

5D. *THE RAILWAY*: Text

Background

The most recent scholarly writing concerned with *The Railway* (Fig.D1), a work painted by Manet during 1872 and 1873 and exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1874, has been a review by Adrian Lewis¹ of Juliet Wilson-Bareau's catalogue for the *Manet, Monet, and the Gare Saint-Lazare* exhibition of 1998.² It is a continuation of the scholarly confusion over the painting's site, and is a further claim that processes of identification and site analysis are limited in their ability to provide meaning for a painting.

In the exhibition's catalogue, Wilson-Bareau, as curator, had set out the identification of the painting site and, more importantly, views from it as seen in the work itself. The site in question, at the rear of No.58 Rue de Rome in the *Europe quartier* of Paris, had always been known – but because a connection had never been made between views from the site and the painting, it had been only noted in passing or completely relocated by most scholars. At the same time that Wilson-Bareau had been carrying out her research which was used as the basis for the exhibition, this writer had also arrived at the same conclusions. On becoming aware of this fact, Wilson-Bareau graciously acknowledged it in the catalogue.³ The real difference between the identifications of Wilson-Bareau and this writer, and the conclusions arrived at by previous scholars, is that it can be shown how the views from the known site related to the imagery of the painting, and in particular to the doors and windows of the building in the upper left corner of the painting. These elements can be shown to be part of the building facades to No.2 and No.4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, in the latter of which was Manet's own studio at that time.

Lewis's review is, in part, a recapitulation of the details of a proposal in an earlier article⁴ in which he and co-writer, Roger Cranshaw, had confirmed but effectively discarded the site because, as Lewis explained, the "evidence led in an opposite direction

to the thrust of Wilson-Bareau's argument".⁵ Not only had Lewis rejected Wilson-Bareau's belief that "the meaning of *The Railway* is 'brought into sharper focus' by the identification of the building in the picture's top left as Manet's studio",⁶ but also rejected that the painting represents a precise view, seeing the identification as "a speculative and reductive explanation".⁷ Even a veiled acceptance of the proposition by Lewis enabled his case to be made that the " 'identification' of the site (even if methodologically accepted) does not expunge whatever connotation the painted image sets up".⁸ Wilson-Bareau was judged by Lewis not to have explored "contemporary schemata of mother-and-child representations in order to explain the critical complaints about the unreadability of the relationship of this woman and child", and to have been blind to the evidence that "the model herself [Victorine Meurent] operated intertextually in the contemporary culture wars as a signifier of a sort of Bohemian licence".⁹ One could have suggested, claimed Lewis, that "free-floating signifiers such as grapes, fan and dog resonated with the vestiges of awkwardly duplex symbolism" or that Manet "deployed smoke to connote reverie".¹⁰ And, speculated Lewis, "Manet's art might legitimately be seen as the construction by a highly critical and self-aware artist of an 'open text' designed to raise questions and thereby provoke viewers to reflect on their relationship with the *representa*."

In so many ways the remainder of the review became a veritable check-list of other notions of the authorial position of Lewis and against which Wilson-Bareau's writing was judged. In such terms, Lewis was also critical of site analysis, believing "that it allows one to note decisions made with visual material... but truncates discussion of the construction of meaning".¹¹ Its failure "to engage in the public arena of contested meaning as Manet did"¹² demonstrated for Lewis "the limitation of site analysis presented as if it were the social history of art."¹³ On the contrary, the physical fabric of an urban domain, in this instance the city of Paris in transformation during the latter half of the nineteenth century, provides as complex and profound an imprint of social history as can be imagined against any other measure. The fact that it was the very means by which so many artists of that time addressed the need to engage contemporaneous issues

suggests that the reading of a painting through such an imprint would expand rather than truncate "discussion of the construction of meaning".

Additionally, Lewis argued that a site identification "does not expunge whatever connotation the painted image sets up".¹⁴ As has been proposed elsewhere in this dissertation, site analysis has the potential to enhance or clarify such connotations, rather than expunge. For Lewis, the pictorial reading of a depicted motif can almost deny, or contradict, any initial identification. In his description of the doors and windows in the upper left corner of the painting, for example, Lewis stated that the

subsuming of wooden door and stone carriage entrance into a non-existent tall brown shape which extends down the left side of the woman's head (connecting colouristically as surface-design with her nearby brown hair) is every bit as subversive of the norms of pictorial illusion as the famous flat red triangle and abutted bottles in the *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*.¹⁵

That, for this writer, is hardly subversive. To know that this "tall brown shape" is not fictional at all but, rather, specifically and clearly is a depiction of the street entrance to Manet's own studio, setting both his metaphorical persona, as a coded self-portrait, as well as his creative domain into such a proximity to the woman's face (in actuality, Victorine Meurent, Manet's favourite model) is far more subversive and suggestive of intimate overtones and meaning than an object subsumed in becoming a "surface-design" element. And such readings were not possible before the identification. The doors and windows are both the fact of their identification and the fiction of their representation, not one or the other.

The earlier article by Cranshaw and Lewis considered, in part but in detail, those problems of the painting's site relevant to the proposals made here.¹⁶ Although reviewing and detailing the confusion of the previous scholarship,¹⁷ Cranshaw and Lewis rejected the possibility that the view from the site directly provided the view seen in the painting, and in so doing continued the history of confusion. Their argument was partly and reasonably based upon the view, which had been held previously by others,¹⁸ and since by Wilson-Bareau in the exhibition catalogue,¹⁹ that the painting would have been produced in Manet's studio. But they saw the sketches not to have been made from the rear of No.58 Rue de Rome,²⁰ and the upper left area of the painting's background to be a

fictional garden,²¹ claiming that "no such garden could or did exist in such a position".²²

And this fictional garden became the means by which Cranshaw and Lewis observed that

no immediately apparent narrative or pictorial relationship is established between the garden and the rest of the painting. The trainsmoke serves to conceal the spatially irresolvable juncture to the left and right background sections. The railings have concealed the inconsistency of the background for over a century.²³

