REFLECTIONS ON BAUDELAIREAN MODERNITY *

In this lecture I investigate the work of nineteenth-century artist Édouard Manet in relation to parodic literary practices in Charles Baudelaire's art criticism and Émile Zola's Naturalist novels. Baudelaire's “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) serves as a point of departure for arguing that the mirror functions as both metaphor and metonymy of modernity and its dualities—at once fleeting and fragmentary yet eternal and immutable. “The Painter of Modern Life” also exemplifies how artistic self-doubling becomes a mandate for the artist's response to “multifarious” modern urban conditions. As I will show, Manet's A Bar at the Folies Bergère (1882) best demonstrates Baudelairean parodying devices and their ironic effects. By considering this painting within the volatile context of a renovated Parisian metropolis, I argue that the painter, like the novelist, used the mirror as a parodic device to promote critical self-reflection upon modern conditions and artistic norms. This painting among others will be used to illustrate how a word and image approach to visual and verbal parody restores the signifying functions of artistic and literary techniques to the realm of social and cultural practices.

At this point, I want to briefly comment on the methodology that guides my research. A comparative study of Manet's visual parody with verbal parody provides a case study to demonstrate a discursive methodology in which word and image function as interactive yet independent signifying agents. That is, Manet's paintings do not illustrate literary texts, but participate in a shared discourse on modernity and its experiential effects. Here I use “discourse” in the spirit of Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Knowledge (1969); that is, discourse connotes a body of knowledge ordered by recurring – and recognizable – practices, statements and signs. Thus, while I argue that A Bar at the Folies Bergère is a manifesto of Baudelairean modernity, I also maintain that Manet's painting is not simply a graphic demonstration of Baudelaire's essay “The Painter of Modern Life.” Rather, in this painting Manet transcribed his own formulation of the visual, technical means by which to represent modernity. As I will show, just as the mirror-motif subverts literary conventions and narrative structures in Zola's novels, in Manet's paintings, the painted mirror and mirrored imagery subvert pictorial conventions, engaging the viewer in an ironic encounter with aesthetic expectations.

This lecture is organized in four sections. First, I examine Baudelaire's modernist tenants within the historical context of mid-nineteenth-century Paris. In the second and third sections, I examine Manet's paintings in which mirrors are either implied or represented, followed by a discussion of the mirror-motif in Zola's novels. In the last section, I demonstrate how Zola used the mirror-motif as a critical standard to champion Manet's art and how Manet, in turn, devised a critical, pictorial response to that interpretation.

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SECTION 1: BAUDELAIREAN MODERNITY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Beginning with Baudelaire’s essay “Of the Heroism of Modern Life,” written for his 1846 Salon review, and subsequently in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” and acts of self-doubling as the visceral response to the urban experience and its expression in artistic form. The later essay especially mirrored the actual events of social and physical disruptions that Manet and Zola experienced during the Second Empire’s modernization of Paris. These changes began in 1852 with Baron Haussmann’s comprehensive plan, and continued through the turn of the century. While one cannot discount the human suffering that the Haussmannization of Paris engendered, these very ruptures and upheavals inspired Baudelaire’s, and then his followers’, celebration of incessant change and cultural renewal. At every moment of every day, Parisians encountered visual and aural cacophonies bursting from demolition and construction sites and from the newly laid boulevards and sidewalks. Along these same conduits, newly built building blocks generated a more ephemeral spectacle of transformations. Plate glass windows at street level reflected and refracted transient atmospheric and material conditions. Now, indoor spaces mingled with outdoor spaces, and spaces in between, transforming all of Paris into a kaleidoscopic spectacle of mirrors. Thus, if modernist writers and painters subverted traditional narrative and representational devices, they did so as a response to and a means of mirroring the daily reality of fragmentation and transmutation.

When Baudelaire wrote “Of the Heroism of Modern Life” in 1846 Paris was already marked by sporadic urban renewal schemes. It was in this context that Baudelaire first defined modern beauty as possessing “something eternal and something transitory” and extolled Paris as a site of creative and cultural renewal. As Baudelaire wrote, the artist discovers the “heroism of modern life” in “the scenes of high life and of the thousands of uprooted lives that haunt the underworld of a great city, criminals and prostitutes; . . . we have only to open our eyes to see and know the heroism of our day.”

While these uprooted lives are the heroes in Baudelaire’s poetic works, in his critical writing, particularly “The Painter of Modern Life,” the artist becomes the hero. Here Baudelaire attributed to Constantin Guys the dual attributes of the artist as both a man of the crowd and distant from it. In the first instance, the artist is a “passionate observer, [for whom] 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. . . . [He] is an ego athirst for the non-ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies, more vivid than life itself, always inconstant and fleeting.” Accordingly, Baudelaire redefined the “double composition” of beauty as a constant tension between “an eternal and invariable element,” and “a relative circumstantial element [of] contemporaneity.” The artist can achieve this aesthetic dualism and, ultimately, cultural renewal, by triggering

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1. Salon of 1846. 104.
3. The Painter. 399-400
4. The Painter. 392.
in the viewer “the shock of surprise.” He does so by rendering the familiar unfamiliar and by presenting “the ever-new which eternally elud[e]s,” but still refers to, “the rules and analyses of the school.” But to achieve this end, the artist must first experience a process of “self-doubling,” which for Baudelaire characterized the artistic creative process, as witnessed in his description of Guys’s activities.

A man of the crowd from dawn to dusk, at night the artist retreats from the crowd. Alone in his studio, he reflects upon his sensory experiences and renders their essence. “All the materials, stored higgledy-piggledy by memory, are classified, ordered, harmonized, and undergo that deliberate idealization, which is the product of a childlike perceptiveness that is acute and magical by its very ingeniousness.” In this assessment of Guys’s modernity, sketch-like techniques and ephemeral transparency convey fleeting cognitive experiences and physical engagement with the myriad Parisian populace. Similarly, in Baudelaire’s earlier Salon reviews, he valued fragmented painterly (or the “unfinished”) treatment of the canvas surface – as seen in Corot – over the smooth, mirror-like (or “finished”) surface of traditional academic painting – as seen in Gerome.

