nineteenth-century art in Paris. This word and image study of Manet and Baudelaire has led to a new way of treating Manet’s work as inscribed with poetic functions and intent. Moreover, this study indicates a new iconography for Manet’s *Masked Ball* and contributes to the solidification of the relationship between Manet and Baudelaire. My project establishes plausible formal and iconographical links between Manet’s *Masked Ball* and Baudelaire’s poetry and offers a model for new approaches to Manet’s modernity as defined by his own time.
Fig. 1: Édouard Manet. Masked Ball at the Opera, 1873. Oil on canvas, 23 ½ X 28 ¾ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
Fig. 2: Charles-Nicolas Cochin. *Decoration of a Masked Ball Given by the King (The Yew Tree Ball)*, 1745. Engraving. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Fig. 3: Charles Joseph Natoire. *A Masquerade Ball*. 18th century. Pen and ink on paper. Musée Atger, Faculte de Medecine, Montpellier, France.
Fig. 4: A Masked Ball at the Academy of Music at Paris (Paris Opera). Harper’s Weekly, April 10, 1858.
Fig. 5: Paul Gavarni. *Ciel! Anatole! Carnaval Series*. 1846. Lithograph. 19.6 x 16.5 cm (image); 36.2 x 25.3 cm (sheet). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA.
Fig. 7: Manet. *La Parisienne, Study of Ellen Andre*, 1874-75. Oil on canvas. Nationalmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden.
Fig. 8: Manet. *Berthe Morisot with a Hat, In Mourning*, 1874. Oil on canvas. 62.23 x 50.17 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 9: Manet. *Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets*, 1872. Oil on canvas. 55 x 40 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Fig. 10: Pietro Longhi. *Il Ridotto*. 1740's. Oil on canvas. Raccotta Salon, Venice.
Fig. 11: Pietro Longhi. *Ridotto in Venice*. 1750's. Oil on canvas. 84 x 115 cm. Private collection.
Fig. 12: Luis Paret y Alcazár. *Masked Ball*. 1771. Oil on canvas. 40 x 51 cm. Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain.
Fig. 13: Luis Paret y Alcazár. *Elegant Company Preparing for a Masked Ball*. 1770. Oil on canvas. 31 x 26 cm. Private Collection.
Fig. 14: El Greco. *Burial of Count Orgaz*. 1588. Oil on canvas. 460 × 360 cm. Santo Tomé, Toledo, Spain.
Fig. 15: Manet. *The Funeral*. c. 1867. Oil on canvas. 28 5/8 x 35 5/8 in. (72.7 x 90.5 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Fig. 16: Gustave Courbet. *Burial at Ornans*. 1949-50. Oil on canvas. 314 x 663 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Fig. 18: Thomas Rowlandson. *Death’s Dance*. 1815. Aquatint. 24.1 x 14.2 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Florida State University.
Fig. 19: Albrecht Dürer. *Melancholia I*. 1514. Engraving. 31 × 26 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Fig. 20: Thomas Rowlandson. *Masquerade*. 1815. Etching with handcoloring. 12 x 20.2 cm (image); 13.4 x 22.8 cm (sheet). Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA.
Fig. 21: Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas. 130.5 x 190 cm (51 3/8 x 74 3/4 in). Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Fig. 22: Manet. *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. 1863. Oil on canvas, 81 x 101 cm. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
Fig. 23: Manet. *Masked Ball*, detail of center female figure with bouquet, orange and parasol.
Fig. 24: Ernest Christophe. *La Danse Macabre*. 1859. Terracotta. Private Collection.
The Mask
Allegorical Statue in the Style of the Renaissance
To Ernest Christophe, Sculptor

Let us gaze at this gem of Florentine beauty;
In the undulation of this brawny body
Those divine sisters, Gracefulness and Strength, abound.
This woman, a truly miraculous marble,
Adorably slender, divinely robust,
Is made to be enthroned upon sumptuous beds
And to charm the leisure of a Pope or a Prince.

