

# Manet and Velazquez

By Paul Corio, 1999

*What a joy it would have been for you to see Velazquez which for him alone is worth the trip. The painters of every school who surround him in the museum of Madrid, and who are all very well represented, seem completely like fakers. He is the painter of painters. He has astonished me, he has ravished me.*

-- Edouard Manet, in a letter to Henri Fantin-Latour, 1865.<sup>1</sup>

This is extraordinary praise from an artist who was known to be terse and wry, and who left very little in the way of written evidence of his ideas about painting. It was my original intent to write an essay solely about the formal similarities between the paintings of Velazquez and Manet: the fluid Venetian brushwork and lush surfaces, the so-called "Spanish palette," the single-figure compositions, the casual virtuosity of draughtsmanship and intrinsic understanding of the human figure. While these subjects will play a prominent role in my investigation, I determined during the course of my research that writing an essay of this kind (which, of course, has been written many time before) would to a large extent be writing about effect and not cause. What I became truly interested in is why Manet, the quintessential modern artist of the nineteenth century who did so much to explode the sacred cows of academic art, responded so strongly to paintings completed over two centuries earlier. What I came to conclude is that he saw an essential modernity in Velazquez's paintings that he intended to harness in his own work.

First, I should like to define what I mean by modernity. I am not specifically referring to modernity in the sense of modernism -- the current in painting that (according to Clement Greenberg) was initiated by Manet. Nor do I mean simply painting people wearing the clothing of the day and depicted in contemporary settings. What I am trying to describe is something slightly more elusive than either of the above; it is something that I believe is illustrated by Velazquez's *Juan de Pareja* from 1648 (at the Metropolitan Museum). Juan looks like someone you might have seen on the street before entering the museum. Almost all of the people depicted in the paintings in the surrounding renaissance, mannerist, and baroque galleries at the Met look like characters who only exist in old paintings, but Juan's humanity and contemporaneity is disarming -- the Greek ideal which hung over so much of renaissance and mannerist painting is present neither in subject matter nor execution. I am not the first person to notice this. In Palomino's biography of Velazquez, he describes the portrait's Roman debut, where "it received such universal acclaim that in the opinion of all the painters of different nations everything else looked like painting, this alone like reality."<sup>2</sup> The fact that Juan is wearing a seventeenth-century doublet does nothing to dispel this illusion of perpetual modernity. Manet himself seemed to understand that if a figure could be made this palpable, it didn't matter what era the clothing he or she was wearing came from, and he routinely costumed his sitters in historical (often seventeenth-century) attire. My point is that *Juan De Pareja*, like so many of the Velazquez genre paintings and non-royal portraits, looks like it might have been completed yesterday, both in terms depiction and technique. Manet understood that nymphs and satyrs, along with the prevailing methods of painting them, was not relevant subject matter in the wake of the industrial revolution, and he was searching through history for new models. He stated in his letter to Fantin-Latour that all Velazquez's neighbors in the surrounding galleries at the Prado looked like fakers. Implicit in this statement is that he saw a reality in Velazquez's work upon which he could build.

My goal, then, is to try and further articulate the characteristics of Velazquez's paintings that render them so insistently modern, and to show how Manet co-opted and expanded these elements in his

own work, which ultimately paved the way for twentieth-century abstraction. As a delimiting factor, I only intend to analyze paintings that hang in New York collections (i.e., paintings that I can go and see), with a special emphasis on two pictures that hang at the Met: the afore-mentioned *Juan de Pareja* by Velazquez and Manet's *Mademoiselle V... in the Costume of an Espada* from 1862. While this eliminates most of both artists' great masterpieces from the discussion, it makes the entire project more approachable -- something that can be accomplished in the space of an essay as opposed to an entire volume. Further, I believe the qualities that I am looking for in the work of both artists are sufficiently espoused in *Juan* and *Mademoiselle V* to make my case.

I'll begin with some brief notes on the lives and concerns of the seventeenth-century courtier and the nineteenth-century flaneur. Don Diego Velazquez de Silva (1599-1660) in many ways seems an unlikely candidate to be one of the great innovators in the history of painting, since his unceasing concern in life seems to have been the elevation of his class-status. Ironically, painting was both a vehicle and an impediment to this end. Born in Seville of lesser nobility, he showed an aptitude for drawing and painting at an early age, and in 1610 was apprenticed to the Sevillian painter and theorist Francisco Pacheco. His ambitions were much larger than simply being the best painter in Seville, and in 1623, after an unsuccessful attempt the previous year, he won a court appointment as painter to King Philip IV. At court he was able to hone his skills without the financial worries which plagued independent painters; he was given lodgings near the palace in Madrid, a stipend of twenty ducats a month, plus additional payments for completed pictures. Painting, however, was considered a craft (like carpentry or brick-laying), and as such was not a fitting enterprise for nobility. Fortunately for Velazquez, Philip IV was a devotee of painting (and an amateur painter) who would later in life become - with the assistance of Velazquez - a voracious collector.