This overview of Baudelaire’s “The Painter of Modern Life” exemplifies how artistic self-doubling, as an internal mirror reflection, becomes a mandate for the artist’s response to modern life. In fact, in “The Painter of Modern Life” Baudelaire attributed mirroring effects to the artist’s creative faculties and his cognitive experiences of the urban crowd: “He, the lover of life, may also be compared to a mirror as vast as this crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with every one of its movements presents a pattern of life, in all its multiplicity.” Finally, Baudelaire describes the viewer’s response as a mirroring act, since he/she reflects upon earlier conventions now re-inscribed in modern forms. In this respect, the mirror also functions as a memory device for maintaining a backward glance upon tradition and its ongoing renewal.

Baudelaire’s prescription for the artist’s the viewer’s self-doubling is consistent with modern parodic strategies as defined by literary historian Linda Hutcheon. As she demonstrates, modern parody is inherently double-coded since it inscribes both “continuity” with, and “critical distance” from, the old (targeted) text in the new text. Hutcheon further shows that, more often than not, irony is both the cause and effect

5. The Exposition Universelle. 124-125.
6. Baudelaire used the term “se dédoubler” in “De l’essence du rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques” (1855) 694 (The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays 154). The dictionary translation of se dédoubler is “to be divided into two”, and of “dédoublement” is “dividing [or splitting] into two” (Cassell’s). Mayne follows this dictionary definition in his translation. However, in translating Baudelaire’s use of se dédoubler as “rapid self-doubling” (“la force de se dédoubler rapidement”) I am following Paul de Man’s interpretation of Baudelaire’s concept of irony. Furthermore, de Man used the term dédoublement to explain the “reflective activity” connoted by Baudelaire’s use of the infinitive form se dédoubler, that being an activity of “self-duplication or self-multiplication” (de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality” 212-13).
8. See Delacroix, Corot.
of parody. Consequently, when parody produces a doubling effect between the new text and the (old) targeted text, this effect induces an ironic attitude or situation for the viewer/reader. It is just this irresolvable opposition between tradition and its inversion that makes irony, as critical self-reflection (or mirroring), contiguous with parody. This reciprocity of technique and effect is what constitutes ironic parody which, during the nineteenth century, became consonant with modernity.

SECTION 2: IMPLIED OR REPRESENTED MIRRORS IN MANET’S PAINTINGS

In this section I demonstrate three ways in which Manet used the mirror and its reflections: first as a corollary of the viewer’s gaze (whereby vision is an optical mirror); second, as a painted mirror that reflects both physical and social spaces; and third, as a means of critical-ironic self-reflection upon the pictorial medium. In the first case I discuss Olympia (1863) and Nana (1877); in the second case, I discuss Café-Concert, (1878) and A Bar at the Folies Bergère (1882). The third kind of mirroring, as critical self-reflection, is embedded in each of the four paintings.

Although the mirror is absent in Olympia and is non-functional in Nana, a mirroring effect is activated by the directness of the female gaze. Each figure engages the viewer in the optical mirroring of her own self-image. That is, we return the perceived image back to the figure that poses before us. By engaging the viewer with the female gaze Manet inverted or parodied the male gaze which traditionally beheld the passive female nude as the embodiment of ideal beauty.

As is well known, Manet’s painting of Olympia is a modernization of Titian’s Venus of Urbino (1538), which had become a standard for subsequent classical nudes. As seen in Titian’s example, the figure’s tilted head and sideway glance render her passive in her encounter with the male viewer. When Manet turned the model’s gaze directly to the viewer, he further modernized the classical nude by evoking the photographic nude, a new genre that emerged with the development of commercial photography during the early 1850s. Indeed, during the 1850s, prior to Manet’s painting, photographers had already inverted the male gaze, by having the model look head-on into the camera aperture. But Olympia’s modernist affinity with the photographic model goes beyond her pose: both are inscribed with a specific social identity, that of a prostitute. Because nineteenth-century viewers regarded the photograph as a mirror image of reality, the model posing for aesthetic purposes represented no one other than herself, a real woman with body hair, soiled feet and fulsome flesh, who has just come in off the streets.

This modern technological intervention and the portrayal of a modern urban type are what transform Manet’s interpretation of Titian’s Venus into a visual parody. Manet not only removed the artifice of an idealized, mythological figure to depict a recognizable prostitute, he also left intact visual references to Titian’s painting – the model’s gestures and pose, the cuddly dog replaced by a seductive black cat, and the two-part division of the background screen. By doing so, he forced the viewer to reflect backwards upon
the sixteenth-century museum masterpiece and experience the transformation of the traditional ideal into the contemporary real.

In his painting of *Nana*, Manet further endowed the model\(^\text{10}\) with photographic references and multiple mirrored reflections. *Nana* before the mirror also recalls studio photography, both in her pose and the presence of the mirror. As seen in this photograph, models were often posed in front of a “psyche” mirror, a commonplace studio prop which reflected multiple views of the figure. A more ironic photograph further signals how Manet borrowed photographic techniques to activate the viewer’s gaze as a mirror reflection. Here the photographer’s presence is made real by his self-portrait\(^\text{11}\); that being his self-reflection in the mirror gazing at his model. Yet his reflected presence makes his physical absence behind the camera equally real. Instead, the viewer is now situated in front of the model, so that his/her gaze replaces the photographer’s gaze through the camera apparatus.

