BLOWING BUBBLES, BURSTING BULLES: AN ANALYSIS OF MANET’S
BOY BLOWING BUBBLES AND THE POLITICIZATION OF
HOMO BULLA

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the political dimensions surrounding visual and literary allusions to soap bubbles. Traditionally, iconographic studies consider soap bubbles within the history of northern Baroque vanitas, attaching to bubbles notions of ephemerality and transience. Building on these interpretations, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French artists and writers created a complex metaphor for soap bubbles that relied on their impermanence and fragility, as well as their illusory nature. By coupling the earliest conceptual meanings of soap bubbles with their almost imperceptible formal properties, the bubble blower came to symbolize deceivers, or figures creating illusions or delusions. Eventually, this transformed vanitas symbolism became harnessed to political critiques and representative of chimerical assertions of papal authority, calumny, and false promises of liberal reform. I not only describe the alternative meanings associated with soap bubbles in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, but also I situate Edouard Manet’s Les Bulles de savon (1867) within this trajectory. While most scholars interpret Manet’s painting and accompanying prints as a continuation of, and legacy to, the Dutch vanitas tradition, I illustrate how the artistic and political milieu in which Manet worked mirrored earlier criticisms employing allusions to bubbles.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Edouard Manet’s (1832-1883) Les Bulles de savon, or Boy Blowing Bubbles (1867) [Figures 1-2], features a half-length portrait of Léon Leenhoff, against a plain, dark background.¹ Using muted tones, Manet renders the child standing behind a table, holding a bowl filled with soapy water in his left hand while, with his right index finger and thumb, he positions a pipe near his mouth. At the end of this tool is a bubble blown by the child, ready to float in the air. Whereas most scholars analyzing Manet’s body of work classify this painting as a continuation of, and legacy to, the Dutch homo bulla or vanitas tradition, and Romantic notions of childhood, I argue that not only does the iconography reference northern Baroque conventions and symbolism, but also this work could answer Charles Baudelaire’s call for modernity by implicitly using the language of politically-charged prints and lithographs critiquing the papacy, the French Revolution, Napoléon Bonaparte, and the July Monarchy.

Although many art historians concentrate on uncovering the complex history and meanings underlying Manet’s extensive oeuvre, there exists a dearth of scholarship concerning Les Bulles de savon and its concomitant prints. While nineteenth- through mid-twentieth-century descriptions of this painting often eschew iconographic interpretations in favor of visual analysis,² the most recent research primarily interprets

¹ Among Manet scholars, there is speculation that Léon was, in actuality, Manet’s biological son. For arguments suggesting that Manet is the father, see: Beth Archer Brombert, Edouard Manet. Rebel in a Frock Coat (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1996). 82. For arguments against this, see: Nancy Locke, Manet and the Family Romance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 115.
the subject matter in relationship to Manet’s artistic predecessors, as an homage to Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s (1699-1779) painting of the same subject titled *Soap Bubbles* (ca.1733-34), and as testimony to Manet’s interest in or reinterpretations of Dutch Baroque genres [Figure 3].

Merging these two tendencies, Michael Fried’s *Manet’s Modernism or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* describes the theoretical framework which informed Manet’s artistic practice, proposing that he allied his art to national and international conventions of representation. Fried argues that Manet emulated the technique and subject matter espoused by renowned French painters, such as Chardin, Antoine Watteau and the Le Nains, as well as suggests that through French artists, Manet could invoke international connections or universal significance. As an example of this tendency, Fried briefly
points to Manet’s adaptation of Chardin’s *Soap Bubbles* and notes that Chardin’s painting corresponds to and revised a traditional Dutch genre. Building upon Fried’s scholarship on Manet, Kristin Collins further illuminates the means by which Chardin’s work served as a precursor to that of Manet. Most significantly, she draws a connection between Manet’s and Chardin’s unkempt bubble blowers. Further substantiating their shared visual idioms, Erika Langmuir cites a point of access to one version of Chardin’s *Soap Bubbles* which was shown at a Parisian art sale in the spring of 1867, a few months before Manet executed his own rendition.

Scholars also compare and contrast Manet’s painting with Thomas Couture’s rendition of the same subject, *Soap Bubbles* (ca. 1859) [Figure 4], as well as to the earliest known appearances of *homo bulla* in the history of art. While Manet enrolled in Couture’s atelier for six years, scholars often cite the distinctions in their approach to

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6 “Thoré seems to have connected Chardin more than any other French painter with Dutch art…During the first half of the 1860s this seems at most to have helped Manet take advantage of his experience of Dutch still lifes and flower pieces. For example, in 1864 Manet painted a number of pictures in genres which I have claimed relate generally to Chardin but which almost certainly reflect the experience of Dutch prototypes seen by him in Holland in late 1863 as well.” Ibid., 498, footnote 178; Though Fried considers Manet’s painting within the trajectory of *homo bulla*, he also distinguishes between Manet’s approach and those of his sources in terms of their relationship to the theory of absorption. Fried writes: “One decisive difference between Manet and the others, it seems clear, is that from the outset he tended overwhelmingly, as if instinctively, to reject the representation of absorption (and a fortiori the intensification of absorption) as a vehicle for his painting, though it’s important to note—it’s one more link between them all—that the rejection wasn’t absolute. At least three pictures of the 1860s—*The Reader* (1861), *Monk in Prayer* (1865), and *Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1867)—make use of traditionally absorptive subject matter, though especially in the two later works aspects of both mise-en-scène and paint handling are at odds with the ostensibly beholder-denying implications of the theme.” Ibid., 280.

7 Collins, 77.

8 Specifically, she draws a connection between the torn jacket of Chardin’s bubble blower and the missing button and “untidy handkerchief” of Manet’s model. Ibid., 77.

emphasize Manet’s anti-academicism and to suggest that Manet rebuffed Couture’s artistic approach. Moreover, Manet’s classical education under Couture could have facilitated Manet’s introduction to earlier art historical sources. For example, Langmuir and Stéphane Guégan expand upon Fried’s proposal that Manet responded to French and international sources by tendering that similarities exist between Manet’s Les Bulles de savon and the subject matter, composition, coloration and tonal ranges exhibited in work by Franz Hals (ca. 1582-1666) and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682), as well as Hendrik Goltzius’s (1558-1617) engraved rendition of homo bulla [Figure 5].

In addition to considering the visual relationship between Manet and his artistic antecedents, historians continue to reevaluate the painting’s historical context and meaning as a vanitas. Meyer Schapiro proffers that, in order for Manet to comment on the endurance of painting over human existence, Léon’s stance resembles that of a painter holding a palette and brush. As reiterated by Langmuir through a comparison of Chardin and Manet:

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11 “I tend to think that the sophisticated Manet knew Goltzius’s engraving… and that Léon’s quietly triumphant air hints at Manet’s frequent celebration of his art’s enduring victory over the transience of life, whether in pictures of cherries falling out of a child’s basket or of a peony shedding its petals.” Langmuir, 222-223; Similar conclusions are drawn in Stéphane Guégan’s *Manet: The Man Who Invented Modernity* (Paris: Musée d’Orsay and Gallimard, 2011), 176. The catalogue entry states: “…this was not a scene caught from life but a synthesis of observed reality and various memories of Hals, Murillo and Chardin seen in museums.”