The 'trainsmoke' has indeed been used to conceal a disjunction in the painting, but one that is explainable and directly related to Manet's strategies of spatial ambiguity. The explanation revolves around the identifications of the actual site, the views available from it, and the extent to which such views have been used by Manet. Not only has there been scholarly confusion about these aspects in the past but, typically, Manet seems to have made little attempt to clarify any of them to the public, critics or friends alike. After seeing the painting in Manet's studio in 1872, and before it was viewed in public, Philippe Burty wrote that the girl "regarde, à travers les grilles du square des Batignolles, la cotonneuse fumée blanche que jette au passage un train de chemin de fer. Comme fond, à travers les barreaux de fer, les maisons de l'autre berge de la voie."²⁴ Manet had either requested Burty to identify the site further north at the Batignolles area or, more likely, had not offered an identification of locale. After a visit to Manet's studio in 1873, and although not writing about *The Railway*, Léon Duchemin, under the pseudonym of Fervacques, may have added to later confusion about the painting's locale by making reference to "les verrières qui donnent sur la place de l'Europe",²⁵ although at the same time correctly describing the view of the rear facades to the buildings on Rue de Rome. The only hint that Manet may have confided with someone about the strategies at play in his work appears in the article of complaint by Stéphane Mallarmé on the rejection of the *Masked Ball at the Opera* and *The Swallows* by the Paris Salon of 1874. Mallarmé made reference to *The Railway*, a work accepted by the jury, with a strangely oblique comment, suggestive of hidden ruses:

Comme la sagesse la plus profonde ne prévoit pas tout et que ses desseins manquent toujours par quelque point, restait le troisième tableau, important lui-même sous un aspect trompeur et riche en suggestions pour qui aime à regarder.

Je crois que cette toile, échappée aux ruses et aux combinaisons des organisateurs du Salon, leur réserve encore une autre surprise, quand ce qu'il y

aura à dire à son sujet aura été dit par ceux qu'intéressent certaines questions, notamment de métier pur.²⁶

A sense that Mallarmé may have been privy to Manet's deliberations are also conveyed in his critique of the *Masked Ball at the Opera*.²⁷ The criticisms of *The Railway* at its showing in the Salon²⁸ were certainly not to do with the identification of site or views but were typically concerned with the painting's illegibility of narrative and sketch-like finish, and the grille separating the foreground from the background generated much visual play from the caricaturists. Most of the comments on the site involved the sense of outdoor light rather than the locale itself, but Edmond Duranty, without being site specific, confirmed the locale when he wrote that "une femme et une petite fille adossées à une grille d'un jardin de la place de l'Europe qui donne sur le chemin de fer".²⁹

The apparent confusion over the site continued after Manet's death. In 1902, Théodore Duret had written that Manet painted the work "en plein air",³⁰ but had been more specific in 1919, writing that "Cette grille servait de clôture à un jardinet, dominant la profonde tranchée où passe le chemin de fer de l'Ouest, près de la gare St-Lazare. Par derrière les deux femmes, se voyaient des rails et la vapeur de locomotives, d'où le titre du tableau",³¹ and, as a catalogue entry, "Une femme assise et une petite fille vue de dos, se profilent sur la grille d'un jardinet de la rue de Rome, surplombant les abords de la gare Saint-Lazare, à Paris".³² And in 1926 Étienne Moreau-Nélaton reiterated Fervacques' error in describing the windows to Manet's studio as looking out on the Place de l'Europe, but had noted the painting's genesis that "Manet l'avait rêvée et réalisée chez un confrère, domicilié rue de Rome 58 et en possession d'un jardin donnant sur la tranchée de la ligne de l'Ouest... le jardin d'Alphonse Hirsch".³³

In 1931 Adolphe Tabarant commenced the process of specifying the site of the depicted wall and grille fence at an impossible position, stating that

Occupant le coin de gauche, au premier plan, une jeune femme, de face et regardant devant elle, est assise sur le mur de scellement de la haute grille dominant la tranchée du chemin de fer de l'Ouest, au pont de l'Europe, à l'intersection de la rue de Rome et de la rue de Constantinople... Le second plan montre, à gauche, l'angle d'un immeuble de la rue de Rome, à droite les croisillons métalliques du tablier du pont de l'Europe. Le fond est constitué par la tranchée où, à travers les fumées de la vapeur, on distingue les voies, les signaux, les baraques-vigies du chemin de fer.³⁴

This was both confirmed and contradicted by Tabarant in a note that identified the correct address but relocated it as before:

Ce tableau fut peint dans le jardinet du peintre Alphonse Hirsch, situé en bordure de la tranchée du chemin de fer de l'Ouest, derrière son atelier du 58 de la rue de Rome, et formant un petit enclos triangulaire entre ce qui est actuellement le 2 de la rue de Constantinople et la première assise de gauche du pont de l'Europe... Les détails du décor furent peints à l'atelier de la rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, d'après des études faites sur place.³⁵

And in 1947 Tabarant spoke of the sequence in which the painting had been produced:

L'été finissant était un délice, et de sa fenêtre de la rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, d'où il embrassait le pont de l'Europe et la tranchée du chemin de fer de l'Ouest, Manet se grisait de Paris, de cette subtile lumière, de cette atmosphère limpide qui font si pénétrante la douceur de vivre. Il avait pris maintes fois des croquis du pont et de la tranchée... L'idée lui vint d'interpréter un plein air de cet aspect caractéristique du nouveau Paris, et sans aucune esquisse préalable il réalisa cet éclatant morceau, le *Chemin de fer*... , pour lequel Victorine Meurent prit la pose dans le petit jardin du peintre Alphonse Hirsch, à l'intersection de la rue de Rome et de la rue de Constantinople. Occupant le coin, au premier plan, elle est de face et regarde devant elle, assise sur le mur de scellement de la haute grille dominant la tranchée... Le second plan montre, à gauche, l'angle d'un immeuble de la rue de Rome, à droite les croisillons métalliques du tablier du pont. Le fond est constitué par la tranchée où, à travers les fumées de la vapeur, on distingue les voies, les signaux, les baraques-vigies du chemin de fer... .