The viewer of Manet’s painting also occupies the photographer’s position – directly in front of his model. *Nana* stands before the mirror, apparently applying makeup, but turns her head to pose before the implied camera. Here the camera’s mirroring is synonymous with the viewer’s optical mirroring. But *Nana*’s gaze is doubly reflected. *Nana*’s brazen self-image is mirrored not only in the viewer’s gaze, but also in her top-hatted client’s gaze. In each case, our/his admiring gaze reproduces *Nana*’s self-image as it reflects back to her, creating a narcissistic circuit of self-absorption and self-satisfaction. It is for this reason that Manet rendered the actual mirror useless. Instead of reflecting *Nana*’s image, the oval surface reflects the painterly medium through which the artist has made *Nana* visually real. The mirror thus becomes an ironic device to reflect upon the production and reception of the painted image: is painting a mirrored reflection (like a photograph) or a creative re-presentation of the real? It is precisely this question that Manet addresses in his mirrored reflections of urban social spaces.

In the *Café-Concert* Manet creates a pictorial space that induces experiential associations with the modern condition. In doing so, he uses the mirror to parody pictorial perspective. To begin with, our initial encounter with the painting is an ironic one. At first glance, the singer on stage appears to be situated in the receding space of the concert hall. However, upon closer viewing, we realize that the image of the singer is a mirror reflection. This reflected image is partially defined by the mirror’s gilt frame, while the staged performance takes place in front of the foreground figures. Thus, where we expect to see into pictorial depth beyond the painted surface, as in Jean Béraud’s *La Pâtisserie Clopole* (1889), Manet’s mirror prohibits our entry into the pictorial space. This negation is reinforced by the mirror’s painted surface – broadly-

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10. An actual actress posed for *Nana*.
11. The first self-portrait by a photographer dates from 1840: Hippolyte Bayard, Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man, direct paper positive (Société Française de Photographie, Paris); repr. Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (p. 33, fig. 25). Nadar’s Self-Portrait (1855) is contemporary with Petit’s.
laid brushwork renders the mirror as flat as the grey wall beside it. Even more so than *Nana*’s mirror, the *Café-Concert* mirror is a critical reflection upon the painter’s materials with which experiences of modernity are made real. Accordingly, Manet parodies perspective by using the mirror to place the viewer within rather than outside the picture space. If the singer’s performance takes place in front of the foreground figures then the viewer of Manet’s painting is situated between those figures and the stage. By placing the viewer in the middle of the picture space, Manet compels the viewer to reflect upon the transient, visceral conditions of modernity: at once fleeting and fragmented, spaces of modernity defy expectations with ironic and shocking encounters.

Ironic encounters are also triggered by the way Manet uses the mirror as a reflection on modern social conditions. For one thing, while the café-concert was a modern site where upper and lower classes mingled, Manet has ruptured this alliance by inserting a still-life between the foreground figures who gaze in opposite directions. The rupture signifies the woman on the left as a *lorette* (a prostitute who ranks above the street walker) and the top-hatted man as her current or potential lover.12 Given the man’s attire, he represents the upper class bourgeoisie or lower level aristocracy. Manet intensified the social chasm between the *lorette* and her client by aligning the *lorette* with the other working women on the left side of the composition.

In the *Café-Concert*, Manet has depicted three urban types of the working woman: the prostitute, the waitress and the singer. Aligned from bottom to top, the head of each woman leads the viewer’s eye along an arrow-shaped path and into the “supposed” pictorial space. However, although their bodies connect in this formal arrangement, their gazes and gestures are disconnected. Here, too, Manet has registered a social scale among the working-class women: the *lorette* remains at the lowest rung, while the waitress can aspire to the middle class, and the singer can gain social privilege among the upper classes. Thus, the *Café-Concert* mirrors the social order of modern Paris at once unified and divided.

In *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, Manet extended the mirror as a parodic device and as a means for invoking ironic social reflection. Here, however, the mirror almost covers the entire picture surface, as indicated by the gilt frame in the lower portion of the canvas. This mirroring suggests that Manet intended the painting to be a celebration of Baudelairean modernity. Even more so than the *Café-Concert*, in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* Manet’s parodic formal devices conform to Baudelaire’s celebration of modernism’s multifariousness, that being a state of incessant paradox, surprise and change.

12. The *lorette* represents the “the middle ground between street prostitute and grand dame of commercial sex, the courtesan.” The *lorette* is kept by several lovers. See: “Lorettes: Respectable Mistresses” [http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255-s01/courtesans/lorette.htm](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255-s01/courtesans/lorette.htm) and “Lorette (Prostitution)” [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorette_(prostitution)](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorette_(prostitution)).
As in *Olympia*, Manet’s ironic behavior can first be identified in the way he parodies “the rules of the school,” that is, museum masterpieces and academic techniques. In *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* the painted mirror provokes contrastive associations with the whole tradition of mirrored feminine beauty and with the smooth academic finish in which this cultural ideal was portrayed. These include mythological types, such as Titian’s *Venus with a Mirror* (c. 1555), and Ingres’ *Portrait of Countess D’Haussonville* (1845). Manet subverts these conventions by rupturing expectations for mimetic representation of mirrored reflections. For one thing, unlike the contiguity between the figure and her reflection in the traditional compositions, in Manet’s painting the barmaid’s reflection is too far removed from her centered, frontal pose. That this disjunction was intentionally ironic is confirmed by Manet’s study for *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. In this rendering, the barmaid’s reflection is directly aligned with her actual figure. In the final painting, the sketch-like painterly brushwork also subverts our expectations for the smooth mirror surfaces in academic paintings.

As in the *Café-Concert*, in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* Manet depicts modernity by way of the fragment form. First we encounter fragments of colors and pigments that do not physically cohere. Likewise, the mirror image is itself a fragment of an overall ambiance and fragments the objects and figures reflected therein (note, for example, the cropped legs of the trapeze artist). The disconnected gazes between the barmaid and her customer, who is reflected in the mirror, add to a psychological fragmentation of the whole. (In the sketch she does look at the man.) At the same time, these painterly and figurative fragments do cohere as the mirror-image of the contradictory, ironic condition apropos modern life and the corollary experience of endless transformations.