In 1628, Rubens came to the court of Philip IV and took a keen interest in Velazquez. While encouraging to the younger artist, the older master saw his shortcomings and knew that the almost total lack of a Spanish tradition in painting would arrest his progress. Taking a cue from Rubens, Velazquez went to Italy in 1629 to study the works of the masters, and this was clearly the turning point in the development of his mature style. Especially evident in the works made after the Italian trip is the influence of the Venetian painters, particularly Titian, in regards to the warmth of the palette and loose, expressive brushwork. Caravaggio is present in respect to the notion that people could be depicted in a natural, unidealized way -- what I believe to be a large part of his Velazquez's (and Caravaggio's) modernity. The 1630's proved to be Velazquez's most productive decade and his towering skill as a portraitist brought him increasing royal favors, including his appointment as Ayuda de Camara in 1643 and Apostenador Mayor de P alacio in 1652. The artist's ever-expanding list of titles made him a personal attendant to the king and his apartments, as well as a kind of royal travel agent. These responsibilities further elevated his class standing, but greatly decreased his output. In the last two decades of his life, he only produced about forty pictures, but it would seem that this trade-off was completely acceptable to the status-hungry Velazquez. The painter was finally admitted to the exclusive order of the Knights of Santiago two years before his death, with the intervention of Philip IV and Pope Alexander VII, who was duly impressed with the portrait of his predecessor, Pope Innocent X, that Velazquez had painted in 1650 during his second stay in Italy.

Edouard Manet (1832-83) was born in Paris to wealthy parents, both of whom occupied influential government positions. The fact that he was a child of privilege would, throughout his life, offer him an even larger freedom than Velazquez had under the protection of Philip IV. Velazquez's subject matter was somewhat restricted by his position at court; Manet had no such limitations. In 1850, the young artist entered the studio of the noted academic painter Thomas Couture, where he received rigorous, traditional training, including painting from the figure and copying from the masters. One year after Manet entered Couture's atelier, Louis Napoleon staged his coup d'etat and established the Second

Empire in France. At the heart of Napoleon III's regime was the Nero-like destruction and subsequent rebuilding of Paris. Under the direction of the notorious Baron Haussmann, the old city with its narrow streets and secretive quarters was razed with dizzying speed, to be replaced with broad boulevards and contemporary architecture which were meant to render Paris the world's most modern city. The abrupt transformation of Paris from an old city to a new one, replete with modern spectacles -- the racetracks, operas, cafe-concerts, and promenades -- is a critical part of understanding Manet's development; Paris itself became a metaphor for the vast technological and concomitant social changes that were sweeping Europe. Manet saw that with this upheaval, painting also had to change.

By all accounts, Manet was a textbook example of a particular type of urban creature known as a flaneur. A flaneur can be defined thusly: He was invariably male, and always impeccably dressed. He strolled the streets of Paris, keenly observing the goings-on and taking mental notes, like a detective. He was wealthy, but disdained to talk about money; his favorite topics were art and literature, and his knowledge of these things was vast. He was terse and witty. He read the newspapers religiously and was always apprised of the latest gossip. And perhaps most critically to the purpose of this essay, the flaneur was detached. The flaneur always wished to be present as events unfolded, but never participated -- he only wished to observe. In my opinion, this seemingly contradictory marriage of minute powers of observation mixed with a kind of detachment that almost borders on indifference is key to understanding the relationship between the works of Velazquez and Manet. Both these artists shared an almost journalistic ability to record visual data as it appeared before them, without the requisite idealization required by classicism.

Truly vanguard art always attracts rabid criticism from self-styled defenders of the faith. Manet had a legion of detractors who clung to the neo-classic doctrines espoused by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. While Velazquez was greatly admired in his day, he was not without critics, who, like those of Manet, wished to preserve classical dogmas. Vicente Carducho was an older painter in the court of Philip IV who was jealous of the younger Velazquez's meteoric rise to prominence. In 1633, he published his treatise on art theory entitled *Dialogos de la Pintura*, one section of which virulently attacked Caravaggio, who Carducho was clearly using as a stand-in for Velazquez. In 1870, Charles Blanc, the French government's newly appointed Director of Fine Arts (who dictated the policies of the Salon) wrote an article which appeared in *Le Temps* entitled "On the Role of Government in the Arts." In his essay, Blanc articulated his distaste for the painters he called Realists or Naturalists, clearly referring to Manet and Courbet. While these texts were written 237 years apart, certain aspects of their attacks on modern painting are surprisingly similar.

Carducho blanched at the idea of simply painting things as they looked, without perfection or idealization: "Has anyone else managed to paint as successfully as this evil genius, who worked naturally, almost without precepts, without doctrine, without study, but only with the strength of his talent, with nothing but nature before him, which he simply copied in his amazing way?" Carducho goes on to lament Caravaggio's seduction of the masses into believing that one could paint without cumbersome rules: "Thus this Anti-Michaelangelo, with his showy and superficial imitation, his stunning manner, and liveliness, has been able to persuade such a great number and variety of people that his is good painting, and his method and doctrine the true ones, that they have turned their backs on the true way of achieving eternity..."<sup>3</sup> Blanc also could not reconcile the idea of simply painting things as they looked, "the vulgarities that dishearten us every day, the deformities that afflict us, all the things that weary and sicken us. To swallow twice the grossness of life? Once is enough." Blanc is in accord with Carducho in the notion that painting should "achieve eternity" by aspiring to a "better world where the ideal flourishes, where truth veils itself, where poetry is unveiled."<sup>4</sup> There are several ironies at play in these texts. As is so often the case, criticism which attempts to discredit a certain type of art often inadvertently articulates the art's greatest strengths, thereby sabotaging its own enterprise. The second great irony is in Carducho and Blanc's insistence that art should exist outside of time. As I mentioned

earlier, so many of the paintings in the Met which were painted with an eye to the eternal simply look like antiques, while Juan de Pareja, a painting of a particular person at a particular time, looks strikingly fresh.