— And see that smile, voluptuous and delicate,
Where self-conceit displays its ecstasy;
That sly, lingering look, mocking and languorous;
That dainty face, framed in a veil of gauze,
Whose every feature says, with a triumphant air:
“Pleasure calls me and Love gives me a crown!”
To that being endowed with so much majesty
See what exciting charm is lent by prettiness!
Let us draw near, and walk around its loveliness.

O blasphemy of art! Fatal surprise!
That exquisite body, that promise of delight,
At the top turns into a two-headed monster!

Why no! it’s but a mask, a lying ornament,
That visage enlivened by a dainty grimace,
And look, here is, atrociously shriveled,
The real, true head, the sincere countenance
Reversed and hidden by the lying face.
Poor glamorous beauty! the magnificent stream
Of your tears flows into my anguished heart;
Your falsehood makes me drunk and my soul slakes its thirst
At the flood from your eyes, which Suffering causes!

— But why is she weeping? She, the perfect beauty,
Who could put at her feet the conquered human race,
What secret malady gnaws at those sturdy flanks?

— She is weeping, fool, because she has lived!
And because she lives! But what she deplores
Most, what makes her shudder down to her knees,
Is that tomorrow, alas! she will still have to live!
Tomorrow, after tomorrow, always! — like us!

To a Passer-By

The street about me roared with a deafening sound.  
Tall, slender, in heavy mourning, majestic grief,  
A woman passed, with a glittering hand  
Raising, swinging the hem and flounces of her skirt;

Agile and graceful, her leg was like a statue's.  
Tense as in a delirium, I drank  
From her eyes, pale sky where tempests germinate,  
The sweetness that enthralls and the pleasure that kills.

A lightning flash... then night! Fleeting beauty  
By whose glance I was suddenly reborn,  
Will I see you no more before eternity?

Elsewhere, far, far from here! too late! never perhaps!  
For I know not where you fled, you know not where I go,  
O you whom I would have loved, O you who knew it!

The Crowds

It is not given to every man to take a bath of multitude; enjoying a crowd is an art; and only he can relish a debauch of vitality at the expense of the human species, on whom, in his cradle, a fairy has bestowed the love of masks and masquerading, the hate of home, and the passion for roaming.

Multitude, solitude: identical terms, and interchangeable by the active and fertile poet. The man who is unable to people his solitude is equally unable to be alone in a bustling crowd.

The poet enjoys the incomparable privilege of being able to be himself of someone else, as he chooses. Like those wandering souls who go looking for a body, he enters as he likes into each man's personality. For him alone everything is vacant; and if certain places seem closed to him, it is only because in his eyes they are not worth visiting.

The solitary and thoughtful stroller finds a singular intoxication in this universal communion. The man who loves to lose himself in a crowd enjoys feverish delights that the egoist locked up in himself as in a box, and the slothful man like a mollusk in his shell, will be eternally deprived of. He adopts as his own all the occupations, all the joys and all the sorrows that chance offers.

What men call love is a very small, restricted, feeble thing compared with this ineffable orgy, this divine prostitution of the soul giving itself entire, all it poetry and all its charity, to the unexpected as it comes along, to the stranger as he passes.

It is a good thing sometimes to teach the fortunate of this world, if only to humble for an instant their foolish pride, that there are higher joys than theirs, finer and more uncircumscribed. The founders of colonies, shepherds of peoples, missionary priests exiled to the ends of the earth, doubtlessly know something of this mysterious drunkenness; and in the midst of the vast family created by their genius, they must often laugh at those who pity them because of their troubled fortunes and chaste lives.
The Dance of Death
To Ernest Christophe

Proud as a living person of her noble stature,
With her big bouquet, her handkerchief and gloves,
She has the nonchalance and easy manner
Of a slender coquette with bizarre ways.