As an actual place of popular entertainment and social class mingling, the Folies-Bergère theater signified a microcosm of the urban whole. Yet, in the painting of this Parisian site, as in the *Café-Concert*, Manet inserted social rupture within the disparate crowd. The barmaid signifies this rupture. Given her status as a working-class woman, she is denied the pleasures that surround her. An isolated, static figure, the barmaid stands in contrast to the dynamic spectacle of revelers, shimmering light works, and lively paint marks. Her psychological isolation is compounded by her physical position. For, in fact, the mirrored spectacle is only a reflection of the action that unfolds before her. Just where the viewer stands in relation to that mirrored space will be considered in the next section.

**SECTION 3: MIRRORS INFERRED OR REPRESENTED IN ZOLA’S NOVELS**

Given the centrality of the mirror in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, I now want to demonstrate the parodic devices and ironic effects that the painting shares with the Naturalist novel. The sustained doubleness that ironic parody engenders, “through the playing with multiple conventions,” is what initially connects Manet’s paintings with Zola’s Naturalist novels. For the writer, as for the painter, the mirror is central to achieving these effects. It is important to note, however, that the verbal-visual
comparisons I consider are grounded in the Baudelairean themes of modernity: 1) creative and experiential acts of self-doubling; 2) the familiar – or conventional – made unfamiliar; and 3) the portrayal of “heroes” of high life and low life in modern Paris.

In particular, I will discuss the mirror as a visual form and formal structure in two Zola novels, *L’Assommoir* (1877) and *Nana* (1880). Like Manet, Zola uses actual mirrors as commonplace interior furnishings and as vehicles for multiple reflections within an interior space. More important for this study, Zola also uses the mirror indirectly as an ordering device with which to contrast reciprocal, yet opposing, events within the narrative structure. Given this latter practice, I use a structural analysis to compare how the writer and painter use formal patterns and technical means to enforce a mirroring dialogue between the reader/viewer and the text or work of art. That is, each medium invites the reader’s/ viewer’s anticipation of a conventional series of events – such as illusionism in painting or idealist plot development in the novel – and then denies these same expectations. In this section I review how the mirror-motif, embedded in the novel’s text, functions as a parodic device for critical self-reflection.

Literary historian David Baguley provides a model for the structural analysis of ironic parody within the Naturalist novel. As he observes, it is precisely the heroic character types and idealized plot development of earlier nineteenth-century Romantic novels that are targeted for ironic inversions in the Naturalist novel. In the earlier narratives, conflicts are resolved in fortuitous outcomes for the characters and their personal developments. However, in the Naturalistic novel an ironic narrative sets up “contrast[s] between a character’s hopes, ideals, aspirations and ensuing plight.” While the reader’s expectations for edifying character and plot development are met at the novel’s inception, its “banal ending” subverts those expectations by denying resolution or redemptive closure. In the Naturalist novel, heroes are replaced by anti-heroes and edifying evolution is replaced by degeneration. This degenerative course of events, is what Baguley calls the “entropic” metatheme of the Naturalist novel. As suggested by the root word “entropy,” meaning decay, the entropic metatheme narrates the moral and social decay brought on by modernization. The narrative structure of entropy thus deploys the banal ending as a parodic strategy of inversion and subversion.

It is in the narrative space between the novel’s inception, where the reader’s expectations are met, and the ensuing events, where expectations are denied, that the reader is caught in a textual “snare.” *L’Assommoir* provides an example of the entropic metatheme and the snare it engenders. At the beginning of the novel, the main character, Gervaise, rises above her rural origins and achieves bourgeois prosperity as a laundress-proprietor in Paris. But her success is short-lived. Midway through the novel the author incisively details the anti-heroine’s slow degeneration: consumed by material indulgence and poverty, Gervaise dies from alcoholism and starvation at the end of the novel. Baguley’s structural analysis of the entropic metatheme in *L’Assommoir* further demonstrates how the mirror-motif is embedded in Zola’s novels. In this diagram he charts the events of Gervaise’s rise and decline on either side of a
triangle. Here, the narrative is structured by a mirroring reciprocity, since each chapter that records these events is paired symmetrically with its opposite.

Similar to the Naturalist novel’s subversive narrative structure, Manet produces an ironic situation by way of an ironic inversion of pictorial structural form. Here, as in the novel’s textual snare, the viewer is engaged in a visual snare. By presenting a painting of a mirrored reflection Manet initiates and then disrupts a conventional way of “entering” the picture. For one thing, pictorial depth is contravened by the painted surface. Likewise, the male figure’s presence and absence is central to the viewer’s ironic aesthetic experience. Although we see the man’s frontal view reflected in the right side of the mirror, the direction of his gaze and the absent view of his back in front of the bar deny our conventional expectations for entering an illusionary space. That is, we would expect a mediating figure or object to direct the viewer into the picture space, as seen in Jean Beraud’s *Au Café*. Here the figures form a narrative grouping, extending into our space and the empty chair invites our participation in the action. Furthermore, the mirror is simply illusionary, functioning to extend the interior space. In the absence of a mediating figure or object in Manet’s *Bar* we are placed directly in the middle of the spectacle, facing the barmaid and the inescapable reflexivity and materiality of the mirror.

The novel *Nana* provides another example of the textual mirroring that Zola embeds in his texts. The novel also provides historical links with his earlier novel *L’Assommoir* and with Manet’s painting of *Nana*. In *L’Assommoir*, Nana appears at the end of the novel as Gervaise’s daughter, who grows from a playful infant to become a seductive young woman. Blond and buxom at the age of 15, she procures a rich 55 year-old bourgeois lover, whom she quickly abandons to pursue the life of an up-scale prostitute. In the novel *Nana*, we are introduced to *Nana* when she is 18. In the first chapter she takes Paris by storm as the thinly veiled “Blond Venus,” the title of an operetta performed at the fictional Théâtre des Variétés. *Nana*’s career as a courtesan is also the story of how she destroys every man who pursues her. Count Muffat is the most injured – he looses his fortune to *Nana*’s voracious appetite for material riches, commits adultery, and is humiliated by *Nana*’s betrayals in extending her affection to other men. The entropic metatheme also prevails over the narrative. *Nana*’s rise to stardom on the stage is brief, replaced by her achieving entry into the aristocracy. However, *Nana*’s insatiable appetite for expensive finery and food, not only ruins men’s fortunes but also leads to her own ruin. In the last chapter, *Nana* leaves Paris to “foreign exotic parts,” having become bored with her abundance of riches. When she returns months later, she gets smallpox and dies a horrible, disfiguring death.