12 Langmuir, 222-223.
Chardin’s brush has arrested on the canvas a moment of maximum instability and tension, evoking from viewers the wordless absorption of the painted figures. This purely painterly act reaffirms, wittingly or not—and with a twist flattering to the artist’s craft—the ancient idea of homo bulla: *Ars longa, vita brevis*, ‘art is long, life is brief’. / Manet chose to depict a similar moment, perhaps making explicit what Chardin leaves implicit. Rather than representing Léon Leenhoff striving to coax the largest possible bubble from his straw, he shows him about to nudge a bubble free, to rise in the air beyond the picture frame. The art historian Meyer Schapiro suggested that the boy’s pose recalls a painter’s standing at the easel, with a brush in his right hand and a palette in his left.\(^\text{13}\)

Nevertheless, the equation of Léon’s stance to that of a painter also could imply the naiveté of persons pursuing careers as artists.

Distinct from Schapiro, there are art historians and biographers, such as Beth Brombert, who propose that Manet’s decision to couple a *vanitas* theme with the portrayal of his step-son, Léon, indicates romanticized parental nostalgia. Giving rise to such interpretations is Brombert’s astute recognition that the age of the child in the painting is inconsistent with Léon’s age at the time of production. She explains:

Léon’s appearance in *Boy Blowing Soap Bubbles*, a work of classical resonances painted in September 1867, is another intriguing case of biographical reference. Léon was then close to sixteen, but in the painting he looks like a child. The theme of the painting, traditionally associated with *vanitas*—the passing of time, the loss of youth, the inescapability of death—would indeed be more congruous with a prepubescent child than with the full-blown adolescent he was when he posed for *Soap Bubbles*.\(^\text{14}\)

Rationalizing Manet’s artistic license, she contends that the image evokes his distress and melancholy concerning Léon’s transition into adulthood.\(^\text{15}\)

Though the literature on *Les Bulles de savon* provides an interesting and convincing account of Manet’s intentions and relationship to French and international

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 222-223; “Schapiro has made the remarkable observation that Manet’s bubble-blower holds his bubble pipe like an artist’s brush and his bowl like a palette.” Mauner, 135.

\(^{14}\) Brombert, 210-211.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 210-211.
artistic traditions, no scholar has drawn a comparison to a plethora of political prints featuring soap bubbles. Beginning as early as 1789, political cartoons employed bubbles and the bubble blower as symbols of impermanence, and failed, illusory, or deceitful dreams of liberal reform. While this iconography derives in part from the vanitas, or homo bulla tradition, it also exploits the triple entendre associated with the French word bulle, which, in nineteenth-century France, translated as bubbles, papal decrees, and the election of emperors. Painting during the Second Empire and shortly after his controversial images depicting the execution of Maximilian, Manet likely chose this subject matter for its ability to serve as a latent or less overt critique of Napoléon III’s reluctance to institute republican reforms and his “election” as emperor, as well as the Second Empire’s alliance with the papacy. Overall, this reading attempts to answer why Léon’s likeness in the painting is inconsistent with his age at the time of production. The depiction of Léon, who was born the same year Napoléon III declared himself ruler of the Second Empire, seems to illustrate that people may grow to adulthood, yet remain immature and childish.

As part of this study, I explore the means by which late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century political satirists appropriated and transformed iconography derived from a particular manifestation of vanitas: the tradition of homo bulla, or “man as bubble.” Due to their frailty and temporary nature, soap bubbles became an iconographic counterpart to the interest in themes associated with vanity and in connection to mortality, linking the depiction of soap bubbles to the transience and

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16 Homo bulla translates as “…man is but a bubble.” Alan Chong, Celeste Brusati et al. Still-Life Paintings from the Netherlands, 1550-1720 (Zwolle: Wanders Publishers, 1999), 141.
fragility of humankind. Although \textit{homo bulla} became a recognizable trope within the history of northern Baroque art, scholars incorrectly propose that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century depictions of bubbles and the bubble blower relinquished symbolic associations with vanity. Conversely, I argue that a \textit{vanitas} emblem (albeit transformed) that began to be harnessed to political representations and literary allusions in France indicates a transformation in attitudes about politics or what it meant to represent politics.

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18 “By the beginning of the 18th century the impetus of \textit{vanitas} still-lifes was different from that of the previous century: their focus began to shift away from the scientific, religious and philosophical foundation that had so characterized the earlier development towards greater displays of extraordinary virtuosity. In short, still-lifes became more decorative than didactic.” Hans J. van Miegroet, “Vanitas,” \textit{Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online. Oxford University Press}, accessed November 27, 2012, http://www.oxfordartonline.com.libproxy.temple.edu/subscriber/article/grove/art/T087870; de Jongh suggests that “In the course of time, the original meanings of seventeenth-century paintings were often forgotten or not recognized, particularly in the nineteenth century when bourgeois mentality had lost all affinity with the rather different one of the Golden Age. In the first half of the nineteenth century, seventeenth-century art was predominantly used (by Potgieter and others) to explain (Dutch) national history; in contrast, later in the nineteenth century and under the influence of Impressionism, artistic interest was more aesthetically determined, and focused more on the form of works of art than their content.” Eddy de Jongh, “Realism and Seeming Realism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting;” in \textit{Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered}, ed. Wayne Franits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 52-54; Despite these readings, Mauner explains that “While it is true that nineteenth-century French commentary on Dutch pictures says little about their moralizing dimension, such motifs as a child blowing bubbles…, or the \textit{vanitas} still-life paintings by Willem Claesz Heda and others, were certainly understood for what they were…” George Mauner, “Manet and the Life of Nature Morte,” in George Mauner, \textit{Manet. The Still-Life Paintings} (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), 32.
CHAPTER 2
THE POLITICIZATION OF VANITAS IN FRANCE

*Vanitas* refers to a predominately seventeenth-century Dutch tradition in which artists imbue still lifes with religious or philosophical meaning. Deriving from the Ecclesiastes dictum “*Vanitas vanitum omnia vanita*,” or “Vanity of vanities, everything is vanity,”¹⁹ Northern Baroque painters exploited this genre to express the fragility or insignificance of life and to serve as a conduit through which viewers could contemplate human existence. Moreover, artists developed a rich iconography evocative of larger, and oftentimes sententious meanings. Not only could viewers enjoy the intellectual stimulation offered by these paintings, but also the degree of detail and illusionism impressed and tested the audience’s ability to distinguish between reality and the objects represented.²⁰ Similar to *memento mori*, images used in connection with death or to remind viewers of their inevitable mortality,²¹ *vanitas* also features images of skulls, extinguished candles, and hourglasses to remind viewers of the impermanence of life.²²

Due to their fragility and temporary nature, soap bubbles also became an iconographic counterpart to themes associated with vanity and in connection with human

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¹⁹ Chong, Brusati et al., 188.