Seuls les détails du décor furent peints à l'atelier...³⁶

Some clarity was brought to the situation by Rodolphe Walter in 1979 when, in his article 'Saint-Lazare l'impressionniste', he not only confirmed that at the time of the painting Hirsch had rented a studio on the fourth floor of the rear building at No.58 Rue de Rome, but also that "Les bâtiments dont on aperçoit la façade, à gauche sur le tableau, appartiennent à la bordure opposée de la tranchée, et non à la rue de Rome comme il a été écrit [by Adolphe Tabarant]".³⁷ He had also noted that

Dans son appartement situé au 4 de la rue de Saint-Pétersbourg... , Manet aperçoit le pont de l'Europe et la tranchée des Batignolles d'où lui parvient, obsédant, le roulement des trains. Pour se rapprocher du motif et du même coup s'en libérer, il traverse le pont et, par la rue de Constantinople, se rend chez son confrère Alphonse Hirsch, au No.58 de la rue de Rome, dont l'étroit jardin surplombe aujourd'hui encore les voies. Il y représente Victorine Meurent en costume bleu et chapeau "Niniche" tournant résolument le dos au spectacle. Celui-ci occupe toute l'attention de la fillette en robe claire qui tient d'une main potelée un barreau de la grille que l'on devine noire de suie. A droite, en pan coupé, le pont de l'Europe; en bas, les rails et la cabane d'un poste d'aiguilleur. Le passage d'un train, objet de la contemplation de l'enfant, est suggéré par un nuage où vapeur blanche et fumée grise se mêlent.³⁸

With those descriptions, Walter had set the complete scene, as it were, of the painting. He had confirmed the site of the garden at No.58 Rue de Rome, described the physical

connection between the studio and the garden, corrected Tabarant's erroneous description of the background buildings, and noted that the "pont de l'Europe" [not the Place de l'Europe] could be seen from Manet's studio. For some reason he did not identify the background buildings to be those in Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, possibly believing them to be in Rue Mosnier, "à la bordure opposée de la tranchée", or possibly because of the Parcels Depot building obstructing the direct line of sight. Nonetheless, all the elements were in place to resolve the issue but all claims subsequent to Walter simply confused the issue further.

Following Tabarant's claims, Theodore Reff in 1982 made reference to the correct address but placed it "near the corner of the rue de Constantinople".³⁹ And with that information obviously unchecked, and suggesting that the "setting is... more contrived than appears at first", Reff established two different viewing points, one for the figures and one for the view of the Pont de l'Europe, and suggested that the "illusion of immediacy" was enhanced by "eliminating the heavy diagonal trellis and vertical fence of the bridge on the other side of the rue de Constantinople, and indeed the width of the street itself, including instead only the thin black fence around the garden".⁴⁰ Reff's claims of wholesale and wilful elimination of physical elements by Manet were supported by Harry Rand who confirmed that to achieve the apposition between the girl and the cloud of steam "Manet merged the garden and the railroad cut, and he eliminated the intervening street. The picture's subject predicated the adjustments to reality."⁴¹ Walter's clarity had disappeared under the weight of unsubstantiated and exotic speculation. Nevertheless, the unsubstantiated claims continued. In 1983 Françoise Cachin basically reiterated Tabarant's claim that the studio of Alphonse Hirsch was "situated at the intersection of the rue de Rome and the rue de Constantinople, where the Pont de L'Europe begins, overlooking the Gare Saint-Lazare",⁴² seemingly unaware that from that intersection the site would overlook neither the station nor the cutting. And in 1988, Robert L. Herbert deduced from contemporary illustrations a completely new locale, "along one of the streets bordering the tracks, namely the rue de Londres".⁴³

In 1988 Reff compounded his contradictions of 1982 by re-positioning the site to the triangular garden behind No.50 and No.52 Rue de Rome. An impossible description of the tracks being seen with a view to the pier and girder on the opposite side was presented; the bridge girder still supposedly had been omitted by Manet; and it was proposed that "At the upper left we see the building where his studio was located, with its windows overlooking the Place de l'Europe".⁴⁴ Reff had possibly realised that from this new viewpoint one could clearly see the angled side wall to No.2, Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg and not the street facade of No.4 as required, and then attempted to overcome the discrepancy by combining the two addresses into the one building.⁴⁵ Erroneously citing Rodolphe Walter, Reff confirmed his impossible claim by stating that

Across the Place de l'Europe, on the Rue de Rome, lived the painter and etcher Alphonse Hirsch, who also had a studio in the same building. It was in the garden behind this studio that Manet placed the figures for 'Le Chemin de Fer'.⁴⁶

As shown above, Walter had specified that one could see the 'pont de l'Europe' not the Place de l'Europe, and had confirmed the address of Hirsch's studio to be at No.58 Rue de Rome.

It is difficult to understand how the position of the site at No.58 Rue de Rome was repeatedly moved to a position other than where it had been noted, or alternatively, after accepting its location, for it to be then claimed, as has Cranshaw and Lewis, that the painting did not depict views from the site. In contrast, it seems to have been common knowledge with residents of the locale that Manet had painted the work from the site.⁴⁷

Analysis

The initial analysis, undertaken in 1996 as an outcome from an examination of Gustave Caillebotte's *Le Pont de l'Europe*, involved an examination of *The Railway*, Manet's preliminary sketches (Figs.D3 and D4), his Rue Mosnier paintings *Rue Mosnier Decorated with Flags, with a Man on Crutches*, and *Rue Mosnier with Pavements* and his Rue Mosnier sketches (Fig.D5). The examination had been mainly concerned with a confirmation of the identifications of the viewpoint(s), sightline(s), and background buildings at No.2 and No.4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg. Subsequent analyses of the X-radiograph (Fig.D2) and infra-red reflectographs of *The Railway* were undertaken at the National Gallery of Art, Washington.⁴⁸ A photograph of the building at No.4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg⁴⁹ confirmed the identification of the carriage doors and windows in the upper left corner of the painting, and partly confirmed the proposition that they were part of a view from the garden at the rear of No.58 Rue de Rome.