As in *L’Assommoir*, the entropic metatheme in *Nana* is structured by mirrored textual

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13. I am referring here to the repoussoir figure.
14. Zola devotes a chapter (xi) to a detailed account of *Nana*’s upbringing and delinquency.
15. This is the age Zola provided in Chapter 1 of *Nana*. Based on the chronology in *L’Assommoir*, however, scholars argue that she is 15.
symmetries. As Pierre Petit has shown, the mirroring occurs at the level of localization – that is, the sites where the action takes place. Petit divides the fourteen chapters into three locations, as illustrated in this diagram. The chapters labeled A take place “Au Spectacle,” chapters labeled B take place “Chez Nana,” and chapters labeled C take place “Chez Muffat.” In the first five chapters the scenes alternate between B and C – Nana’s and Muffat’s residences, and are framed by A, the Théâtre des Variétés. These scenes form the pattern A-BCB-A. The next three chapters, at the novel’s center, take place elsewhere: Chapter VI takes place at Nana’s country villa, where she gains entry into aristocratic social life. The next two Chapters VII and VIII return to Paris. These two chapters form a textual snare and are pivotal to Nana’s degeneration. Immersed in a frenzy of extravagance, Nana traverses the city to various locations trying to satisfy her insatiable carnal desires. In each of these centrally located chapters, which Petit marks as locations of “instability,” Nana herself embodies the spectacle.

Symmetry returns to the last six chapters, again forming the pattern A-BCB-A.17 Except for the Chapter XI, another outdoor scene at the racetracks, the same alternating sequence of locations, between Nana’s residence (B) and Muffat’s residence (C), is framed by A – the world of the spectacle: Chapter IX takes place at the Théâtre des Variétés and Chapter XIV at the Grand Hotel. In this last scene, the spectacle resumes with Nana’s death: she dies surrounded by women spectators in her hotel room while male spectators wait for her demise in the hotel lobby.18 This structural patterning of mirroring locations, on either side of the locus of instability, also introduces another mirroring experience for the reader midway through the novel. Just as the viewer is located at the center of the spectacle in Manet’s Bar, so the reader is located at the center of Nana’s performative spectacle.

The mis en abyme19 is another mirroring device that Zola uses in Nana. According to Lucien Dällenbach, the mis en abyme is “a means by which the work turns back on itself, appears to be a kind of reflexion” or, in other words, it is “the mirror in the text.”20 In the case of Nana, “the mirror in the text” appears as a story within the story which occurs in

16. Chapter I – At the Theater des Variétés; Cahpter II – Chez Nana; Chapter – III, Chez Muffat; Chapter IV – Chez Nana; Chapter V – Au Theatre des Varietés.
17. Chapter IX – Au theatre des Varietés; Chapter X – Chez nana; Chapter XI – Longchamp–another outdoor scene; Chapter XII – alternating locations: Chez Nana-Chez Muffat-Chez nana (this being a mis en abyme); Chapter XIII – Chez Nana; Chapter XIV – Grand hotel.
18. Another set of symmetries are constructed as places of “harmony” (ch. 1, v, ix, xiv) where nana is the spectacle and antithetical, a matter of different points of view: nana seen in the “salle” (1) of the theater or backstage (v); nana victorious (IX) or defeated (XIV). In these last two chapters the opposition salle-backstage coexists, up to a certain point, with the opposition victorious-defeated (23).
19. Mise en abyme (also mise en abîme) has several meanings in the realm of the creative arts and literary theory. The term is originally from the French and means, “placing into infinity” or “placing into the abyss”. The commonplace usage of this phrase is describing the visual experience of standing between two mirrors, seeing an infinite reproduction of one’s image. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mise_en_abyme (04/09/10).
Chapter VII, strategically placed at the exact center of the novel. Nana and Muffat are in her dressing room and she is gazing at her naked self in the full-length mirror having “grown absorbed in her ecstatic self-contemplation.” Muffat, however, is troubled by the story just published in a journal, titled “The Golden Fly,” which he reads to Nana. The story describes “the life of a harlot descended from generations of drunkards,” who now “[w]ith her . . . rottenness that is allowed to ferment among the populace[,] is carried upward and rots the aristocracy. . . [and] corrupts and disorganizes all Paris.” This story, of course, mirrors both Nana’s history and Muffat’s corruption. Realizing this, Muffat at first is repulsed. He then gazes at Nana’s reflection in the mirror and becomes seduced once again by “her satin skin and the supple contours of her shape.”

If this textual scene reminds you of Manet’s Nana, it is not by accident. For one thing, Manet’s 1877 painting was named after the young woman Nana who became a prostitute at the end of L’Assommoir which was published in the same year Manet created the painting. For another, Zola used the painting to create the stage-like setting and the characters’ positions in Nana’s dressing room. As in the painting, the novel reader is caught in the narcissistic circuit of Nana’s gaze, which is returned to her by Muffat’s gaze. This creative exchange between painter and writer is not only an important historical event, but it also invites an investigation of their critical exchanges. While Zola championed Manet in his critical reviews of the artist’s works, he did so in the name of Naturalism and the mimetic reflections Naturalism promoted. Manet, in turn, responded with pictorial retorts to the limitations that Naturalism imposed. It is this critical exchange, and the mirror’s pivotal place therein, that I will treat in the remainder of this paper.