Juan de Pareja was a Sevillian of Moorish descent, and was Velazquez's slave until freedom was granted him in 1654. He worked as an independent painter until his death in 1670, and was included in Palomino's *Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors*, where his work is described as a convincing facsimile of Velazquez. This would seem to suggest that besides stretching canvas and grinding pigments, he was also one of the shop assistants that actually worked on Velazquez's canvases. Velazquez painted his portrait during the artist's second trip to Italy, shortly before painting his famous picture of the stern looking Pope Innocent X. Juan's portrait is 32 inches high by 27 1/2 inches wide, and is painted in a fairly characteristic Velazquez palette: a variety of warm and cool greys within a fairly narrow value range, black, white, and a ruddy flesh tone. As I stated at the beginning of my essay, the picture is startlingly human, but it is not smooth or photographic; the brushstrokes are quite loose and sketchy. The portrait is half-length, cutting the sitter off just above the belt, and in three-quarter view, with his back to the left side of the framing edge. His left arm crosses his mid-section and his hand seems to be about to withdraw some mysterious object from under the cape which drapes from his left shoulder. His clothing, hair and goatee are dark and tend to merge with the dark background, except for his wide, bright-white collar. As in so many of Velazquez's portraits, the background is without detail except for some subtle tonal modulations; I would be tempted to call it a wall, but it is more of an atmosphere, in that it surrounds the subject as opposed to simply hanging behind him (Manet would borrow this device again and again). His face is illuminated by a single light source emanating from the upper right, casting the lower left side of his face in shadow. He looks directly at the painter/viewer. Palomino suggests that Juan was in his early sixties at the time of his death, which would mean he was in his late thirties or early forties at the time the portrait was painted.

A good place to begin an investigation into Juan's portrait - both in and of itself and as an exemplar of Velazquez's larger body of work - is to look at some of the artist's influences. In Palomino's hyperbolic biography of Velazquez, the author states: "Because he counterfeited nature in his works so successfully and with such verisimilitude - always keeping it present in all he did - Velazquez was called a second Caravaggio. In his portraits he imitated Dominico Greco for, in his view, his likenesses could never be praised enough... Finally, Velazquez's art shone with energy of the Greeks, the diligence of the Romans, and the tenderness of the Venetians and Spaniards..."<sup>5</sup> While Palomino's praise borders on the comic, his comparisons provide an excellent starting point. Of the six influences which Palomino lists, I am most interested in four. Caravaggio, El Greco, the Venetians (specifically in regard to Titian), and the Romans (particularly in regard to their portrait-busts). As for the Greeks -- or more specifically as for the renaissance notion of the Greek ideal -- I believe that Velazquez was questioning the viability of that beauty-paradigm (and Manet could sense that in Velazquez's works). In terms of the Spaniards, I don't know who, besides El Greco, that Palomino could be talking about. Further, I should separate the four influences I intend to touch upon into two different categories. Caravaggio and the Romans (which I will deal with first and fourth, respectively) I will place under content, or ideas about representation. Titian and El Greco's influence (second and third) pertain to form, or the technical methods of representation. During the course of my analysis, these two issues will each encroach upon the territory of the other, but it is as true today as it was 400 years ago that a great painting must be a marriage of form and content, so much so that one becomes almost indistinguishable from the other.

An essential part of being a modern painter is keeping up with the trends in modern painting, and in the beginning of the seventeenth century, the news was Caravaggio (1571-1610). Velazquez probably became aware of the infamous painter long before he actually saw any of the work; his tempestuous life

story was as well known as his painting. While one could make tenuous connections with the more smoothly brushed paintings of Velazquez's Sevillian period (like the Met's *Supper at Emmaus* from 1623), the actual influence that Caravaggio's work had on Velazquez's was slight in terms of the borrowing of formal devices or compositions. Velazquez mature paintings sought to depict an accurate representation of the world; Caravaggio's painting was a kind of amplification of reality. The languid boys in *The Musicians* (1594) and *The Lute Player* (1597), both at the Met, are not so much real as super-real - their fleshiness and sensuality is tantamount to over-ripe fruit. This treatment of the figure simply would not work for a status-seeking court painter in inquisition-era Spain. What Caravaggio represented to Velazquez, and other young painters of the era, was the idea that one could paint what one saw without the requisite idealization demanded by the prevailing interpretation of the Greek ideal. There is certainly very little of Caravaggio in Juan de Pareja, except for the idea that Juan could be represented as he actually looked. While apprentice painters were required to work from life, they would learn that what they saw must be mitigated by the mind in the interest of achieving a kind of physical, spiritual, and moral perfection. As Charles Blanc's treatise shows, this conflict between realism and idealism would again arise in the nineteenth century, with Manet and Courbet as the new vanguard.

Formally, Velazquez was deeply influenced by the paintings of Titian (1488-1576) and El Greco (1541-1614). Titian's portrait of Filippo Archinto, Archbishop of Milan, from 1556 and at the Met, is in many ways a model for the palette of *Juan de Pareja* and the composition of Pope Innocent X. Further, a personalized version of Titian's brushwork can be seen in almost everything Velazquez painted after his first Italian trip. The archbishop is portrayed seated and cut off just above the knees. He is wearing what is presumably his clerical dress: a dark mantle over a white robe. He is portrayed in three-quarter view, and facing the right (his eyes do not engage the painter/viewer). His chair seems to be tipped slightly forward, although the effect is not as though we are looking downward at Archinto; it simply looks like some liberties were taken with the rules of perspective. The framing edges on the top, left and right are quite close to sitter, giving the appearance that he is very close to the picture plane. The colors in Filippo Archinto are essentially black, white, and flesh, with slight touches of red on the trim of the archbishop's mantle, sleeve, and the edges of the book he holds in his left hand, small areas of dark brown on the edges of the chair, and two gold rings (one on each hand). Velazquez took several lessons from Titian in terms of coloration. The general warmth and earthiness of the palette, the hallmark of so much Venetian painting, was one. The use of chiaroscuro was another; directing the viewer's eye around a picture with intervals of lighter tones which emerge from an overall darkness (this technique would be brought to its apogee by Rembrandt).