Initially it was thought that the painting had been structured as a single perspectival view from a position in the garden adjacent to the rear facade of No.58 Rue de Rome, but with some uncertainty as to whether it had been created in the garden directly from the motif or in the studio from sketches or photographs. Subsequent analysis of views from the garden, different floors in the rear building at No.58 Rue de Rome overlooking the railway cutting, and the bottom of the railway cutting, as detailed below, clarified the spatial shaping in the foreground view of the garden and the composite nature of the final image. It also influenced the assessment of the circumstances in which the painting may have been created. The co-ordinated information that was required for the developed analysis included detailed topographical information around the site, visual records, measured on-site information, and calculated dimensions from archival photographs. Although initial testing was carried out by means of hand-drawn geometries, the computer-generated modelling was used to clearly differentiate between views, and to clarify the way in which different views are proposed to have been juxtaposed in the final painting.

The overall topography of the site, including the rear of No.58 Rue de Rome and the small garden, the railway cutting with the retaining wall on the western side and bank on the eastern side, the Place de l'Europe with its radiating streets supported on the Pont de l'Europe, No.2 and No.4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, and Rue Mosnier, is shown in a perspective overview (Fig.D20), and plans and sections (Figs.D21, D22, and D23). This overview can be seen in conjunction with the contemporary illustration by Lamy (Fig.D6) which, although not showing the viewing site or the building facades seen in the painting's background and showing detail forms of walls other than as built, provides an understanding of the railway cutting and its relationship with the Gare Saint-Lazare beyond the Place de l'Europe.

Other aspects of the topography and site details are illustrated with both contemporary and recent photographs. A composite photograph (Fig.D7) from a third floor window at the rear of No.58 Rue de Rome shows the Place de l'Europe, at the right, but also shows the Parcels Depot building interrupting the view of the buildings on Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, at the left. Views from the rear garden level looking towards the Parcels Depot building and the adjacent bridge pier, which is the one depicted in the painting, are seen in photographs taken from behind the grille (Fig.D11) and through the grille (Fig.D12). Details of the garden as seen in the painting can also be identified, including the top of the wall and the grille fence (Fig.D10)⁵⁰ and the rounded 'knuckles' on the vertical rods (Fig D8), but with the plate at the base of the grille set along the top of the wall no longer in existence. A photograph of the grille at No.54 Rue de Rome (Fig.D9) confirms the original existence of such a plate. From outside the garden, the rear facade of No.58 Rue de Rome overlooking the unseen railway cutting below is shown in a contemporary postcard photograph taken from the Place de l'Europe (Fig.D13). In a similar postcard photograph, the facade of No.2 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg overlooking the Place de l'Europe is seen in the view looking across the Place and up Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg (Fig.D14). Recent photographs taken in Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg also show this facade (Fig.D15), as well as the carriage doors and adjacent windows to the street

facades of No.2 and No.4 (Fig.D17). The complete facade of No.4 is seen in a contemporary photograph taken from Rue Mosnier (Fig.D16).

Specific points of consideration required to confirm the identifications made in the painting, to better understand the circumstances of its production, and to investigate the spatial manipulations used by Manet, included: the need to establish in detail what could have been seen from garden and rear building at No. 58 Rue de Rome in 1872 and 1873, and how the views related to the graphite sketches and the painting; the extent to which the graphite sketches influenced the form of the painting; whether the painting had been created on site or from photographs as source or *aide-mémoire* in the studio;⁵¹ an explanation for the angle at which the top of the garden wall is seen in the painting; and, whether Victorine Meurent, as the model, had been sitting on the wall, an unseen seat or stool, or had only modelled for Manet in such a pose in his studio. These various aspects have been examined in terms of a general gathering of information and more specifically with comparisons of views from different viewpoints.

The view from the garden beyond the grille fence was made up of a middle-ground of the railway cutting with its sloping bank at the left and the bridge structure at the right, and of a background of the building facades. At the top of the sloping bank, on the northern side of Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, a paling fence, seen in both the painting and the two graphite sketches, enclosed the open area opposite Manet's studio at No.4.⁵² In the painting this fence is seen in front of the facade of No.4 and in the two sketches in front of the facade of No.2. It continued around into Rue Mosnier as seen at the left of the Rue Mosnier sketch (Fig.D5), and at the left of the two paintings *Rue Mosnier Decorated with Flags*, *with a Man on Crutches*, and *Rue Mosnier with Pavers*. The Rue Mosnier sketch also depicts, beyond the fence at the left and across the railway cutting in which is seen a train's funnel and a cloud of steam, the rear of the buildings to Rue de Rome set above the retaining wall to the cutting.

The two sketches provide important information about viewpoint and views, insights into Manet's fragmentation of views, and a possible key to the scale adjustment that exists in the background of the painting. Sketches made directly from a motif, even

if quickly executed, often provide in their detail a reasonably accurate record of the extent of visual overlap of elements, and thus the means to determine the viewpoint used. Manet's sketches provide such details, with the paling fence cutting across the carriage entry door to No.2 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg (Fig.D3), and the spiked top of the grille fence to the triangular garden adjacent to No.2 seen just above the paling fence (Fig.D4). These relationships, as seen in the computer-generated perspective views, indicate the viewpoint for the sketches to have been at the level of the rear garden, and that obviously the interposing grille fence had not been drawn.⁵³ Unfortunately the page from Manet's sketchbook which may have included sketches of No.4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg is lost, but the remaining sketches also show that, in the process of recording the scene, Manet actually fragmented the image as he went from one part of the motif to another, creating separate sketches of different parts and at different scales, but combining them as composite images in the very process of drawing them. In other words, these sketches for *The Railway* seem to have been composed in a similar way to that of the painting. Such a realisation raises the question whether Manet creatively used the process of making the sketches to be more than quick visual notations, or the serendipity of the organisation of these separate sketches was retrospectively used by him as the genesis for the composite painting. At the level of technique the sketches have also suggested the use by Manet of a notational 'shorthand', with many of the elements drawn as if angled elevations. With the lower shed, for example, the series of parallel horizontal lines in real space of the base of the walls, the eaves and the roof ridges, all of which would have been seen as lines in perspective to a vanishing point set at the higher eye level, were all drawn by Manet as horizontal lines. Similarly, the base of the pier and bottom of the bridge truss are drawn horizontally, and not as they would have been seen in perspective. The "flattening" of Manet's space may have thus developed from a sketch technique which provided him with coded information other than a record of natural perspective.