SECTION 4: THE MIRROR AS A CRITICAL DEVICE

When Zola began writing about Manet in 1866 he invoked the mirror-motif as a critical tool for promoting Manet and his work as a modern way of seeing. Zola regarded Manet as a mirroring agent and his art as a mirror reflection of both his subjects’ physical appearance and their social existence. In doing so, the critic transposed his literary theory onto the artist and his works. This transposition can be traced in the two critical reviews of Manet’s art that Zola wrote in 1866 and 1867. For, in fact, it was during these years that Zola also formulated his theoretical tenets of the Naturalist novel.

24. Literary and art historians today regard Zola’s art criticism of Manet as a transference of his literary theory onto the artist and his works. However, these writers have not considered how Zola used the mirror-topos as a critical device, the method on which I want to focus. For discussions of the intersection of Zola’s literary theory and art criticism, including Manet, see: Berg, The Visual Novel, 33-60; and Robert Lethbridge.
Zola first published these tenets in the 1868 preface to the second edition of *Thérèse Raquin* (originally published in 1867). Here he explained his “analytical method” as a defense against “accusation[s] of immorality” in his novel. In this defense, Zola argued that he used the analytic method, inspired by “scientific curiosity,” as a means to “simply [be] an analyst who may have become engrossed in human corruption, but who has done so as a surgeon might in an operating theater.” For Zola, the Naturalist writer depicts these objective observations with “a clear and natural language.” As such, Naturalist language functions as a mirror reflection of reality. In this respect, Zola’s 1868 description of his literary method echoes the analytic method he ascribed to Manet two years earlier. In his 1866 Salon review Zola praised Manet’s talent for its “simplicity and accuracy,” “that is to say, the exact observation of objects.”

This earlier assessment of Manet suggests that Zola’s Naturalist theories were not only shaped by science but the pictorial arts as well. In fact, in his 1868 preface, Zola compares his process of transcribing human nature to the painter’s process of mirroring physical nature: “While I was busy writing *Thérèse Raquin* I forgot the world and devoted myself to copying life exactly and meticulously, giving myself up entirely to precise analysis of the human being. . . . The human side of the models ceased to exist, just as it ceases to exist for the eye of the artist who has a naked woman sprawled in front of him but who is solely concerned with getting on to his canvas a true representation of her shape and coloration.”

Zola elaborated on Manet’s direct observation and simple translation of nature in his longer 1867 Salon review, where he called Manet “an analytical painter.” As such, Manet is just like the modern scientist who has, in Zola’s words, “returned to a precise observation of facts.” The artist, he writes, is “an interpreter of that which is, and his works [consist] of a precise description made in a human and original language.” For Zola, the individual artist’s originality or uniqueness is only important for the way his vision is affected by his so-called “temperament,” that is, the faculty that heightens one aspect of nature over another. As Zola elsewhere explained, “a work of art is a corner of nature seen through a temperament.” When Zola applied this axiom to Manet, he further aligned the artist with his own analytical method and the new art it engendered. For Zola, it is Manet’s temperament that renders natural light with heightened brightness which, in turn, enhances his formal simplicity. Zola thus surmised, “if I . . . were asked what new language Édouard Manet spoke, I would reply: he speaks a language of

25. See Robert Lethbridge.
27.
29. Zola, 1867 Salon review dedicated entirely to Manet.
simplicity and exactitude. The new note that [his temperament] contributes is one of [bright tones], filling the canvas with light. The translation that he gives us is a precise and simplified one, achieving its effect through large units and broad masses." Zola here posited the painter’s language as analogous with the Naturalist’s writer’s language, both mediums function as an objective mirror of nature.

Zola’s description of Olympia, written for his 1867 Manet review, demonstrates how he applied his art criticism and Naturalist theory to a specific painting. In the first case, Zola explains how the formal elements signify the artist’s direct observation and “nature seen through a temperament.” Viewing Olympia directly, Zola describes how “at the first glance you distinguish only . . . two tones played off against each other” – “a large pale spot on the black background.” Similarly, he observes, when you look closely, all you see are patches of color – “details have disappeared” and “everything is simplified.” However, Zola recommends that the viewer must “step back a bit” in order to “reconstruct reality.” Then, he discovers, “a curious thing happens. Each object falls into its proper plane. Olympia’s head projects from the background in astonishing relief, the bouquet becomes marvelously fresh and brilliant.” Zola attributes this transformation of paint into reality to “[the artist’s] accurate eye and . . . direct hand. . . . The painter worked as nature works, in simple masses and large areas of light, and his work has the somewhat rude and austere appearance of nature itself.” Zola then explains how the artist’s direct translation of physical nature extends to the artist’s translation of human nature.

In order to extol Manet’s painting as an accurate representation of social realities, Zola identified Olympia as “a girl of our own times, whom we have met in the streets.” As if observing a specimen of the urban environment for his own novel, Zola further explained, “She is a girl of sixteen, doubtless some model whom Edouard Manet has quietly copied just as she was. . . . When other artists correct nature by painting Venus, they lie. Manet asked himself. . . Why not tell the truth? . . . As usual the public took good care not to understand what the painter wanted. There are even people who have looked for a philosophical meaning in the painting.” This last statement deserves our attention since it denies meaningful content in Manet’s paintings, a denial repeated by Zola’s later claim that Manet never wanted “to put ideas in his paintings.” Both statements reveal Zola’s attempt to enlist Manet into the ranks of Naturalism.

33. Zola, 1867 review. 76-77.
34. Zola, 1867 review. 77.
35. Zola, 1867 review. 73.
36. When Zola aligned the new art with scientific observation he sought to distinguish it from Romantic tendencies of emotional expression and spiritual aspiration. For this reason he denied any relationship between “the paintings of Edouard Manet and the poems of Charles Baudelaire.” While he admits “that a lively sympathy has brought the poet and the painter together, but I think that I can affirm the latter has never made the blunder, committed by so many others, of wanting to put ideas in his painting.” Manet is only motivated by his talent for translating what and how he sees nature: “if he brings together several objects or several figures, he is guided in his choice only by the desire to obtain beautiful color areas, beautiful oppositions. It is silly to try to make a mystical dreamer out of an artist obedient to such a
However, in doing so, he rid the painter of any extra-pictorial or ironic intentions as well as rid his paintings of the parodic play with pictorial conventions.