²⁰ Whereas Svetlana Alpers and Celeste Brusati analyze Baroque still lifes in terms of formal qualities and description, Eddy de Jongh and Eric Sluijter comprehend still lifes as containing a moralizing allegorical meaning. Rather than privilege either approach, I argue that the formal qualities and allegorical meaning contribute to another kind of reception worth considering: political critique.


mortality. Specifically, Northern Baroque artistic practices linked the depiction of soap bubbles—referred to as *homo bulla*, or “man as bubble”—to the transience and fragility of humankind. While soap bubbles and the notion of *homo bulla* became recognizable attributes of northern Baroque vanitas, the allusion to bubbles as indicative of life’s ephemerality has antique origins. Dating to 36 B.C.E., Marcus Terentius Varro’s *De Re Rustica*, a book ostensibly about agriculture, includes an anecdote comparing man to a bubble. The theme was, most likely, reintroduced to sixteenth-century audiences in the publication of Erasmus’s *Adages*. In his reflection on *homo bulla*, Erasmus describes that

> The lesson of this proverb is that there is nothing so fragile, so fleeting and so empty as the life of man. A bubble is that round swollen empty thing which we watch in water as it grows and vanishes in a moment of time. Thus Marcus Terentius Varro in the preface to his book on agriculture: ‘Bearing in mind’ he says ‘that I must make haste; for it, as they say, man is but a bubble, much more is this true of an old man. My eightieth year reminds me to pack my baggage before I bid farewell to life.’ Lucian too in his *Charon* makes men’s lives something very like this kind of bubble: some vanish at once as soon as they are born, some last a little longer, but all of them at very brief intervals take the place of others.

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23 *In the Mauritshuis: Children*, 24.

24 “It is quoted as a proverb as early as about the year 36 B.C. by Marcus Terentius Varro in his *De Re Rustica* when he says (at the very beginning of his work): ‘My dear Fundania, if I had leisure I would give a better form to his treatise. As I have not, I will do what a man may who has to bear in mind the need of haste. Man is a bubble, they say; in which case the proverb must be the more true of an old man. And I am in my eightieth year, which warns me to pack up my baggage in readiness to journey out of this world.’” Wolfgang Stechow, “Homo Bulla,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jun., 1938), 227.

25 “As to the revival of this proverb in Renaissance literature and art, I believe I can identify the author responsible for it; it is in fact the one from whom we may expected the introduction of such an antique proverb into Renaissance literature: Erasmus of Rotterdam. In his *Adagia* (first published at Paris in 1500 containing 838 items, enlarged to the number of 3260 at Venice in 1508) he has dedicated a long paragraph to this saying, carefully expanded (in 1508) into a funeral speech on Philip the Handsome of Burgundy and a Venetian friend Paolo Canal (Decanalis), who by means of their premature death (both died in 1506) had lent themselves to such literary delicacies as are likely to have made a great impression on Erasmus’ contemporaries.” Ibid., 227.

Erasmus discusses the history of the proverb “man is bubble,” as well as lists causes of human fatality and other symbols alluding to death, such as leaves, shadows, wind, and flowers. Despite the antique origins of *homo bulla’s* literary allusions, the earliest extant visual manifestations date to the sixteenth century and likely took Erasmus’s publication as inspiration. In fact, the earliest known instances of *homo bulla* probably couple text and image to further elucidate or invoke the iconographic significance developed by Erasmus. Meanings associated with *homo bulla* were not static, however, and could be understood in a number of ways by different audiences. In particular, by the seventeenth century, bubbles symbolized the transient nature of human life, and artists had begun to use them even as a means of mocking vanity.

While French academicians relegated *nature morte* to the lowest form of genre, Manet’s nineteenth-century artistic milieu galvanized an affinity toward traditionally northern Baroque subject matter, such as still life. Since the preoccupation with still lifes flourished within avant-garde artistic circles privileging formal experimentation over academic conventions, few critics or historians interpret nineteenth-century still lifes as imbued with conventional *vanitas* innuendos. Moreover, recent scholarship on the reception of Dutch still lifes in France focuses on the efforts by nineteenth-century critics, such as Charles Blanc and Théophile Thoré, to align northern Baroque characteristics

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27 Ibid., 173-174.

28 Stechow, 227-228.

29 de Jongh, 41-42.

30 Ibid., 52-54.
with Republican and Protestant concerns.  

Thoré overtly allied republicanism with Dutch genres and declared seventeenth-century Dutch painting as the artistic antecedent to modern, nineteenth-century art.  

In doing so, Thoré sought to inspire his contemporaries to appropriate northern traditions as a means to critique the guidelines espoused by Italian art theory and the academy, and as a way to refute the French government. Ann Dumas explains:

Théophile Thoré (also known as Thoré-Bürger; 1807-1869), a republican who interpreted older art from a polemical, left-wing position, acquired special authority as a prophetic critic. A powerful advocate for seventeenth-century Dutch art, he had decisive influence on the way it was received from the 1860s on. Dutch art encapsulated his notion of ’an art for mankind,’ an art that, in contrast to what he saw as the empty idealization of the Italian School, valued and found beauty in the commonplace life of its own time.

Thus, nineteenth-century artistic references to Dutch genres or la vie quotidien could share larger political connotations.

Interestingly, whereas nineteenth-century critics and artists interpreted and adopted still lifes as a form of artistic subversion, few scholars comment on the iconographic significance of doing so. This is not to say that nineteenth-century critics

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31 “Thoré attributed the emergence of this original school of painting in the seventeenth-century Dutch republic to its hard-won political and religious freedom and to the independence and energy of its citizens...Unlike their Flemish neighbors, they threw off the yoke of Catholic Spain and set up a democratic Protestant republic, and rejected the arcane religious, classical, and mythological subject matter of Italianate Renaissance art that served ruler and church. Instead, their new art, naturalism, served the entire society and was ‘art for mankind’ (l’art pour l’homme).” Likewise, she asserts that “…Blanc’s introductory essay explained the naturalism of the great Dutch School in the context of national independence, democracy, and Protestantism.” Frances Suzman Jowell, “Impressionism and the Golden Age of Dutch Art,” in Inspiring Impression. The Impressionists and the Art of the Past, ed. Ann Dumas. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 81, 86.

32 “Manet and the younger Impressionists surely knew of Thoré’s contention that the legitimate ancestors of modern art were those old masters who themselves had depicted the life of their own times—most notably the seventeenth-century Dutch School...” Ibid., 81.

did not recognize the attributes and traditional readings linked to *homo bulla*. Rather than address the ability of *vanitas* symbolism to function politically, scholars connect formal qualities to acts of political and academic dissension. Building on the politicized nature of non-academic artistic styles, this paper elucidates the means by which soap bubbles became iconographically entrenched in political notions of failed dreams or delusions of liberal reform within the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In doing so, this study also expands upon and further corroborates Philip Nord’s seminal work, *Impressionists and Politics*, and Robert Lethbridge’s “Manet and the Politics of Art,” illustrating the role of political engagement in Manet’s body of work and overarching interest in Dutch tropes.