With the viewpoint of the sketches established at the level of the rear garden, an important identification issue was able to be confirmed. In addition to claiming that the sketches were made from the level of the railway cutting, Lewis also stated that "the

doors in the picture are different in design from those to Manet's building"⁵⁴ and that "there were similar carriage doors at the rue de Saint-Petersbourg [sic] end of the rue Mosnier".⁵⁵ In the context of the comparative perspective views from different levels, the confirmation that the views of the sketches and the painting involved the same motif as seen from the rear garden established that the carriage entry door seen in one of the sketches and in the painting not only looked to be, but in fact was that to No.2 Rue de Saint-Petersbourg. Lewis had referred to doors in Rue Mosnier (Fig.D18), but those had been considered by this writer in a wider survey of the area to ensure similar doors did not exist, and with the form of their adjacent windows and balconies were seen to be completely unlike those depicted in the painting.

The question of whether Manet painted the work directly in front of the motif or in his studio can be addressed in various ways. The limited depth of the garden as a site for setting up an easel, the narrowness of the ledge of the wall on which Victorine Meurent is seen to be sitting, and an assessment of lighting directions had suggested to Wilson-Bareau that the painting was created in the studio.⁵⁶ In contrast, the two pencil sketches were considered by her to have been "clearly made on the spot, probably at ground level in the little back garden",⁵⁷ but a "change in the relationships between the signalmen's hut and the stone pillar from drawing to painting"⁵⁸ suggested to Wilson-Bareau a viewpoint for the painting higher than the garden, at Hirsch's fourth-floor studio. Lewis agreed with Wilson-Bareau's proposal that the painting was created in the studio, but disagreed on the viewpoint for the sketches, stating that

their low viewpoint proves that they were not done from the fourth-floor window of 58 rue de Rome or even... from its garden. Accepting the probability of their being done on the spot, it is more likely that the drawing with the bridge pier was done on the railway tracks, and certainly (as the angle of the pier proves) well to the right of 58 rue de Rome.⁵⁹

Although the analysis indicates that the sketches were made from the garden level, it points to the painting being created in the studio from the sketches and photographs for reasons other than those stated by Wilson-Bareau. No matter how the view as seen from the garden had been recorded, directly onto a canvas or with a camera, the limited depth of the garden would have been no more of a problem for painting at an easel than for

taking a photograph with a camera. And with the rounded stone coping to the top of the wall, the width available between its front edge and the vertical rods of the grille fence is 235mm (a little more than nine inches), a more than adequate surface on which Victorine Meurent could have been comfortably seated.⁶⁰ Taken together, these aspects suggest that there would have been no difficulties in creating the scene in the garden, with Victorine seated on the wall and the young girl standing beside her, and for it to have been recorded either directly onto a canvas or photographed. That it is proposed to have been photographed is based upon the evidence of the offset spatial shaping used by Manet.

The angle at which the top of the wall is seen in the painting provides the key to this assessment. In actuality the wall slopes down to the [viewer's] right and the fact that it is seen to slope up to the right indicates that it is viewed at an angle as if in a two-point perspective. The angle at which it would be seen, however, in a two-point angled view has been determined to be greater than that depicted, with Manet either 'flattening' the perspective or using the geometry of an offset viewpoint, as a construction or as available with a *chambre photographique*. Although, as discussed above, it is plausible that the canvas, or at least part of it, was painted in the garden, the awareness that Manet had been consistently experimenting with ambiguous spatial shaping of the offset viewpoint, makes the possibility that a photograph had been taken with such a camera for use as source and *aide-mémoire* in the studio more than an unfounded speculation. The use of photography by Manet in the painting of *The Railway* has been previously raised by scholars, but in compositional rather than spatial shaping terms. It has been suggested by Gabriel Weisberg that

the randomness of the entire scene... gives the impression of continuing beyond the confines of the canvas, much like a snapshot image. While no specific photographic source has come to light, the impact of this medium... cannot be underestimated in helping Manet toward the final realization of his composition.⁶¹

And Harry Rand has proposed that "It is entirely possible that the composition was established in a posed tableau vivant that Manet had photographed as the basis for his work."⁶² Notwithstanding these assessments, an analysis of the spatial shaping of the

depicted view from the garden level not only made it evident that the offset geometry solved the problem of the angle of the sloping wall top, but it also provided an explanation for the apparent distortion or stretching of the young girl's left arm.⁶³

The extent of Manet's activity at the site of No.58 Rue de Rome can also be seen in terms of the residencies of the various *appartements* and *ateliers* in the rear building overlooking the railway cutting. As noted above, Rodolphe Walter had confirmed with the *calepins du cadastre* records that a *Hirsch fils* leased one of the *ateliers* on the fourth floor and that Hirsch's mother resided in an *appartement* on the third floor, and Wilson-Bareau had presented in the exhibition catalogue these records of residency in more detail.⁶⁴ Interestingly, the contact with Hirsch did not necessarily provide Manet with access to the rear garden and the circumstances of his presence there are unknown. Further examination has revealed, however, that *appartement* No.8 had been leased for twelve months in 1873 by someone named Faure.⁶⁵ Research has not been able to establish that the very person who bought *The Railway* from Manet on its completion, the famous baritone of the time Jean-Baptiste Faure, had any connection with the lessee, but in the context of this analysis which establishes that part of the painting was based upon a view from the second floor, such a possible confirmation that Manet indeed had access to that floor, and possibly the rear garden, through contact with the Faure family is a tantalising one.