But perhaps the most important lesson Velazquez learned from Titian in relation to the portrait of Juan de Pareja is the number of colors used and the way they are modulated. As I mentioned, there are really only about six colors in the painting of Archinto, but if one were to try and count the number of minute variations in the black alone - warm blacks, cool blacks, blue-blacks, brown-blacks, red-blacks - one could see that the actual number of colors in the painting is too vast to tabulate. If we compare this to Juan's portrait, the same phenomenon emerges. Velazquez's picture, like Titian's, is executed in a small range of colors, in this case grey, black, white, and flesh. But here, as in Archinto, the myriad modulations suggest a much wider variety of colors. The subtle shift from the cooler grey of the costume to the brownish grey of the ground, similar in value, but differing in tint and temperature, is what gives the feeling that the area surrounding Juan is not background so much as atmosphere. Likewise, the subtle variations in the local color of Juan's face -- the slightly red tints in the cheeks and lips, the brownish tint of the nose with its white highlight, the yellowish-white additions to the forehead and eyelids -- are a large part of Juan's surprising realism.

The Venetians' loose brushwork is another aspect of Titian's work that Velazquez adapted, but updated for greater immediacy -- which, again, would be very attractive to Manet. Titian's late work

was painted with a loose, expressive mark; the opposite of the smooth, uninflected surfaces of Raphael. It is important to note the difference in emphasis of these two methods of paint application in relating them to the modernity of both Velazquez and Manet. Raphael's method tended to mask the process by which the painting was made. The magical illusion of deep space upon what was understood to be a flat surface was paramount, and technique was no more than a means to this end. While the Venetians also sought spatial illusionism, their method concurrently acknowledged the two-dimensionality of the picture surface and the literal qualities of the materials used. By leaving the brushstrokes plainly visible, the painter left no doubt that the painting was made with a brush, thus process becomes part of the viewer's experience. As Greenberg stated in his seminal essay, "Modernist Painting:" "Realistic, illusionist art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art. Modernism used art to call attention to art."<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of painting since Manet has been predicated, at least in part, on this assertion of the materials, but shining examples can also be found scattered throughout the history of western painting.

While Titian's brushwork differed greatly from Raphael's, his method of glazing is similar. Glazing is the method by which paint is diluted with oil and solvent until it becomes transparent and is then applied in successive layers in a wet over dry method -- similar to the way in which a watercolor is made. Glazed oil paint has the peculiar and impressive effect of looking like it is lit from behind, but, needless to say, it is a lengthy process. Depending on the type of pigment and the amount of oil, each layer can take anywhere from several days to several weeks to dry. A close look at the Titian which hangs just to the right of Filippo Archinto, Archbishop of Milan at the Met provides a preview of Velazquez's adaptation of Titian's method. The picture is titled *Venus and the Lute Player*, and dates from between 1565 and 1570 (which would place Titian in his late seventies or early eighties at the time of execution). The painting depicts a nude Venus being courted by a young musician as Cupid looks on. A red curtain, which would become such a fixture in baroque painting, is drawn to the upper right to expose a landscape and somewhat overcast sky. The foreground is painted in the above described method of layered colors, but the landscape is painted in what appears to be an alla prima (all-at-first) method, with the brown of the ground and the coarse weave of the canvas plainly showing through the diluted blues, tans, pinks, mossy greens, and browns that make up the landscape and sky. The painting-surface is completely exposed in certain places, and is used for both tone and texture.

The method in which Titian painted the background of *Venus and the Lute Player* would become Velazquez's model for subjects other than the royal family. Generally, this technique only appears in the garments or backgrounds of the royal portraits, which required a high degree of finish and restraint, particularly in respect to the depiction of the face. But in paintings that did not require such a regimented treatment of the subject, such as Juan de Pareja, this method became Velazquez's *modus operandi*. Especially inventive in Juan's picture is the way Velazquez uses the weave of the canvas in conjunction with the density or thinness of paint to create differing textures in the sitter's clothing. The impastoed sleeve suggests velvety material. The thinly painted body suggests that the material of which Juan's doublet is made is not unlike the canvas itself. The varying densities of white in the collar suggest cottony material that is worn and thin, and wispy strokes at the edge of the collar denote lacy details that have become somewhat tattered with age. This seamless marriage of form and content, in which the literal character of the materials is used to represent observed characteristics of the subject, is another key to understanding why Velazquez's work cast such a spell over Manet.