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34 Significantly, *homo bulla* became a subject of historical interest, and several critics commented on the ability to study light and color through bubbles. For instance, Charles Blanc’s seminal work, *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles*, originally published in 1861 as a response to or perpetuation of the attention toward Northern Baroque traditions, describes the original meanings associated with *homo bulla*. See Charles Blanc, *Histoire des peintres de toutes les écoles: Ecole Hollandaise* (Paris: Librarie Renonard, 1876, originally published in 1861), 4, 23, 76. Blanc describes several paintings using this iconography, such as David Bailly’s *Self-Portrait with Vanitas Symbols* (1651), Dominique [Domenicus] van Tol’s *Two Children Blowing Bubbles* (c. mid-seventeenth century), and Jean [Jan] Steen’s *The Life of Man* (1665). While current scholars claim that nineteenth-century viewers lost knowledge associated with Dutch *vanitas*, Blanc’s writing illustrates the means with which French historians understood *homo bulla* as a method to address the fragility of existence and to mock human vanity. For instance, Blanc evokes the allegorical meaning of David Bailly’s *homo bulla* imagery, describing that “…the artist packed together all the fragile things, all the ephemeral objects that can symbolize the vanities of human life—*Vanitas Vanitatum et Omnia Vanitas*, these are the words that Bailly took care to inscribe in a corner of the painting, as if he judged that his thought, although clear, was not clear enough for the spectator. Withered roses, an opened letter, a skull, soap bubbles, a glass half empty reflecting the fugitive image of voluptuousness, a candle that is beginning to extinguish, these are the principal emblems that David Bailly reunited around his young philosopher.” Likewise, in *Grammaire des arts du dessin: architecture, sculpture, peinture*, Blanc comments on the importance of color in painting and the ability to study color and light “Soit qu’on observe l’iris, soit qu’on regarde les bulles de savon dont s’amusent les enfants, soit que, renouvelant l’expérience de Newton, l’on se serve d’un prisme triangulaire de cristal pour analyser un faisceau de lumière, on voit se former un spectre lumineux composé de six rayons diversement colorés qui sont le violet, le bleu, le vert, le jaune, l’orangé, le rouge.” See Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin: architecture, sculpture, peinture* (Paris: J. Renouard, 1867), 596. Note that this text was published the same year Manet painted *Les Bulles de savon*.

35 “It is reasonable to inquire, though, whether there was anything in the painting[s by Impressionists] itself that justified such political animus. / Let us start with certain aspects of the new painters’ choice of subject matter. The impressionists painted events and personalities that defined a particular and circumscribed milieu. On their canvases can be made out the features of a democratic society under construction, a society inhabited by popular politicians and middle-class hostesses, by Protestants
The Politicization of Homo Bulla

In a dictionary issued by the Académie française in 1835, the author outlined several definitions and phrases employing the word bulle. While the primary definition refers to floating orbs of air encapsulated by liquids, notably soapy water, the word also shares papal and political connotations. Specifically, une bulle refers to “A letter from the pope, written on parchment and sealed with lead.” On a similar note, the term shares political significance: “The constitutions of several emperors. Such as the constitution of Emperor Charles IV, who declared, among other things, the form of the election of emperors in Germany, was called [a bulle].” While the painting of Manet’s son blowing bubbles overtly resembles, and has been linked by scholars to the representational conventions and meanings associated with vanitas, I argue that Manet’s work exploits and is representative of the triple entendre associated with the French word bulle by subtly alluding to a genre of politically-charged prints published in response to the French Revolution of 1789 and the reign of Napoléon Bonaparte, as well as in critique of the July Monarchy.

and Jews, by a whole cast of newcomers to the stage of public life. This was a new-made world, secular and republican in constitution. In choosing to paint it and to paint it in often mythic colors, the impressionists were not making a neutral choice.” Philip Nord, Impressionists and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Routledge, 2000), 53; “The most oft-quoted denial of a political dimension of Manet’s work is the famous ‘c’est une œuvre absolument artistique’ specifically generated by the mock shock-horror disappointment of the banning of his Maximilian lithograph in 1869.” Robert Lethbridge, “Manet and the Politics of Art” in Art and Literature of the Second Empire, ed. David Baguley (Durham: Modern Language Series, 2003), 19-20.


38 Ibid., 239-240.
Beginning as early as the French Revolution, political cartoons employed bubbles and the bubble blower to express insubstantiality, and illusions or delusions. For example, though historians remember October 6 and 7, 1789, as the March on Versailles, an anonymously published print from 1790 relegated the protestors to the background in order to highlight the resulting court trials [Figure 6]. Three revolutionaries inhabit the foreground, their attention cast on a series of soap bubbles within which are inscribed “déposition” and roman numerals. One Republican—identified as Boucher d’Argis—sits by a table on which there rests three cups of soapy water, each with a different label referencing three governmental institutions including the “Armée de Paris,” “Assemblé nationale,” and “Garde du corps.”39 With these ‘ingredients,’ he blows bubbles, while two other figures to the right portraying l’abbé Grégoire, a republican bishop opposed to the French monarchy,40 and Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve, an attorney, participant in the


40 “On the evening of the 21st the Convention also declared itself unanimously in favour of abolishing the monarchy. ‘Kings,’ cried Grégoire, ‘are in the moral order what monsters are in the physical order. The history of kings is a martyrology of nations.’” François Furet and Denis Richet, French Revolution, trans. Stephen Hardman (New York: Macmillan Company, 1970), 161-162.
Estates-General, and writer in favor of overthrowing the *ancien régime*, clap their hands so as to burst the bubbles or applaud d’Argis’s efforts.\(^{41}\) The print’s title, which translates to “So finally, voilà, [see] the secret terror,”\(^{42}\) derives from a speech in which d’Argis attempted to incriminate the Duke of Orléans. Shortly after the March on Versailles, conspiracy theorists argued that the Duke instigated the riot in order to secure his future as king of France.\(^{43}\) Despite these accusations and as represented by the bubbles in the print, d’Argis’s evidence was insubstantial and considered calumnious.

Akin to the critique of d’Argis’s insubstantial or illusory evidence, in 1791 an anonymous satirist published an editorial criticizing the papacy which, historically, enacted papal *bulles* in support of monarchy [Figure 7].\(^{44}\) Evoking the hostile

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\(^{41}\) In her account of the March on Versailles, Webster describes Pétion’s role, writing that “Pétion, taking advantage of the ensuing tumult, arose to denounce the banquet of the bodyguard.” In reaction to this, “Monsieur de Monspey demanded that Pétion should substantiate his charges against the bodyguard, but Mirabeau interposed.” Nesta H. Webster, *French Revolution: A Study in Democracy* (London: Constable, 1919), 139; Richard Ballard, *A New Dictionary of the French Revolution* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 269-271; Blum., 85.

\(^{42}\) “Information des journées du 5 et 6 octobre 1789: le voilà donc enfin ce secret plein d’horreur ! ! ! !,” 1790.

\(^{43}\) “Accordingly in November the Châtelet of Paris opened an immense inquiry into the events of October 5 and 6. In spite of the threats of the Orléanistes no less than 398 witnesses came forward to testify against the infamous manoeuvres of the duke and his supporters...In the light of this great mass of evidence no impartial mind can possibly doubt that the whole insurrection was the work of the Orléaniste conspiracy—the forcing of the women to march, the men in women’s clothes, the money distributed amongst the crowd, the presence of the duke himself and of his supports in the thick of the tumult always followed by cries of ‘Vive le bond duc d’Orléans! Vive notre roi d’Orléans!’ All these facts were proved beyond dispute...But the evidence collected by the Châtelet was already more than sufficient to prove that the events of October 5 and 6 were the work of a conspiracy...The following day a deputation from the Châtelet presented themselves at the Assembly and placed all the documentary evidence they had collected on the table./Boucher d’Argis then opened the debate with these dramatic words: ‘At last we have torn aside the veil from the deplorable event now all too celebrated. They will be known—those secrets full of horror; they will be revealed—those crimes that stained the palace of our kings in the morning of October the 6th! But the Orléanistes had still far too much power over the Assembly to be brought to justice.’” Webster, 165-167; Henry Morse Stephens, *The Principal Speeches of the Statesmen and Orators of the French Revolution, 1789-1795: Mirabeau. Vergniaud. Gensonné, Gaudet. Louvet. Cambon*, volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 218, 233.