Did one ever see a slimmer waist at a ball?
Her ostentatious dress in its queenly fullness
Falls in ample folds over thin feet, tightly pressed
Into slippers with pompons pretty as flowers.

The swarm of bees that plays along her collar-bones
Like a lecherous brook that rubs against the rocks
Modestly protects from cat-calls and jeers
The funereal charms that she's anxious to hide.

Her deep eye-sockets are empty and dark,
And her skull, skillfully adorned with flowers,
Oscillates gently on her fragile vertebrae.
Charm of a non-existent thing, madly arrayed!

Some, lovers drunken with flesh, will call you
A caricature; they don't understand
The marvelous elegance of the human frame.
You satisfy my fondest taste, tall skeleton!

Do you come to trouble with your potent grimace
The festival of Life? Or does some old desire
Still goading your living carcass
Urge you on, credulous one, toward Pleasure's sabbath?

With the flames of candles, with songs of violins,
Do you hope to chase away your mocking nightmare,
And do you come to ask of the flood of orgies
To cool the hell set ablaze in your heart?

Inexhaustible well of folly and of sins!
Eternal alembic of ancient suffering!
Through the curved trellis of your ribs
I see, still wandering, the insatiable asp.

To tell the truth, I fear your coquetry
Will not find a reward worthy of its efforts;
Which of these mortal hearts understands raillery?
The charms of horror enrapture only the strong!

The abyss of your eyes, full of horrible thoughts,
Exhales vertigo, and discreet dancers
Cannot look without bitter nausea
At the eternal smile of your thirty-two teeth.

Yet who has not clasped a skeleton in his arms,
Who has not fed upon what belongs to the grave?
What matters the perfume, the costume or the dress?
He who shows disgust believes that he is handsome.

Noseless dancer, irresistible whore,
Tell those dancing couples who act so offended:
"Proud darlings, despite the art of make-up
You all smell of death! Skeletons perfumed with musk,

Withered Antinoi, dandies with smooth faces,
Varnished corpses, hoary-haired Lovclaces,
The universal swing of the danse macabre
Sweeps you along into places unknown!

From the Seine's cold quays to the Ganges' burning shores,
The human troupe skips and swoons with delight, sees not
In a hole in the ceiling the Angel's trumpet
Gaping ominously like a black blunderbuss.

In all climes, under every sun, Death admires you
At your antics, ridiculous Humanity,
And frequently, like you, scenting herself with myrrh,
Mingles her irony with your insanity!"

The Old Clown

Vacationers spread out, scattered, and frolicked everywhere. It was one of those occasions upon which mountebanks, charlatans, animal trainers, and itinerant hawkers of goods had long counted, to make up for the slow times of the year.

On these sorts of days, it seems to me that the common folk forget everything—suffering and work. They become like children. For the little ones, it's a day off, it's the horror of school put off for twenty-four hours. For big people, it's an armistice signed with the malevolent powers of life, a respite from universal strife and struggle.

Even the man of the world and the man occupied by the work of the mind escape with difficulty from the influence of this plebeian jubilee. They absorb, without wanting to, their share of this carefree atmosphere. As for myself, like a true Parisian, I never fail to pass in review all of the booths flaunting themselves on these solemn occasions.

They were, in truth, offering one another formidable competition: they squallled, they bellowed, they screeched. It was a mix of shouts, of blasts of brass, of explosions of rockets. The [redstarts?] and the simpletons convulsed the features of their swarthy faces, hardened by wind, rain, and sun; they tossed out, with the aplomb of actors sure of their effect, witticisms and pleasantries whose solid and heavy humor recalled Molière. The strong-men, proud of the enormity of their limbs, with receding foreheads and narrow skulls, like orangutans, strutted majestically in tights washed the night before, especially for the occasion. Dancers, as beautiful as fairies or princesses, leapt and capered under the fire of lanterns that filled their skirts with sparks.