There is probably no way to overstate the incredulity with which El Greco's late work was received. The *Vision of St. John*, at the Met and painted somewhere between 1608 and the artist's death in 1614, has more in common with Soutine than Titian. Palomino gives some idea of the reaction when he refers to "the bizarreness into which he fell at the end." He goes on to say "whatever he did well, no one did better, and what he did badly, no one did worse."<sup>7</sup> El Greco's influence on Velazquez is an important one, and I will digress from the discussion of Juan de Pareja briefly to illustrate my point. El

Greco's *Portrait of a Cardinal* from 1600 (at the Met) is believed to be a picture of the Grand Inquisitor, Cardinal Guevara. The portrait is full figure and seated, and the cardinal's body is completely hidden by a cascading shiny, pinkish mantle and an intricately embroidered white robe beneath. He sports a pointed beard, and casts a sidelong glance to the our right through thick, round spectacles. Given his supposed identity, the effect is chilling. The artist worked with undiluted paint in an alla prima fashion, and achieved stunning effects in the cardinal's shiny cape, embroidered hem, and in the wallpaper behind. The quick, multi-directional strokes (again, in no way hiding the literal identity of the material) captures the satiny material of the mantle with dazzling accuracy. The impossibly intricate embroidery at the hem of the cardinal's robe turns out to be nothing more than dry-brushed white dragged over a dark ground. The painter provides just enough of an indication of the pattern in the gold and silver wallpaper behind the seated figure for the viewer's eye to fill in the rest, the remainder is executed in much the same way as the embroidered robes.

Velazquez employs many of the same techniques that El Greco used in *Portrait of a Cardinal* in *Philip IV at Fraga* from 1644, at the Frick Collection. This is the only portrait Velazquez painted of the king during the 1640's, and shows him in military garb. It was painted in the town of Fraga, which the Spanish army was using as a base of operations from which they hoped to retake territories invaded by the French. It is a standing portrait cut off at the knees. The king is in three-quarter view, with his back to the right side framing edge. In his right hand he holds a military baton, in his left a large black hat, and a sword hangs from his left side. His gaze engages the painter/viewer. He is wearing an intricately embroidered red cape with arm holes that reveal shiny silver sleeves, also embroidered. While the king's head is painted in a highly smooth and finished way, the sleeves and embroidery are painted the same manner that the clothing and wallpaper is painted in the El Greco picture: quick grey strokes highlighted with white denote the shiny material from which the sleeves are made, and a thin, dry brush traces skinny lines of grey and white which suggest the sleeves' embroidery. Impastoed greys of differing tone and temperature (light/dark and warm/cool contrasts) depict the intricate embroidery that runs along the edges of the king's cape, providing just enough data to indicate pattern and leaving the viewer's eye to fill in the rest. Manet would employ these techniques over two centuries later -- his only amendment being that he would often provide even less information in his shorthand, requiring a greater participation on the part of the viewer.

In his biography of his son-in-law and former pupil, Francisco Pacheco provides a fairly detailed travelogue of Velazquez's first trip to Italy. Unfortunately, he discloses precious little about the art the young painter was looking at; most of the information is about the important people Velazquez met and how warmly he was received by them. While we can only conjecture about what he saw, it is hard to imagine a trip to Italy in which one would not come in contact with Roman portrait busts. At first glance, the common thread between the roughly three-dozen marble heads in the Roman collection at the Met is how similar the expression on all the faces is; not smiling or frowning and extremely calm. But a closer investigation shows an extraordinary range of subtle nuances of expression visible in these ostensibly identical attitudes. Emperor Caracalla, carved between 217 and 230 AD, during the late Severan period, is a prime example, but a similar amount of information could be gleaned from a close description of any of the heads in the collection. Upon quick examination, the emperor displays the calm demeanor shared by most of his neighbors. But a closer look at his imposing, blockish head with closely cropped, military-style hair reveals a slightly furrowed brow and a glance that looks up and toward the right. His jaw is set, but his mouth seems like it might be about to open. The overall effect is that he was looking down at something quite important, perhaps a map or other such military matter, and was distracted by some trifling thing. The emperor looks as though he is about to bark at the unfortunate person who disturbed him.

Returning to Juan's portrait, Velazquez observes and depicts nuance with the same skill as the Roman carvers. Juan wears the same emotionless expression as the Roman busts, but his pose and calm

stare mimics the archetypical stance of early Spanish portraiture. His erect posture and vaguely regal comportment smack of the portraits of the Habsburgs, who felt that their magisterial qualities were so deeply embedded in their countenance that their pictures needn't display any royal ostentation. Juan's left hand appears to be ready to present us with something (his demeanor is too forthright to suggest that he is concealing something). Is it a letter of recommendation from one of the crowned heads of Europe, or a glove with which he will slap the viewer and challenge him to a duel, or will he draw a sword and knight the viewer? What Velazquez presents is a slave who, understanding that he is about to be painted by the *pintor del rey*, assumes the character of the king. Velazquez could have easily turned this into a sentimental disaster by overstating Juan's shabby clothes and exaggerating his regal posture, but instead presents us with the possibility that even Juan himself doesn't realize he is acting.

The prevailing myth (right up to the present day) is that great portraitists have the power to look into the psyche or "soul" of the sitter, usually through the sitter's eyes. Velazquez does not look into Juan de Pareja, he looks squarely at him, and faithfully records nuances that might simply pass by someone less observant. What I know about Juan's character comes from piecing together these subtle clues in his demeanor, in the same way that I could pick up hints about a stranger I see on the subway by examining nuances of expression, posture, and clothing. The difference, of course, is that I would never stare as hard or as long at someone on the subway as I can at a portrait. Juan, then, is a stranger who I am given the luxury to stare at, and, since the subtleties of his character are so accurately recorded, I can learn a surprising amount about him. This idea about portraiture relates again to the influence of Caravaggio: the idea that the painter shouldn't depict any presupposed ideas about how the sitter should (or wants) to be perceived, but keenly observe the sitter and depict him or her as such. Manet came of age at a time when the European economy was shifting from agrarian to industrial, and urban populations were increasing exponentially as people moved from the country to the city to work in factories. The anonymity of the city is something we take for granted, but was a fairly new phenomena in mid-nineteenth century Paris. What Manet probably saw (with his flaneur's eyes) in Velazquez's portraits and genre paintings was lots of exquisitely depicted strangers, a metaphor for the urban population.