\(^{44}\) The print is titled: “La France s’appuyant sur les droits de l’homme en écrasant la noblesse et le clergé: repousse avec une chignaude patriotique les bulles apostolique du St Père préparées par l’abbé
relationship between the papacy and the revolutionary government which was bent on imposing secularization, the artist illustrates the personification of liberty, holding in one hand the French constitution titled Les Droits de l’homme, while bursting the papal bulles literally and figuratively with her other hand. Through this print, the artist explains that the republic was challenged by the papacy and Royou, a French Abbot who formed L’Ami du roi, in support of the aristocracy and clergy.45 Using the same conventions and expounding upon the identical message as the previous image, another anonymous printmaker satirized the papacy in 1791, titling his work: “Eighteenth-century bubbles/bulls: while Pius VI, surrounded by his guards, plays games, the abbot Royou, armed with a bundle of feathers that a general of order cut for him with a knife, lathers apostolic soap…” [Figure 8].46 Like the previous image, this artist shows the personification of Les Droits de l’homme, illuminated by rays of celestial sunlight, bursting papal decrees.

Despite this, a print in support of the clergy relies on imagery of soap bubbles too. Whereas the previous images display the opposition between church and state, a designer and printmaker—identified only as un bon chrétien and un bon citoyen—illustrates that several religious figures considered the power of the new democratic state superior to that

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45 James L. Osen, Royalist Political Thought During the French Revolution (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 6-8, 34-35.

46 “Bulles du 18e siècle: pendant que Pie VI environné de sa garde fait jou-jou, l’abbé Royou armé d’un paquet de plumes qu’un général d’ordre lui a taillées avec un poignard, fait mousser le savon apostolique…”; According to the Bibliothèque nationale, the print was published chez Potrelle.
of the papacy. To gain the support of the ministry, the government established the 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy, a statute forcing priests to vow fealty to the republic; Pope Pius VI retorted with two papal bulls. As expressed by the title, “Response to the author of the chronicle, who compared a papal bull to a bomb: well Monsieur Chronicler, I find you to be a pleasant buffoon” [Figure 9], the pope’s *bulles* were insubstantial and ineffective against the new French authority.

Despite their context-specific meaning, these images derive from the *homo bulla* tradition. Specifically, in the depictions of political views on both sides of the hostility between the papacy and the revolution, the artists seem to appropriate and adjust compositional elements from a print in Jean Jacques Boissard’s 1588 *Emblèmes latins* [Figure 10]. Within this series of prints, one couples a poem concerning humankind’s mortality with an image of an adult, allegorical figure bursting the bubbles blown by a child. Whereas the adult figure corresponds to the depiction of liberty bursting papal bulls, Boissard’s child corresponds to the depiction of the papacy, naively attempting to reinstate and reinforce their power. Missing from the revolutionary satires, however, is

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47 “The inscription below emphasizes the role played by good citizens and good Christians in producing the print; thus, it was intended to act as a propagandistic image in support of the good French clergy who accepted the authority of the revolutionary government over that of Rome.” Cynthia Burlingham and James Cuno, “Catalogue of the Exhibition,” in *French Caricature and the French Revolution, 1789-1799* (Los Angeles: Grunewald Center for the Graphic Arts, Wight Art Gallery, University of California, 1988), 176.

48 “In March and April 1791, Pius VI issued two papal briefs that formalized the schism within the church over the revolutionary government’s requirement that French priests take an oath of loyalty to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.” Ibid., 176.


an inscription overtly relaying the images’ message. Unlike Boissard’s composition, which is displayed next to the anecdote: “Transient and vain is everything in our life: everything hangs from the thread of Lachesis. As quickly as the wet swelling of the bubbled water perishes, so the certain hour of death comes to anyone,” the prints critical of the clergy do not explicitly refer to the insubstantiality or fragility of soap bubbles.51 Due to their shared iconography and composition, it becomes clear that there exists an adaptation of conventional homo bulla from an image encouraging contemplation and imbuing in its viewer a sense of melancholy, to one of political satire. This also illustrates the flexibility with which audiences could interpret homo bulla imagery, attesting to its ability to appeal to multiple sides of a debate and to deny culpability in the case of illegal political satire.

Similar iconographic conventions appear in prints representing Napoléon Bonaparte and Louis-Philippe. In a nineteenth-century print titled “Facetious piece: Napoléon blowing bubbles in front of his son” [Figure 11], the artist rendered Napoléon, rather than his prepubescent son, blowing bubbles representative of European countries and principalities, such as Westphalia, Holland, Spain and Italy, as well as the largest bubble illustrating his dream of an imperial reign. 52 In rendering his military victories and resulting land acquisitions as bubbles, the printmaker highlights the ephemeral and illusory nature of Napoléon’s conquests and grand dreams.

51 Ibid.

52 “Pièce facétieuse: Napoléon faisant des bulles de savon devant son fils,” nineteenth century. Note, this resembles the means by which Napoleon III inscribed conquered countries on balloons at his Fêtes imperiales, see footnote 124; Although the artist, printmaker and publisher are unknown, scholars believe the print originated in Germany. See “Ah Papa les belles bulles de savon que as faites,” The British Museum. Accessed April 26, 2012, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=1336771&amp;partid=1&amp;searchText=les+bubbles+de+savon&amp;fromADBC=ad&amp;toADBC=ad&amp;num_pages=10&amp;orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&amp;currentPage=1.
In a similar vein, Charles Philipon critiqued the July Monarchy by depicting Louis-Philippe, the “Citizen King,” blowing bubbles [Figure 12]. The July Monarchy (1830-1848) describes the time in which Louis-Philippe governed France as a constitutional-monarchist and was a period marked by political strife. During his reign as king, Louis-Philippe often was the subject of ridicule in political lithographs: most famously, Honoré Daumier’s *Gargantua*, published in the infamous political newspaper, *Le Charivari*.53 Like Daumier, Philipon was a prominent lithographer and political satirist famous for his depictions accentuating Louis-Philippe’s pear-shaped face and exploiting the *double entendre* associated with the French word *poire*, translating as “pear” and “fathead.”54 Most important to this study is Philipon’s lesser-known print featuring Louis-Philippe seated behind a table blowing bubbles from a bowl of foam, playfully referred to as “Mousse de Juillet,” or “July Foam.” This print was published by the Maison Aubert, a shop organized by Philipon and Gabriel Aubert and known for its political satires.55 Similar to several of the earlier depictions, Philipon describes the

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53 Although no one can be sure if Philipon—like Daumier—was inspired by Rabelais, there are illusions to bubbles and the bubble blower in Rabelais’s *Gargantua*. See François Rabelais, *The Complete Works of François Rabelais*, trans. Donald Murdoch Frame (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999), 579. He writes: “Panurge, through a tube of Pantagruelion, was blowing bubbles with his tongue.” Moreover, on page 75 of Elizabeth A. Chesney’s *The Rabelais Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), the author explains the chapter title “Fanfreluches antidotées,” explaining that “The word *fanfreluches* is derived from *fanfeluce*, meaning ‘trifle,’ and vulgar Latin *fanfalauca*, meaning ‘air bubbles.’” Cotgrave’s *Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* define it as ‘vanities, fopperies, fooleries, fond tricks.’”