Although adding little to an understanding of the painting's spatial manipulation, the X-radiograph of the painting (Fig.D2) provides evidence of the extent of adjustments made by Manet within the field of separate definable motifs. As has been demonstrated by Wilson-Bareau, a number of changes are apparent, including the spacing of the rods of the grille and details to the form and dress of the two figures.⁶⁶ The changes of most interest, however, involve the relationship between the carriage entry door and the adjacent window(s) to Manet's studio in the facade of No.4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, with evidence that, at an earlier stage, two windows had correctly existed (*a* and *b*) to the left of the door in positions as seen in the photograph, Fig.D17. It is also evident that this group of door and windows had been set in positions both higher and lower than the final

position, but that the two windows had been replaced with the single window (c) set in the position of the wall panel between the original two windows. That is, Manet deleted one window and set the one painted window further away from the door than it actually existed. Nonetheless, the position of one of the small windows to the lower ground floor (d), set in its lateral position directly beneath the window at (b), remained unchanged in the painting and gives evidence of the earlier position. Such reworking of a surface is typical of Manet's known painting process but, as has been established by this research, there seems to have been a hierarchy of adjustments within which Manet worked, with a common factor being that each item had its own domain on the surface of the canvas within which, and in terms of which, it was realised.

These many considerations were developed in concert with the computer-generated perspective views from various viewpoints at the rear of No.58 Rue de Rome as the means to identify the views, viewpoints, and spatial geometry of the sketches and painting. The viewpoints, except for that in the garden, are set at 1.5m above the specified levels and in the positions indicated in the plans and sections in Figs.D21, D22, and D23. The views, with each overlaid with the painting format for comparative purposes, include: from SP1 at 1.2m above the garden level, a 2P-angled view as seen in Fig.D27, and a 2P-offset view as seen in Figs.D28 and D29; from SP2 at the first floor level, a 2P-angled view as seen in Fig.D33; from SP3 at the second floor level, a 2P-angled view as seen in Figs.D30 and D31; from SP4 at the third floor level, a 2P-angled view as seen in Fig.D34; from SP5 at the fourth floor level, a 2P-angled view as seen in Fig.D35; and, from SP6 at the level of the railway cutting, a 2P-angled view as seen in Fig.D32.

It can be seen from these various views that the foreground and upper-left background of the painting relate with reasonable accuracy to the 2P-offset view from SP1 at the garden level, rather than the 2P-angled view, but that the perspective and scale in the upper-right background of the painting do not relate. Although the 2P-angled view relates to the way in which the scene would be viewed with normal vision, and therefore as would have been seen by Manet when making the sketches, the angle of the garden

wall in the angled view is greater than in the painting, and any turn to the left to reduce the angle of the wall top, but with the same cone of vision, would simply change the view. Nonetheless, in the two views from SP1 the overlap of elements, such as with the paling fence to the door and lower ground floor window to No.4 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg, confirms that the view of the left background was recorded from the garden level. In the right background, the perspective of the bridge pier and truss and the building facade behind relates more accurately, however, to part of the view from viewpoint SP3 at the second floor level than from the other levels. This view, seen without a painting format overlay in Fig.D30, is shown in Fig.D31 with one overlay that relates to the composition as seen from the garden level, and in which the bridge pier and truss are too large, but also with another, larger overlay, in relation to which the relative sizes of the bridge pier and truss are reduced to that as seen in the painting.

The painting can be seen to be a composite of these two part-views, and their relationship to the geometry of the painting is confirmed by line overlays from the painting, with the offset view as seen from the garden shown as part-image 1 in Fig.D42, and the angled view from the second floor level shown in its reduced size as part-image 2 in Fig.D43. The composite image for the complete painting, with part-image 2 set behind the grille fence of part-image 1, is shown in Fig.D44, and is overlaid for confirmation with a line drawing from the painting in Fig.D45. The separation of these different views is maintained by the nebulous connecting device of the clouds of smoke and steam from the railway below.

The graphite sketches present an important influence on this image of the final painting. Even if drawn as quick notations by Manet, the sketches are shown by the modelling to be complex translations of the view. A two-point angled view from the garden, with the grille fence eliminated and as shown in Fig.D36, presents the view upon which the sketches are based. When overlaid by diagrammatic line drawings made from the sketches, as shown in Fig.D37, it can be seen that the two sketches comprise a total of four separate, but connected, elements of the one view. In Figs.D38 and D39, the two part-images at similar scales can be seen to include the carriage door and adjacent

windows of the street facade of No.2 Saint-Pétersbourg in one and the corner brickwork to the building and an upper shed in the other,⁶⁷ and in Figs.D40 and D41, the two part-images, at different scales, include the facade overlooking the triangular garden with the upper shed repeated at the left in one and the bridge pier and truss, and lower shed in the other. It is confirmed in Fig.D37 how these four sketches depict, with reasonable accuracy for such small and obviously quick visual notations, parts of a field of view somewhat wider than is evident from the sketches themselves. The reduction in scale of that part of the sketch depicting the bridge pier and truss provides an interesting prelude to the fact established by the analysis, and as discussed above, that the upper right area of the painting which also includes the bridge pier and truss had also been reduced in scale in comparison to the painting's foreground and upper left background. A direct translation by Manet of the collaged image of the sketches as one of the influences on the final form of the painting is thus more than likely.

Proposal

Although the proposal made here is an outcome of the analysis, it is neither one simply made from an examination of computer-generated views nor seen as one completely resolved or indeed complete. In particular it is an outcome of the examination of the spatial shaping used in the work, both in itself and in the context of the perceived program of Manet's spatial ambiguity. And it has been tempered, above all, by the abstruse qualities of the painting and the freshness of the graphite sketches made directly from the background motif. Spatially, *The Railway* is a most complex painting. At one level, and in terms of layered space as discussed in Chapter 4, the painting presents an uncertain recession, from the foreground to the finite background, without intermediate intervals other than the grille fence acting as both a transparent backdrop screen for the foreground and a filter for the space. The spaces with their identified adjustments of scale and perspective become, when modulated by this screen and simultaneously held together and separated by the cloud of smoke and steam, both clear and uncertain, with the painting alternatively seen as a unified space based upon a single view, a composite of disparate parts held together by the unifying element of the grille fence, or one in

which there is no spatial resolution and the ambiguity is used as an unsettling undercurrent to the gentle intimacy of the foreground setting. As with so many of his more problematic works, Manet has ensured that both everything and nothing is obvious.