*Mademoiselle V... in the Costume of an Espada* was painted in 1862, three years before Manet's pilgrimage to the Prado. Manet would have had exposure to Velazquez's work, however, in the Louvre's Galerie Espagnole, which opened in 1838 and contained twenty-seven paintings by Velazquez (although some were discovered to have been falsely attributed), and via Goya's etchings after Velazquez which, apparently, were widely available. *Mademoiselle V* is in fact Victorine Meurent, who was Manet's favored model -- she was Olympia, the nude in *Luncheon on the Grass*, the urban stranger in *The Railroad*, and the itinerant musician in *The Street Singer*, among others. She is depicted full-figure wearing a dark matador's outfit and in a bull-ring setting. A yellow scarf hangs from her left jacket pocket, and a pinkish-grey one is wrapped around her head, over which is a black, flat-brimmed Matador's hat. She faces the viewer, but her body is turned to the left with both arms raised; in her left hand is a pink cape and in her right a raised sword which pierces almost precisely the upper left corner of the picture. Her weight is supported by her right leg, and her left foot is behind her as though she has just pivoted into this position. Behind her and to the left is a picador about to spear a bull, which is borrowed from an etching from 1814 entitled *The Tauromaquia* by Goya (1726-1828) -- another Spanish artist who Manet greatly admired, and who, in turn, was also greatly influenced by Velazquez. Above (or behind) is a group of matadors who appear to be engaged in casual conversation in front of the wooden fence that borders the arena.

Of course, Manet would not be considered a great innovator had he simply absorbed the ideas he saw in Velazquez and reiterated them for a nineteenth century audience. Manet understood the implications of the lessons learned from the Spanish master (as well as other historical influences), and

expanded on those that addressed his concerns about modernity. By analyzing *Mademoiselle V*, I hope to show how Manet adapted what he saw in Velazquez for an urbanized, industrial world. In Manet, issues of form and content are not quite as easily separable as they are in Velazquez. T.J. Clark eloquently addresses the union of these two issues as they relate to Manet in his aptly titled *Painting of Modern Life*:

*Certain painters in the seventeenth century, for example, had failed to hide the gaps and complexities inherent in their own procedures, but those traces of paradox in perception -- those markers in the picture of where the illusion almost ended -- only served to make the likeness, where it was achieved, the more compelling, because it was seen to exist in the face of its opposite, chaos. There is no doubt that Manet and his friends looked back for instruction to painters of just this kind -- to Velazquez and Hals, for example -- but what seemed to impress them most was the evidence of palpable and frank inconsistency, and not the fact that the image was somehow preserved in the end from extinction. This shift of attention led, on the one hand, to their putting a stress on the material means by which illusion and likeness were made...; on the other, to a new set of proposals as to the form representation should take...<sup>8</sup>*

I should begin with the two most obvious similarities between *Mademoiselle V* and Velazquez. The first is thematic; like so many of Manet's paintings from the 1860's, the theme of *Mademoiselle V* is Spanish. The second is formal: the vertical, single-figure composition, loose brushwork, and the so-called "Spanish palette" are all derived from Velazquez. In 1859, Manet submitted his first important picture to the French Salon: *The Absinthe Drinker*. The picture was rejected. It was, in its limited, earthy palette, single-figure composition, and still-life elements, very much derived from Velazquez, specifically from the Spaniard's twin portraits of Aesop and Mennipus. Manet was known to have said: "I painted a Parisian character whom I had studied in Paris, and I executed it with the technical simplicity I discovered in Velazquez. No one understands it. If I painted a Spanish type, it would be more comprehensible."<sup>9</sup> In 1860, he did just that.

The Spanish Singer, now at the Met, was accepted by the Salon jury, and received mixed reviews. The singer is depicted full-figure on a blue-green bench. His dark hat and jacket and blue-grey pants vaguely smack of the bullring, and he holds a guitar, propped up on his left knee, and sings. A smoldering cigarette, which he has presumably just thrown down before starting his song, lies on the ground. Particularly Velazquez-like are the dark background and still-life elements (two onions and a jug) in the lower right. The painting was followed by a string of pictures with Spanish subjects, including *Mademoiselle V*, *Boy with a Sword* (1861), *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* (1863), and *A Matador* (1867); all at the Met. This strategy could be interpreted as pandering to the tastes of the Salon, in that the young Manet understood that making a clearer reference to an older acknowledged master would make him more attractive to the Salon jury's conservative taste. That assumption would probably not be entirely wrong-headed given the importance of an appearance in the Salon to a young painter. The Salon was very nearly the only way to get one's work presented to a broad audience; the private gallery was still quite uncommon. This interpretation is undermined, however, by the somewhat ironic way in which Manet used the Spanish costuming - more on that shortly.