55 “Philipon and his brother-in-law Gabriel Aubert ran another successful shop, the Maison Aubert, established in 1829 in the fashionable Passage Véro-Dodat, near the Palais Royal...Maison Aubert was best known for issuing prints in journals sold by subscriptions. *La Caricature*, Philipon’s most notorious high-end satirical publication, was filled with political prints by Daumier and J.J. Grandville.” Ibid., 14.
significance of the bubbles by inscribing different facets of Louis-Philippe’s short-lived promises of liberal policies allowing popular elections and freedom of press. While these bubbles represent positive aspects of this king’s reign, the ephemeral and illusory nature of bubbles indicates the impermanence and delusory nature of Louis-Philippe’s liberal inclinations.56

While the meanings and interpretations of the prints described are far from static, each reveal how the visual manifestation of bubbles invoked or implied insubstantiality and failed dreams or deceit within the political domain. In each instance, the bubble blower represents a figure creating illusions—of evidence, papal authority, imperial conquests, and republican reforms—impossible to substantiate. Thus, rather than evoking the vanity or transient nature of human existence, these artists imply the vanity or futility of calumny, the assertion of authority, and democratic amendments.

Illustrative of a transformation of *homo bulla* or *vanitas*, prints of this sort attach negative connotations to, and criticize the bubble blower as creator of illusions. Rather than remind viewers of the vanity and transience of life, these images come to rely on the illusionistic quality characterizing the Dutch Baroque and seem to derive from the formal

56 “In February 1831 La Maison Aubert published ‘Mousse de Juillet’, better known as ‘Les Bulles de savon’, a caricature in which Philipon drew an insouciant Louis-Philippe blowing bubbles, each one labeled with one of the concessions included in the Programme de l’Hôtel de Ville: Liberté de la presse, Élections populaires, Les Maires nommés par le peuple, Plus de pairie héréditaire, Plus de sinécures, Gouvernement à bon marché, La Charte sera une vérité. With ‘Les Bulles de savon’, Philipon suggested that the king’s promises in August 1830 had been as fragile and short-lived as soap bubbles. The government reacted by ordering the seizure of the caricature, which became the first to be prosecuted under the July Monarchy. When the prosecution collapsed because of a procedural abnormality, Philipon was not prepared to let the matter lie. He decided to turn the affair into a test case in order to establish his right to publish political caricatures—aware, no doubt, that a trial would bring him useful publicity. He published another edition of the caricature, which was duly seized for the second time.” David S. Kerr, *Caricature and French Political Culture 1830-1848: Charles Philipon and the Illustrated Press* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 79.
problems associated with depicting a phenomena difficult to perceive or study in great
detail due to its ephemeral nature and refraction of light.⁵⁷
CHAPTER 3
THE TRANSFORMATION OF VANITAS IN THE WAKE OF ENLIGHTENMENT IDEOLOGY

Beginning in the eighteenth century and almost eighty years before Manet’s *Les Bulles de savon*, French satirists appropriated a *vanitas* symbol, namely the soap bubble, as a means to express a political ideology or point of view. Because of this, one must ask: does the fact that satirists harnessed *vanitas* iconography to political representations suggest a transformation of the way people thought about politics or the representation of politics? I conjecture that eighteenth-century allusions to soap bubbles within French art and literature served as a manifestation of a particular attitude toward reason extant in Enlightenment political theory which resembled nineteenth-century theories of *realpolitik*, and that anticipated similar concerns under the Second Empire in France.

During the Enlightenment, there arose a widespread interest in republicanism stemming from both the growing dissatisfaction with government systems privileging the aristocracy, and the transformations within the economic spheres that gave rise to the bourgeoisie. In developing new approaches toward political systems and reform, philosophers, critics and citizens alike were confronted by the role of reason in determining and bolstering the authority and efficacy of democratic endeavors. However, the inability to visualize “reason” became a source of contention.\(^58\) Despite the

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\(^58\) The tenuous relationship between text and image is discussed in Ernst Gombrich, “The Visual Image: its Place in Communication,” in *The Essential Gombrich*, ed. Richard Woodfield (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 42. He writes: “The assertion that statements cannot be translated into images often meets with incredulity, but the simplest demonstration of its truth is to challenge the doubters to illustrate the proposition they doubt. You cannot make a picture of the concept of statement any more than you can illustrate the impossibility of translation. It is not only the degree of abstraction of language that eludes the visual medium…. ”
increasing interest in implementing republican systems rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, 

…it is not clear that human reason proves powerful enough to put a concrete, positive authoritative ideal in place of the ideals negated by rational criticism. As in the epistemological domain, reason shows its power more convincingly in criticizing authorities than in establishing them. Here too the question of the limits of reason is one of the main philosophical legacies of the period. These limits are arguably vividly illustrated by the course of the French Revolution. The explicit ideals of the French Revolution are the Enlightenment ideals of individual freedom and equality; but, as the revolutionaries attempt to devise rational, secular institutions to put in place of those they have violently overthrown, eventually they have recourse to violence and terror in order to control and govern the people. The devolution of the French Revolution into the Reign of Terror is perceived by many as proving the emptiness and hypocrisy of Enlightenment reason, and is one of the main factors which account for the end of the Enlightenment as an historical period.  

While many of the aforementioned prints were published before the Reign of Terror, the supposed “emptiness” and limits of reason seem to have inspired their depiction. In particular, prior to their conception, several textual and artistic references existed in which the act of blowing bubbles expressed irrationality, insubstantiality and illusions. Preceding and mirroring nineteenth-century German theories of realpolitik, or “politics based on practical and material factors rather than theoretical or ethical [or idealistic] objectives,” soap bubbles represented ideal, abstract and intangible principles upon which governments or economic transactions could reside with difficulty. 

Though soap bubbles became an object of study in eighteenth-century physics, philosopbes did not necessarily associate their existence with reason. As early as 1707,


61 “Newton s’élévoit de la contemplation d’une bulle de savon à la théorie de la lumière. L’art de voir est l’art d’apercevoir les rapports, & tout s’enchaîne aux yeux du génie.” Charles Bonnet, Oeuvres
the anonymously engraved frontispiece to Pierre Poiret’s *De Eruditione triplici Solida* [Figure 13] embodied the irrationality of the bubble blower. Largely representative of different epistemological methods or theories, this print provides an interesting commentary on locating notions of truth through rational or divinely inspired thought. In particular, in the foreground of the image, Poiret depicts a cave in which figures blow bubbles. Surrounding these figures is a series of ancient philosophical texts. Recalling Plato’s allegory of the cave, the artist conveys philosophers as bubble blowers creating illusions or imagining a world based on false knowledge. In other words,

Poiret places these philosophers in the *Domus falsae eruditionis*, a world confined to books. Like Plato’s cave, this dwelling houses beings who are prisoner to their illusions. Classical writing litters the ground: *Rhetoric* and *Organon* by Aristotle, Homer….Poiret opposes the true erudition: mystical contemplation, that opens up to Truth in all its splendor—a brilliant figure, wearing the sun in one hand and in the other, the symbolic reins of mastery [or control] over oneself…Through this Cartesian figuration of Truth, mental representations are associated with the painting of an idea or a thing.

Perhaps exploiting the association of bubbles and artistic illusion, the printmaker intimates that approaches to philosophy rooted in Platonic thought result in the creation

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62 Pierre Poiret, *De Eruditione triplici, solida, superficiam et falsa* (Amsterdam, 1707).

Likewise, the print could illustrate the role of imitation and illusion in Platonic reasoning, which asserts that truth cannot be known through visual perception.