The proposal is set within a context of residency in the apartments and studios at the rear of No.58 Rue de Rome, with the two-storey space at the ground floor level of the rear building of unknown occupancy, the second floor apartment leased for one year in 1873 by someone named Faure, and the fourth floor apartment leased by the painter Alphonse Hirsch. It is proposed that prior to undertaking the painting, Manet made the graphite sketches from the rear garden, without recording the screen of the grille fence, and that the subsequent painting was created as a composite of two views based in part, upon the fragmentation of those sketches. The painting was also based upon a photograph taken with a *chambre photographique* from the viewpoint SP1 within the rear garden, and with the offset view looking across the railway cutting to the facades of No.4 and No.2 Rue de Saint-Pétersbourg. Such a view, with its centre of vision at the left of the canvas, was not only ambiguously both frontal and not frontal, but also created the required angle of the top of the wall and gives explanation to the spatial shaping around the figures of Victorine Meurent and the young girl.

Areas of the painting's background are related to such a view in different and contrasting ways. In the upper left corner, the overall position of the facades to No.4 and No.2 and the fence on the opposite side of the street above the inclined bank, relate with reasonable accuracy to the view. Although the windows adjacent to the door to No.4 have been repositioned, the X-radiograph shows that at an earlier stage the facade had been accurately painted in its relationship to the foreground. The background at the right-hand side, with the facade of No. 2 facing the Place de l'Europe, the bridge pier and truss, the shed near the base of the pier, and the railway tracks on the floor of the cutting in the middle distance, is very different. Not only reduced in scale in relation to the foreground, it has been depicted as seen from the viewpoint SP3 at the second floor level, either sketched or painted directly, or painted from a photograph in the studio. Together with the bridge pier set in the lateral position in which it would have been seen from the

garden and the reduction in scale, the left and right sides of the background could thus not be connected. Any disjunctions that may have become apparent with an unresolved interlocking of two images which were disparate in both perspective and scale were avoided, with the two parts pictorially integrated by the cloud of smoke and steam, the signature of the *chemin de fer*.⁶⁸ These spatial dynamics created an interaction between the uncertain space and its means of production at the surface, negating a spatial unity but creating, as has been noted for many of Manet's other works, a spatial cohesion at the painting's surface. Although painted from what he had seen and sketched from No. 58 Rue de Rome, the evidence of fragmentation and ambiguous spatial shaping as the basis for the composite final work indicates that it was a studio construction based upon photographs and created by Manet behind the window visible in the painting's upper left corner.⁶⁹

5D. THE RAILWAY: Notes

DISSERTATION: Volume 2, pp.25–27

NOTES

[\[Page 25 of dissertation here\]](#)

1. Adrian Lewis, 'Place de L'Europe and the Privileging of Site', review of exh. cat. *Manet, Monet and the Gare Saint-Lazare*, Juliet Wilson-Bareau, Art History, v.22, no.2, June, 1999, pp.300–05.
2. Juliet Wilson-Bareau, Manet, Monet, and the Gare Saint-Lazare, exh. cat. (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 1998), Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998; Manet, Monet: La gare Saint-Lazare, exh. cat. (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1998), Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1998.
3. *ibid.*, New Haven and London, p.186-n.34.
4. Roger Cranshaw, and Adrian Lewis, 'Manet's *Le Chemin de Fer* (1872–3): Producing the Art Historical Text', Issues; in Architecture, Art and Design, (Polytechnic of East London), v.2, no.1, Winter, 1991–2, pp.76–103.
5. Lewis 1999 (as in n.1), p.301.
6. *id.*
7. *id.*
8. *id.*
9. The 'evidence' presented being how Moreau-Nelaaton [sic] had recalled the " 'quarrel created because of his choice of model': 'visitors to the Salon of 1874 confronted there her person which few found to their taste' " (Lewis 1999, p.305-n.15).
10. The 'evidence' presented being "the 1876 Portrait of Mallarmé,... the 1874 etching of Theodore de Banville (second version) in which dream images emerge from tobacco smoke" (*ibid.*, p.305-n.16).

[\[Page 26 of dissertation here\]](#)

11. Lewis 1999, p.303.
12. *ibid.*, p.304.
13. *id.*
14. *ibid.*, p.301
15. Lewis 1999, p.305-n.19.
16. Published in a journal of the faculties of architecture, art, and design at the Polytechnic of East London, the article had not received wide scholarly circulation and had been unknown to both Juliet Wilson-Bareau and this writer at the time of our separate researches. It can be said that nothing in the proposals of Cranshaw and Lewis would have influenced the researches of this writer other than in the surprise that the site had yet again been identified and had then been ignored.
17. Reasonable questions were raised about the the collective information of Duret, Moreau-Nélaton, and Tabarant on the painting site, and the contradictions and errors in the claims of others such as Theodore Reff (Manet and Modern Paris, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1982, pp. 81-2), Robert L. Herbert (Impressionism: Art, Leisure & Parisian Society, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1988, p.83), and Harry Rand (Manet's Contemplation at the