Manet's comment about the "technical simplicity" he saw in Velazquez bears a closer look. There is nothing simple about the execution of any of Velazquez's paintings. What they do possess, however, and what I believe Manet is referring to, is directness and literalness. As I mentioned earlier, Velazquez took the laborious glazing he saw in the paintings of the Venetians and figured out a way to achieve similar effects *alla prima*. Further, he seldom made studies for his paintings, preferring to begin working and then correct the picture (including enlarging or reducing the canvas size) as he painted. This directness resulted in the literal acknowledgement of surface, paint and canvas, or, as Clark called

them, “those markers in the picture where the illusion almost ended.” Loose brushwork was certainly not unseen in the Salon - the romantic painter Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) was a Salon juror and was greatly admired by the emerging realists. Delacroix, in turn, was sympathetic to realism and was one of the only voices on the jury who had voted in favor of *The Absinthe Drinker*. But Velazquez’s brushwork, unlike Titian’s before him and Delacroix’s later was somewhat different. More than expressive it was a kind of shorthand. This is perhaps best illustrated in the embroidery on the cape of Philip IV at Fraga, in which a large amount of information is transmitted with extraordinary economy. As I mentioned earlier, the flaneur religiously read that tangible symbol of modernity, the newspaper. In the Parisian papers were the caricatures of Daumier and others, in which this notion of shorthand was taken to new level of abbreviation, so short were the publication deadlines. Manet adapted the directness he found in Velazquez, and brought to it the acceleration he found in Daumier. This is especially evident in the cluster of matadors in the upper right of *Mademoiselle V*, who are described with a few quick strokes; just enough information to discern they are figures and nothing more.

Velazquez’s favored portrait motif was a single figure against a long vertical ground. Often, as in the Met’s Philip IV of Spain, from 1624, the color-value of the clothing is not vastly different than the color of the background. More often than not, the background would contain little to no detail, save for some still-life elements, a single piece of furniture (as in the chest on the right side of Philip IV), or the occasional curtain. Further, Velazquez would often take some liberties with the rules of perspective by tipping the floor - and hence the shadow cast by the figure - upward slightly. In his letter to Fantin-Latour, Manet wrote this about Velazquez’s *Pablo de Valladolid* (a picture tonally and compositionally similar to *Philip IV*): “The most astounding piece of his splendid oeuvre, and perhaps the most astounding bit of painting ever done, is the picture listed in the catalogue as Portrait of a Famous Actor of the Reign of Philip IV. The background disappears. It is only air that surrounds the good man, all dressed in black, and alive.”<sup>10</sup> Manet would use this device again and again, but exploiting the tendency that this motif had toward collapsing of space, flattening of image, and merging of figure and ground (the tendency which, for Greenberg, signalled the beginning of modernist painting). While the motif of dark figure against dark ground -- with it’s concomitant spatial compression -- can be seen in *Young Man in the Costume of a Major*, *Spanish Singer*, and *Boy with a Sword*, this flattening tendency is carried out in a more aggressive and programmatic way in *Mademoiselle V*. Here the background is not strictly dark, but the perspective of the ground is radically altered, so much so that Victorine could not possibly be standing on it. Further, the scale of the Goya scene and the group of matadors agree neither with one another, nor with Victorine in terms of perspective and proximity. Again, this illogical use of perspective tends to always bring the viewer back to the reality of the two-dimensionality of a painted surface.

Manet also employed the technique which Velazquez derived from Titian of using a fairly wide variety of tints to describe an area that is ostensibly made up of one color. The painting is, like *Juan de Pareja* (and *Filippo Archinto*), made up of a relatively small array of colors: brown, grey, black, flesh, pink, and a small area of yellow -- but the variations of each of these colors within the larger zones render the palette much larger. This phenomena is most dramatically illustrated in Victorine’s black costume and pink cape. In her matador’s uniform and hat, the blacks are varied so slightly in temperature and tone that only after careful scrutiny does one begin to notices the changes and the details they describe; an effect akin Ad Reinhardt’s late black paintings. Victorine’s pink cape is actually made up of several pinks, again varying in tone and temperature, along with greys, browns, and yellows. The essential difference between Velazquez’s use of this technique and Manet’s is that the latter uses much broader and more unblended strokes than the former. Close examination of Juan’s left sleeve shows quick, impastoed strokes of various greys and blacks, but when the viewer backs away from the painting, the strokes magically coalesce into a velvety sleeve. The broad patches that make up Victorine’s cape, however, resist optical blending, even when viewed from optimum distance. This is

yet another marker of the painting's materiality.

The Spanish bodegona painting was a genre scene which prominently featured still-life elements. Velazquez's contribution to this category was the inclusion of specific likenesses, as opposed to archetypal characters; not portraits exactly (since no effort was made to preserve the identity of the sitters), but clearly modeled on people from real life. While Velazquez's bodegonas are not particularly well-represented in New York collections, his *Supper at Emmaus* from 1622-23 (at the Met) provides a glimpse of the way in which the artist blurred the lines between the painting categories. The picture depicts the moment when two apostles realize that they are dining with the risen Christ. Christ sits at the end of the table on the painting's far right, facing up and left. The two apostles are seated on either side of the table facing one another. The background is without detail, and the table is covered with a simple white cloth. Some still life elements are visible beneath the foreground apostle's outstretched left arm. The picture's theme is biblical, which would be appropriate for history painting, but the modest scale and humble setting, along with the still life elements, render it clearly a bodegona. Christ is painted in a fairly typical renaissance fashion, but the apostles, particularly the one on the far side of the table, are clearly specific people. Part of Manet's full frontal assault on academic painting was a disregard for the fairly strict hierarchy of subject matter: history painting at the top, then portraiture, genre scenes, landscapes, and lowly still life at the bottom. Manet emulates Velazquez in combining genre and portraiture, and to leave no doubt that the woman in his painting is a portrait likeness, he gives her a name in the painting's title.