Complementing this interpretation of bubble blowers is Jean-Baptiste-Claude Delisle de Sales’s 1802 treatise, *Mémoires de Candide sur la liberté de presse, la paix générale, les fondements de l’ordre social, et d’autres bagatelles*. Written in response to, or as homage to Voltaire’s *Candide*, and as a reflection of the efforts toward republican reforms, he published this book under the pseudonym, Doctor Emmanuel Ralph (nephew to Voltaire’s *nom de plume*, Doctor Athanase Ralph). Distinct from *Candide*, in order to explore Enlightenment notions of freedom, government and reason, de Sales’s work features two allegories to soap bubbles. For de Sales, bubbles serve as a metaphor for ineffectuality, and illusion or deception, as well as for the incomprehensibility of metaphysical dogma. Specifically, in order to express the futility of implementing republican institutions, de Sales compares the idealism propounded by Plato, Thomas

64 Yoko Mori expresses a similar meaning associated with soap bubbles, explaining that: “There is a newly discovered ceiling fresco in Regensburg which has been restored during 1967-68 for the Hofbibliothek at the Castle of Princes Thurn and Taxis. Cosmas Damian Asam painted it in 1737, but in 1812 it was overpainted according to change in contemporary taste. The original central theme is to praise heavenly wisdom. King Salomon holding a scepter is looking at heaven. He is sitting on the throne surrounded by lions, books, terrestrial and celestial globes which are attributes of human wisdom. Under him a putto is blowing a soap bubble and besides him an in inscribed banderole indicating the passage from ‘ECCLESIASTE(S), I.V(erso).17, namely, ‘And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.’ At the other corner a second putto is blowing a soap bubble indicating that the arts are also vanitas depicted at the other three corners near the cornice. Thus, soap bubbles here are not implied as homo bulla, but as vain human knowledge in comparison to heavenly wisdom.” Also at stake in her article is the importance of ludic learning, or education through play. Through the childish act of blowing bubbles or playing games, one might learn more about human nature, virtues and vices. Yoko Mori, “The Iconography of homo bulla in Northern Art from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Homo ludens; der spielerende Mensch* (Munich: Musikverlag Katzbachler, 1996), 166-168.

65 “For Plato, as is well known from this and other demonstrations (notably the famous allegory of the cave), it is the moral value of a reflection that is in question, since he sees imitation as a deception, and as such, detrimental to the search for truth. (Pliny’s story of the deceiving power of the painted grapes of Zeuxis comes quickly to mind.) Behind this position is the belief that both painting and mirror reflect the earthly object and not the pure Form, or Idea, from which it is derived.” Mauner, 29.

More, and Voltaire’s protagonist, Candide, to bubble blowers, writing that: “Plato, who makes republics, More, who wrote *Utopia*, a diplomat, who dreams in his office on the happiness of the world, are all fabricators of soap bubbles; while the children who are governed admire them [bubbles], the strong men who govern blow on this brilliant and light architecture, and all disappears.” A similar anecdote appears in which the ability to understand soap bubbles is connected to the ability to understand the bubble’s structure. Associated with the bubble blower’s creation of illusions or delusions, de Sales also expresses the difficulty with which humans can comprehend abstract theoretical notions derivative of or closely related to reason, such as morality. He writes: “Morality, for the strong men reposing on the cushion of atheism, like the wise Montaigne on that of indifference, is a soap bubble with which the children play and which, before one has the time to explain its structure, it has already dissipated in the wave of space.” Regardless of the author’s consideration of atheism or Montaigne, he illustrates the means by which bubbles are used to represent or describe intangible or nonrepresentational metaphysical dogma.

Likewise, read within the context of the French *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, it becomes clear that bubbles signified illusions or popular delusions. Perhaps inspiring de Sales’s references to soap bubbles, Montesquieu and Voltaire each use bubbles in relation to the intangible. Specifically, whereas Montesquieu compares the difficulty

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67 “Platon, qui fait des *Républiques*, Morus, qui écrit des *Utopies*, un Diplomate, qui rêve dans son cabinet sur le Bonheur du Monde, sont tous des fabricateurs de bulles de savon; pendant que les enfans qui sont gouvernés admirent, les hommes forts qui gouvernent soufflent sur cette architecture brillante et légère, et tout disparaît.” Ibid., xiii.

68 “La Morale, pour les hommes puissans qui reposent sur l’oreiller de l’athéisme, comme le sage Montaigne sur celui de l’insouciance, est une bulle de savon dont les enfans se jouent, et qui, avant qu’on ait eu le tems d’expliquer sa structure, s’est déjà dissipée dans le vague de l’espace.” Ibid., 148.
with which one defines morality to the ephemeral and incomprehensible nature of bubbles, Voltaire connects bubble blowing to irrationality and vanity. For instance, in attempting to express the difficulty with which one defines morality, Montesquieu writes: “I return in the domain of a higher morale, and I retake, by force, a severe pen. All of a sudden, morality varies under the political actions or business, like a soap bubble which rises or descends according to the will of air and receives the various colors of light which amuse children.”69 In other words, he compares the indefinable and perhaps irrational character of morality to the instability and illusory nature of a soap bubble. Further capturing the inability to connect bubbles to logic is a poem by Voltaire which rhymes: “Friend, play with life, / Blow soap bubbles; / That is my philosophy, / Because I really fear being right.”70 Serving as an anecdote preceding a short letter to M. ***, Voltaire conveys the insubstantiality or immateriality of reason and thought.71 Rather than express seventeenth-century Dutch notions of homo bulla, such as the transient nature of life or the vanity of human existence, these writers signify the illusory nature of reason as soap bubbles due to the difficulty with which one perceives their ephemeral and insubstantial nature, as well as because the illusionistic means with which northern Baroque painters rendered bubbles and impressed audiences.

69 “Je rentre dans le domaine d’une morale plus haute, et je reprends, par force, une plume sévère. Tout à l’heure, la morale variait sous l’action de la politique ou des affaires, comme cette bulle de savon qui monte ou descend au gré de l’air, et reçoit de la lumière les couleurs variées qui amusent l’enfant.” Auguste Charaux, L’esprit de Montesquieu: sa vie et ses principaux ouvrages (Lille: J. Lefort, 1885), 405-6.


71 Ibid., 329.
Writing in reaction to the French *philosophes* and resulting revolution, August Wilhelm Rehberg’s text, *Untersuchungen über die französische Revolution*, contains an interesting allusion to soap bubbles that is later echoed by nineteenth-century writers, such as Thomas Carlyle. Born in 1757, Rehberg was a German philosopher famous for his critique of the French Revolution. Specifically, in 1793, Rehberg condemned the means by which French revolutionaries justified their actions and political beliefs according to *reason*, censuring the notion that “…the principles of reason are guidelines for concrete political practice, that they are blueprints to reconstruct all society and the state.”

To express the inability of reason to uphold political practice, Rehberg analyzes the tenants of Rousseau’s 1762 treatise inspiring democratic and revolutionary thought, *Of The Social Contract, Or Principles of Political Right*, writing that:

Real men aren’t limited by law, but are limited by other men, who make claims; and the characteristics of these people always produce, inevitably, an influence. That is why the first two books of the *Social Contract*, which discusses the entire system examined here, must be considered as an extraordinarily subtle speculation, like a profound and infinitely coherent system, but which the object is found nowhere; like a magnificent edifice, which hovers in the air and reposes on soap bubbles.