Manet, an avid reader of Zola’s novels and personal a friend of the writer, would have likely read Zola’s 1868 preface to *Thérèse Raquin*. This being the case, what would Manet have thought about Zola’s subjugation of painting to writing and his refusal of meaningful content in his art? To answer this question we cannot rely on textual evidence, since Manet wrote little about his art. Instead, we can demonstrate that Manet painted Zola’s portrait in 1868 as a retort to the critic’s misinterpretation of the painter’s artistic method and pictorial intentions.\(^37\) Manet’s portrait of Zola also reveals how the artist, in turn, appropriated the writer and his writing to his own artistic agenda.

As Robert Lethbridge and others have argued\(^38\), Zola is “awkwardly misplaced” among objects and images that are alien to him. Instead of placing Zola amidst his own writings and literary activities (as is suggested in Nadar’s photographic portrait), the artist surrounded the writer with art works and texts that shaped Manet’s own artistic practices. Zola holds an open book, Charles Blanc’s popular *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles* (1849-69), which Manet would have owned and relied on for its illustrations.\(^39\) The Japanese screen, behind the sitter on the left, and the Japanese print, in the upper right, refer to Manet’s engagement with Japanese art. This print is mounted with a reproduction of Velasquez’s *The Drinkers*, marking Manet’s admiration of Spanish art, and an engraving of Manet’s *Olympia*.\(^40\) Ironically, this *Olympia* turns her gaze toward Zola, in appreciation of his admiration for the painting. Directly below *Olympia* is a blue pamphlet inscribed with Manet’s name on its cover. This pamphlet marks another tribute to Manet; it is a reprint of Zola’s 1867 review of Manet’s work which was published on the occasion of the artist’s one-man exhibition that took place in May 1867.\(^41\) Here, however, Manet reversed the writer’s appropriation of his paintings by appropriating Zola’s writing: Manet replaced the pamphlet’s printed title with his personal signature used to sign the painting.\(^42\)

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40. Ibid., 39.
42. Lethbridge, “Manet and Textual Frames,” 74. Lethbridge also asserts that the painting is evidence of Manet’s ironic, “visual wit” as well as an articulation of “the contemporary debate about the relative autonomy of literature and painting”.
Although Zola is oblivious to all the visual references to Manet’s artistic “sources,” we are not. For one thing, we see and recognize the pictorial cues from which Zola looks away. For another, compositional delineations compel the viewer to focus on pictorial images and the artist’s inscription. Manet directs our gaze in a diagonal direction, first to scan the illustrated pages of the open book, then to follow the book’s binding to Zola’s thumb and fingers, which, in turn, directs our attention to the artist’s signature. Similarly, Manet uses the L-shaped contours of Zola’s arm and torso to repeat the outline of the frame that holds the print collection. In doing so, he reinforces the pictorial methods that underlay his art. Now the viewer’s gaze mirrors the artist’s self-reflection on his medium and the conventions specific to pictorial representation. In short, we can agree with Lethbridge who asserts that the portrait’s internal pictorial references ‘reassert [Manet’s] creative contacts with tradition that Zola had missed.’

Notwithstanding Manet’s reassertion of his painting’s autonomy and its traditions, Zola responded to the portrait in a literary way. Indeed, he used his 1868 Salon review to reassert Manet’s position as an analytical observer in the service of his Naturalist theories. Here Zola echoed his 1868 preface to *Thérèse Raquin*, where he compared the writer’s process to the painter’s process, wherein each forgets his subjects’ physical presence during sessions of intense observation. Thus, in describing Manet’s performance while painting his portrait, Zola recalls, “Manet had forgotten me, he didn’t know I was there, he was copying me as he would have copied any human animal, with an attention, an artistic awareness, the like of which I have never seen.” Like the disengaged writer who only records what he observes, so Manet painted both the surrounding still-lifes and the living model with equal intensity and color harmony. Zola thus concludes that “Manet is before all a naturalist. His eye sees and renders objects with an elegant simplicity.”

In the following years Zola further developed the Naturalist novel and continued to champion Manet’s achievements along similar lines of his literary theory. He variously called Manet “a modern artist, a realist, a positivist” (1875), “a naturalist, an analyst” (1876).
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(1876), and “one of the tireless workers of naturalism” \(^{48}\) (1880). With all these labels, Zola matched Manet’s art and method with the later positivist tenets he presented in the essay “The Experimental Novel,” Zola’s treatise on his scientific methods published in 1880. Here Zola explained his determinist techniques of studying humans through their relationship with the social environment. Like the scientist, the writer is free of personal feelings and moralizing, and controls his "a priori ideas" by “observation and experiment." \(^{49}\) While Zola aligned his experimental method with the scientist’s, he also aligned the artist with the experimental novelist. As he put it, “The artist has the same starting point as the scientist; he stands before nature, has an a priori idea, and works in line with that idea.” Yet, Zola cautioned, the artist only “diverges[s] from the scientist if he carries his idea out to the end without verifying its exactness by observation and experiment.” \(^{50}\)

In conclusion, I want to return to A Bar at the Folies Bergère to argue that this painting also represents Manet’s retort against Zola’s latest appropriations of his art. Manet began the painting in 1881, just one year after Zola had called the painter “one of the tireless workers of naturalism” and had published “The Experimental Novel.” Manet’s retort is not just against the assimilation of the visual by the textual, \(^{51}\) but also against the take-over of modernity by science. With A Bar at the Folies Bergère Manet reclaimed his Baudelairean modernity and, at the same time, disassociated himself from Zola’s determinist positivism.