- Gare Saint-Lazare, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987, pp. 83–4), methodically unravelled.
18. e.g. Harry Rand, 'To the *Gare Saint-Lazare*', Arts Magazine, v.61, no.5, 1987, p.54.
 19. Wilson-Bareau 1998, p.57.
 20. Cranshaw and Lewis 1991–92 (as in n.4), p.85. Oddly, they also noted that the drawings were not made from the bridge itself (id.).
 21. A description of the fictional garden was made with detailed identifications. (Cranshaw and Lewis 1991–92, p.86).
 22. *ibid.*, p.86.
 23. *ibid.*, pp.86–87.
 24. Philippe Burty, "Les Ateliers", La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, v.I, 2 November, 1872, p.220.
 25. Fervacques (pseud. for Léon Duchemin), 'L'HIVER A PARIS: *Jeudi 25, décembre*', Le Figaro, 27 December, 1873, p.1. See discussion of article, Chapter 5(E), n.2.
 26. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Le Jury de Peinture pour 1874 et M. Manet', La Renaissance littéraire et artistique, 12 April 1874, p.156.
 27. See discussion in Chapter 5(E).
 28. Lent to the Salon by its owner, the baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure. Exhibited as: No.1260 *Le Chemin de fer*.
 29. Edmond Duranty, 'Le Salon. II', in Musée Universel: Revue illustrée hebdomadaire 1874, v.4, Paris, 1874, p.136.
 30. Théodore Duret, Histoire de Edouard Manet et de son œuvre. Avec un catalogue des Peintures et des Pastels, H. Floury, Paris, 1902, p.102.
 31. Théodore Duret, Histoire de Edouard Manet et de son œuvre. Avec un catalogue des Peintures et des Pastels, Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, 1919, p.114.
 32. *ibid.*, '152. – Le Chemin de fer. Salon de 1874', p.256.
 33. Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, Manet raconté par lui-même, 2 vols., Henri Laurens, Paris, 1926, v.2, p.11.
 34. A. Tabarant, Manet: Histoire catalographique, Montaigne, Paris, 1931, p.236.
 35. *ibid.*, p.237.
 36. A. Tabarant, Manet et ses œuvres, Gallimard, Paris, 1947, pp.221–22.
 37. Rodolphe Walter, 'Saint-Lazare, l'impressionniste', L'Oeil, no.292, November, 1979, p.53-n.13.
 38. *ibid.*, pp.51.
 39. Reff 1982 (as in n.17), p.56.
 40. id.
 41. Rand 1987 ('To the *Gare Saint-Lazare*', as in n.18), p.59.
 42. Françoise Cachin, et al., Manet 1832–1883, exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1983, p.340.
 43. Herbert 1988 (as in n.17), p.307-n.40.
 44. Theodore Reff, 'Manet and the Paris of His Time', in Kunst um 1800 und die Folgen. Werner Hofmann zu Euren. Sonderdruck, Prestel-Verlag, Munich, 1988, p.251. As can be seen in the proposal, the windows of Manet's studio do not overlook the Place de l'Europe.
 45. Such a situation is one that highlights the research approach taken by this writer, which is to undertake whatever research or analysis is required to achieve an understanding, rather than to obscure discrepancies with speculative or impossible claims.
 46. Reff 1988 (as in n.44), p.251.
 47. When this writer made contact in 1996 with an elderly resident at No.58 Rue de Rome, Mme Mercier, she stated she had spent her whole life there and that it had always been common knowledge to be the site from where Manet had painted *The Railway*.

48. The examination of the X-radiograph with Juliet Wilson-Bareau was made possible with the kind co-operation of Sarah Fisher and Ann Hoenigswald, Conservation Department, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.
49. Jean-Jacques Lévêque, Manet, Crescent Books, New York, 1990, p.79.

[\[Page 27 of dissertation here\]](#)

50. The closer wall is a more recent edge to a garden bed.
51. For a discussion on different assessments of the influence of photography on Manet in general and with *The Railway*, within the context of a scathing critique of Harry Rand's proposals, see: Cranshaw and Lewis 1991–92, p.88.
52. Although not known at the time of this analysis, and as noted in n.21, Cranshaw and Lewis had seen that open area as a fictional garden in the painting.
53. The height of the fence has been set in the computer modelling at 180cm. The computer modelling showed that there is no overlap of the fence and the door from the fourth-floor level, and the door, together with all the windows at the ground floor level, is unable to be seen from the base of the railway cutting.
54. Lewis 1999, p.301.
55. *ibid*, p.304-n.10.
56. Wilson-Bareau 1998, p.57.
57. *ibid*, p.56.
58. *id*.
59. Lewis 1999, p.304-n.6.
60. This dimension was stated by Wilson-Bareau (Wilson-Bareau 1998, p.57) and confirmed by Lewis (Lewis 1999, p.301) to be five inches.
61. Gabriel Paul Weisberg, 'Aspects of Japonisme', preview of exh. *Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art 1854–1910*, The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art, April, 1975, p.126.
62. Rand 1987 ('To the *Gare Saint-Lazare*'), p.54.
63. An aspect noted previously by others, e.g. "Mlle Hirsch's arm seems rather long, extended across the space between her and Victorine" (Rand 1987 (Manet's Contemplation..., as in n.17), p.124).
64. From the *calepins du cadastre* records for No.58 Rue de Rome (*Archives Fiscales, calepins du cadastre*, D1P⁴/973, Archives de Paris, Paris), Wilson-Bareau confirmed that "the fourth-floor studio was leased to *Hirsch peintre* from July 1872", that "the third-floor apartment was rented to *Hirsch veuve*, presumably the artist's widowed mother who had previously been at 70 Rue de Rome", and that "ownership of the ground floor *atelier* and the adjoining garden at the rear remains unspecified in the cadastre records (1862–1900)." (Wilson-Bareau 1998, p.185-n.33).
65. The *calepins du cadastre* records shows that the lessee for *appartement* No.8 in 1872 had been "Cicile M", in 1873 "Faure vp", and in 1874 "Kuhn, dentiste". The meaning of the "vp" which appears under the column heading of "NOMS, PRÉNOMS ET QUALITÉS des locataires" is uncertain as it seems to be neither the person's initials nor indicative of a profession.
66. Wilson-Bareau 1998, p.57, p.186-n.44.
67. In the translation to the painting, this upper shed has not been included. Details of its size or actual position on the bank are unknown and have not been speculated.
68. On seeing the painting at the 1884 retrospective exhibition, Jacques de Biez wrote "True the locomotive is missing and as for the train – you do not see it. The smoke is enough for me" (trans. in Pierre Courthion, and Pierre Cailler, eds., Portrait of Manet by Himself and his Contemporaries, trans. Michael Ross, Cassell & Company, London, 1960, pp.76–77).
69. See Appendix 2 for a comparison of particular aspects such as this in the paintings of Manet and Gustave Caillebotte.