All was light, dust, shouts, joy, tumult: some spent, others won, the former and the latter with equal joy. Children hung from their mothers' skirts, begging for a candy-cane, or got up on their fathers' shoulders, the better to see a juggler as dazzling as a god. And circulating everywhere, overwhelming all other scents, the odor of fried food, which is the very incense of this festivity.

At the end, at the very end of a long row of booths, as if—ashamed—he had exiled himself from all of these splendors, I saw a poor mountebank, stooped, decrepit, leaning his back against one of the posts of his hut, a hut more miserable than that of the most most brutalized
savage, and whose poverty was illuminated yet all too well by two dripping, smoking candle butts.

Everywhere joy, success, debauchery; everywhere the certainty of bread for tomorrow; everywhere the frenetic explosion of vitality. Here, absolute misery, misery decked out—as a crowning horror—in comic rags, upon which need rather than art had introduced contrast. He didn't laugh, this poor wretch! He didn't cry, he didn't dance, he didn't gesture, he didn't shout; he sang no song, either happy or sad; he didn't plead. He was mute and immobile. He had renounced, he had abdicated. His fate was fixed.

But what a probing, unforgettable gaze he paraded upon the crowd and the lights, whose moving swell stopped just a few steps from his repulsive poverty! I felt my throat clutched by the terrible hand of hysteria, and it seemed to me that my sight was clouded by those rebellious tears that do not wish to fall.

What to do? What good would it do to ask this unfortunate man what curiosity, what marvel he had to show me in these stinking shadows, behind his torn curtain? In truth, I didn't dare; and, even if the reason for my shyness should make you laugh, I must admit that I feared to humiliate him. Finally, I had just decided to place a few coins on one of his planks as I passed, hoping that he would divine my intentions, when a great crush of people, produced by some sort of commotion, dragged me far away from him.

And, turning back, obsessed by that vision, I sought to analyze my sudden sorrow, and I said to myself: I have just seen the very portrait of the old man of letters who has outlived his generation, which he had brilliantly amused, of the old poet without friends, without family, without children, degraded by his misery and by the ingratitude of the public, and into whose booth the forgetful world no longer wishes to enter!

— Cat Nilan:  http://www.piranesia.net/baudelaire/spleen/14saltimbanque.html
Bibliography


Cashin, Fransçoise. *Manet, 1832-1883: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, April 22-
August 8, 1983, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, September 10-November 27,


Daniel, Robert. The *Poetry of Villon and Baudelaire: Two Worlds, One Human Condition*. New

D’Souza, Aruna and Tom McDonough, eds. *The Invisible Flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and
Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University

de George, Richard and Fernande, eds., *The Structuralists from Marx to Levi-Strauss*. New


Duret, Théodore. *Histoire de Édouard Manet et de son œuvre: avec douze illustrations*. Paris:
Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1906.

Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*.

_______. *Manet’s Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860’s*. Chicago: University of


Hutton, John. “The Clown at the Ball: Manet's *Masked Ball of the Opera* and the Collapse of


http://www.fsu.edu/~proghum/interculture/benjamin.html

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Pride completed her undergraduate studies at Florida State University in 1999, during which time she worked on the exhibition *Judy Chicago: Trials and Tributes* at the FSU’s Museum of Fine Arts and spent a semester in Paris studying nineteenth-century art with Prof. Lauren S. Weingarden. Jennifer began her graduate studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 2003 and continued her graduate work at FSU in 2006. During that time she has served in numerous professional capacities including: symposium co-coordinator and promoter, digital archivist, visual resource assistant, and research assistant to numerous professors in New York and Florida. Jennifer has had one article published in the proceedings of the 2008 Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities and served as copy-editor for Prof. Weingarden’s forthcoming book: *Louis H. Sullivan and a 19th-Century Poetics of Naturalized Architecture* (2009, Ashgate). Jennifer is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at Florida State University focusing on nineteenth-century European art and word-and-image studies.