As we have seen, because Manet’s painting shares mirroring techniques and urban themes with the naturalist novel, associations with entropic metathemes are inevitably encoded in the network of visual forms – whether figurative or abstract. For example, for the nineteenth-century viewer the barmaid might foretell the working-class woman’s inevitable “fall” into prostitution. \(^{52}\) Likewise, the dematerialized ambience of the café-concert scene might evoke an atmosphere of incessant decay. Conversely, as I have argued, these surroundings evoke the incessant flux and contradictions that Baudelairean modernity extolled. In short, I think Manet shared Baudelaire’s affirmation of such modern phenomena as a source of cultural renewal. Manet thus used the mirror to demonstrate that his art was not just a static record of modern life, but rather a dynamic translation of the lived experience. As earlier discussed, it was this cognitive

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49. He thus defined the experimental novelist as “he who accepts proved facts, who shows in man and society the mechanism of the phenomena which science has mastered, and who lets his personal sentiments enter in only concerning those phenomena whose determinism is not yet fixed, while he tries to control this personal sentiment, this a priori idea as well as he can by observation and experiment.” 195.
51. Re: Lethbridge.
52. The “fallen” women one of the most prevalent themes of the naturalist novel, which follows the anit-heroine within entropic metatheme pattern. The barmaid’s lowly labor in the public realm of entertainment marks her sexual availability and, in turn, her inevitable degeneration into prostitution. More often than not the anti-heroine succumbs to prostitution for material and social gain, as witnessed in Nana.
experience that Baudelaire attributed to the painter of modern life, comparing him “to a mirror as vast as the crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with every one of its movements presents … life, in all its multiplicity[.]”

Given his Baudelairean allegiance, Manet’s choice of the Folies-Bergère as a site of modernity can be explained by the spectacle of mirrors actually encountered in the building’s interiors. Both the semi-circular theatre and the adjoining rectangular hall (or winter garden) were lined with mirrors, as seen in these photographs, where the camera flash reflects off the walls of the theater and winter garden. Graphic illustrations of the Folies-Bergère also suggest the ways in which Manet combined the two spaces into a single space in order to portray the experiential, cognitive effects of modernity. First, these documents record the presence of several bars, located at both ends and, perhaps, the center of the semi-circular balcony of the theater and along one side of the ground-story of the winter garden. Second, a more realistic rendering of The Bar at the Folies-Bergère, by Jean-Louis Forain, illustrates the actual curvature of a mirrored bar at one end of the theater balcony. As this diagram shows, the mirror’s curvature explains why Manet rendered the barmaid’s and her client’s reflection off center. The bar’s countertop also suggests the mirror’s concavity: the end of the countertop is reflected in the mirror but is not shown in the foreground. We can also see that the viewer’s position is identical with that of the client.

Finally, and of particular importance, a poster depicts how the staircase-arcade bridged the theater and winter garden and that the two spaces opened onto each other. This image suggests that the figures in Manet’s mirrored balcony scene are also both viewing the stage and mingling in the two-storied rectangular winter garden. That adjoining space is further suggested by Manet’s rendering of perspectival depth, here marked by the receding orthogonal lines behind the barmaid. Yet, the cropped legs of the trapeze artist, in the upper left corner, indicate that we are standing within the theater where the trapeze act was performed. Given these simultaneous views, we can assume that the artist distorted reality and mastered his technique in representing the real spectacle of the Folies-Bergère as an unending hall of mirrors, mirroring, in effect, the kaleidoscopic experience of modern Paris. As a result, the viewer inhabits the instable space that Nana occupies at the center of the novel: immersed in the multitude of the crowd and its infinite transience.

If we accept that Manet’s bar at the Folies-Bergères is not one bar but a composite of all the bars enclosed within its walls, then we will also agree that his portrayal is a product of the lived experience transformed by his imagination (rather than the translation of nature by his “temperament”). Like the concave mirror, Manet’s mirroring converges everything into a composite image. As such, another Baudelairean narrative unfolds, one that follows the creative process prescribed in “The Painter of Modern Life.” As quoted earlier, Baudelaire described the modern artist as a man of the crowd from dawn to dusk, who at night retreats from the crowd. Alone in his studio, the artist reflects upon his sensory experiences and then “[a]ll the materials . . . undergo that deliberate
idealization, which is ... acute and magical by its very ingeniousness." Manet followed both the process and means of Baudelaire’s prescription for the creative translation of nature. As the ink drawing of the Folies-Bergère shows, Manet rendered his first impressions on the spot. Away from the crowds in his studio, he retrieved the essence of the café-concert and re-presented its scintillating ambience in the fragmented but unified surface of the canvas. If his viewers recognized A Bar at the Folies-Bergère as a dynamic synthesis of low art and high art, of real and remembered space, of sketch-like brushwork and visual spectacle, would they not have viewed Manet’s painting with, in Baudelaire’s words, “the shock of surprise”? If so, Manet would have effected an ironic aesthetic response that Baudelaire celebrated as the ultimate purpose of artistic creation.

To summarize: Manet responded to Zola’s Naturalist appropriation of his art by demonstrating how the painted mirror (the painted canvas) sustains the transitoriness of modernity and its ironic effects. In doing so, he created an experiential immediacy that the novel could not have achieved. Although in Zola’s novels character and plot developments are structured by mirrored symmetries, these developments depend on sequential events that unfold in real time (for the reader) and abstract time (within the novel’s structure). Ironically, the mis en abyme in Nana comes closest to a point where visual and textual mirrorings converge. That is, the story within the story, illustrated by Muffat reading “The Golden Fly” to Nana, is also reflected in the mirror reflection of Nana’s gaze in Muffat’s gaze. To be sure, Zola adapted this scene from Manet’s Nana. Manet, however, ironized this mimetic interpretation of his paintings. Always reflecting on his medium in the Bar, Manet used the mirror to subvert mimetic reflections and to present, instead, a painting within a painting which is about painting. Here, finally, the viewer is caught in a visual snare that defies narrative appropriation and prolongs ironic contemplation.

53. Zola. The Painter 402, original emphasis.