While Manet takes his cue from Velazquez in terms of ignoring the hierarchical categories imposed upon painting, he goes much further than Velazquez's position at court would have permitted. Besides adding a portrait likeness to what is essentially a genre scene, Manet flies in the face of one of the traditional aspects of genre painting by letting the large cracks in the painting's believability show. Genre painting in France before Courbet was certainly not realist, but was still meant to be perceived as a "slice of life." Jules Breton's peasants were clearly a scrubbed, idealized bunch - far from the reality of the rural poor - but pains were taken to make the illusion believable. Manet states that his subject is in costume in the picture's title, but this would have been clear to any nineteenth century viewer even if no title was given, since there was no such thing as a female matador. Besides exposing the artificiality of the Salon categories, *Mademoiselle V* addresses the artificiality of painting itself both in terms of content (by the frank admission that the sitter is in costume) and in terms of form (by the disjuncture of figure from ground and resulting two-dimensionality, and from the cut-and-paste addition of the Goya print in the upper right). All these elements plainly show that the picture is just that; a picture. As Clark suggests, Manet was looking back to Velazquez and Hals for examples of painting which did not smooth over all of the transitions and acknowledged the nature and character of paint and canvas, but Manet was not as interested as the masters were in the preservation of the illusion. Theatrical costuming and affirmation of flatness have the effect of eroding the sense of a painting's depicted reality, but makes all the more explicit the very real nature of the picture as both a literal object and a representation.

And finally, Manet uses the same keen powers of observation in his depiction of the face and pose of *Mademoiselle V* that Velazquez used in *Juan de Pareja*, but again, to a different end. As I stated earlier, Velazquez did not look so much into Juan as at him, and Manet looks at Victorine with the same probing eye, and records faithfully what he sees (and adds it to a fake background). The pose is clearly meant to indicate action, as though Victorine is about to deliver a death blow with her sword, but, despite some small attempt to indicate movement in the cape, the figure is unmistakably still. More importantly, however, is the face. Anyone who has spent any time in a figure-drawing class will recognize the blank, glazed stare of the model who has been posing for a long time -- the same kind of unfocused look that the daydreamer wears. Manet captures this look in his paintings again and again, the other great example in the Met's collection being the *Spanish Singer*. In both cases, the fact that the figure is unmistakably posed and motionless is directly at odds with the purported action of the pictures;

in one case singing, in the other bullfighting. Velazquez uses his ability to perceive and depict nuance to give a disarmingly frank look at his sitter, Manet uses this same ability to paradoxically peel back the layers of artifice intrinsic to painting. Juan is a stranger, but so well described that we can learn much about him. Mademoiselle V is a stranger that, because of her blank look and theatrical costuming, preserves a kind of enigmatic distance.

I have touched a fairly broad range of issues in trying to articulate Velazquez's modernity and its subsequent influence on Manet, but I think it can be neatly encapsulated. Velazquez's mature pictures decisively broke from mannerist painting in two ways: by their surprising naturalism and the frankness of their materiality. Manet used both of these things, but added a third: the exploitation of their contradiction. In *Juan de Pareja*, the paradoxical nature of the picture's believability and the markers of its own two-dimensionality coexist quite seamlessly - their disparate nature only emerges upon close analysis. In *Mademoiselle V*, the fractured perspective, broad brushstrokes, and abrupt transitions plainly announce the contradiction between the illusion and the physical object. Further, this contradiction is allegorized in the depiction of Victorine. Rather than try to convince the viewer that this is actually a matador in the bullring, Manet chooses to leave no doubt that the scene is constructed and posed, or more specifically, that the supposed action of the picture never really took place. He uses his method of representation - particularly in respect to the vacant look and costuming -- to reinforce the message transmitted by the picture's materiality and skewed perspective: that this is not real life, it is painting.

I will close with a quote from Stephane Mallarme's essay entitled "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet." Mallarme saw that Manet's modernity was seemingly at odds with the historical influences he so openly embraced. He reconciles these two polarities as follows:

*Wearied by the technicalities of the school in which, under Couture, he studied, Manet, when he recognized the inanity of all he was taught, determined either not to paint at all or to paint entirely from without himself. Yet in his self-sought insulation, two masters -- masters of the past -- appeared to him, and befriended him in his revolt. Velazquez, and the painters of the Flemish school, particularly impressed themselves upon him, and the wonderful atmosphere which enshrouds the compositions of the grand old Spaniard, and the brilliant tones which glow from the canvases of his northern compeers, won the student's admiration, thus presenting to him two art aspects which he has since made himself master of, and can mingle as he pleases. It is precisely these two aspects which reveal the truth, and give the paintings based upon them living reality instead of rendering them the baseless fabric of abstracted and obscure dreams. These have been the tentatives of Manet, and curiously, it was to the foreigner and the past that he turned for friendly council in remedying the evils of his country and his time.<sup>11</sup>*

## Notes

1. Brown 1986, 269.
2. Palomino 1987,
3. Engass 1970, 173-4.
4. Roos 1996, 163.
5. Palomino 1987, 142.

6. Greenberg 1982, 6.
7. Palomino 1987, 142.
8. Clark 1985, 10.
9. Hamilton 1969, 24.
10. Brown 1998, 93.
11. Mallarme 1982, 40.

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