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74 Ibid.

75 “Der wirkliche Mensch wird nicht durch Gesetz eingeschränkt, sondern durch andre lebende Menschen, die es geltend machen: und die Eigenthümlichkeiten dieser Menschen wirken unvermeidlich allemal auch etwas. / Die beyden ersten Bücher des *Contrat focial*, worin das ganze hier geprüfte System vorgetragen ist, kann daher nur für eine äußerst scharfsinnige Speculation, für ein tiefssinniges und sehr zusammenhängend ausgeführtes System gelten, dessen Gegenstand aber nirgends zu finden ist, für ein prächtiges Gebäude, das in der Luft schwebt, und auf Seifenblasen gegründet ist.” August Wilhelm Rehberg, *Untersuchungen über die französische Revolution* (Hannover: Ritscher, 1793), 19, http://books.google.com/books?id=7htCAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq= Untersuchungen+%C3%BCber+die+Franz%C3%B6sische+Revolution+volume+1&hl=en&sa= X&ei=k4UyUYbKKl30gHXp4HIBg&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false.
Rehberg intimates the impossible manifestation of Rousseau’s social contract as a political system, comparing its functionality to the ability of a great edifice to float through the air, resting on a soap bubble.

While the allusion to *bulles de savon* likely dates to eighteenth-century texts and images dealing with epistemological notions of truth or reason, the popularization of soap bubble imagery also may derive from the Mississippi and South Sea Bubbles of 1720. The Mississippi and South Sea Bubbles refer to economic schemes in which a large production of paper money no longer was backed by metal coinage. Due to the fragility, insubstantiality and ephemerality of these economic measures, eighteenth-century critics characterize the ventures as “bubbles.” In particular, Charles Mackay’s 1841 text *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* describes these disastrous economic investments, as well as the illustrations they inspired dating to the eighteenth century.76 Resembling Montesquieu’s and Voltaire’s allusions to soap bubbles as insubstantial or foundationless, and incandescent, Mackay evokes the deceptive nature of paper money, writing that:

> With a weakness most culpable, he [Law] lent his aid in inundating the country with paper money, which, based upon no solid foundation, was sure to fall, sooner or later. The extraordinary present fortune dazzled his eyes, and prevented him from seeing the evil that would burst over his head, when once, from any cause or other, the alarm was sounded.77

Furthermore, Mackay describes the brief period of economic wealth as illusory, writing that as a result of Law’s economic policies, “New houses were built in every direction; an illusory prosperity shone over the land, and so dazzled the eyes of the whole nation, that

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77 Ibid., 22.
none could see the dark cloud on the horizon announcing the storm that was too rapidly approaching.”

In a related chapter recounting the history of the South Sea Bubble, in which increased speculation resulted in economic failure, Mackay ties the implementation of financial schemes to irrationality. Similar to earlier accounts, Mackay unites bubbles to false logic by questioning: “Is it a dull or uninstructive picture to see a whole people shaking suddenly off the trammels of reason, and running wild after a golden vision, refusing obstinately to believe that it is not real, till, like a deluded hind running after an ignis fatuus [will-o’-the-wisp], they are plunged into a quagmire?”

Thus, according to Mackay, bubbles are deceitful illusions blinding or causing citizens to lose sight of reason.

Representative of Mackay’s history is a broadside made by Bernard Picart dating to 1720 titled “Mississippi ou Monument consacré à la Posterité en mémoire de la folie incroyable de la XX année du XVIII siècle” [Figure 14]. As intimated by the title, this print renders the economic failures and ensuing chaos surrounding the implementation of paper money not backed by gold. Mackay’s explication of the print explains that:

Among the caricatures that were abundantly published, and that showed as plainly as graver matters, that the nation had awakened to a sense of its folly, was one, a fac-simile of which is preserved in the ‘Mémoires de la Régence.’ It was thus

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78 Ibid., 41.

79 Ibid., 111.

80 Mississipi ou Monument consacré à la Posterité en memoire de la folie incroyable de la XX année du XVIII siècle [concerning John Law and the Mississippi scheme; rioting crowds at the Rue Quinquen Poix as a nude woman ‘Fortuna’ surrounded by streams of light floats over their heads, and a winged demon behind a dark clouds blows bubbles in their direction, detail, c. 1720, engraving, (29.4 x 36 cm). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin; According to Lynn Avery Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt’s, The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard’s Religious Ceremonies of the World (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2010), 185-186, “It also appeared, though perhaps without his [Picart’s] permission, in The Great Picture of Folly, a large, folio-size volume on the crash that included seventy prints, poems, satirical plays, pamphlets, and even copies of the stock subscription agreements. The engravings in this collection circulated, often crudely copied, throughout England, France, Holland, and the German states.”
described by its author: ‘The “Goddess of Shares,” in her triumphal car, driven by the Goddess of Folly. Those who are drawing the car are impersonations of the Mississippi, with his wooden leg, the South Sea, the Bank of England, the Company of the West of Senegal, and of various assurances. Lest the car should not roll fast enough, the agents of these companies, known by their long fox-tails and their cunning looks, turn round the spokes of the wheels, upon which are marked the names of the several stocks, and their value, sometimes high and sometimes low, according to the turns of the wheel. Upon the ground are the merchandise, day-books and ledgers of legitimate commerce, crushed under the chariot of Folly. Behind is an immense crowd of persons, of all ages, sexes, and conditions, clamoring after Fortune, and fighting with each other to get a portion of the shares which she distributes so bountifully among them. In the clouds sits a demon, blowing bubbles of soap, which are also the objects of the admiration and cupidity of the crowd, who jump upon one another’s backs to reach them ere they burst. Right in the pathway of the car, and blocking up the passage, stands a large building, with three doors, through one of which it must pass, if it proceeds further, and all the crowd along with it. Over the first door are the words, ‘Hôpital des Fous,’ over the second ‘Hôpital des Malades,’ and over the third, ‘Hôpital des Gueux.’

Most important to this paper is the winged demon hiding above the crowd in a dark cloud blowing bubbles toward the figure representing fortune [Figure 15]. Not only do the Mississippi and South Sea financial catastrophes appropriate bubbles as symbols of economic failure, but also the artist insinuates, or serves as a predecessor to the negative connotations associated with political and papal figures blowing bubbles. Related to the revolutionary and nineteenth-century prints, the demon blowing bubbles creates false illusions of economic prosperity. Moreover, whereas Poiret’s 1707 print showed the illusory nature of Platonic reasoning, the representation in reaction to the Mississippi crisis expressed how faulty logic may inspire disastrous results.

Overall, the writing and prints illustrate the means with which the eighteenth-century signification of homo bulla couples transience with illusion or delusion. It appears that soap bubbles became a metaphorical tool used to represent intangible or theoretical projects of Enlightenment, including failed attempts to locate sources of

81 Mackay, 62-63.
knowledge, and to inspire economic prosperity and republican reforms. Additionally, the transformation of allusions to bubbles likely was a result of, and came to represent the insubstantiality, intangibility, and instability associated with the large interest in reason and theory in eighteenth-century France. As will become clear in chapter four, Enlightenment ideals and the limitations of reason as manifested through the iconography of *homo bulla* was applicable to Manet’s artistic and political environs under the Second Empire and likely inspired his portrait of Léon, *Les Bulles de savon.*
CHAPTER 4
MANET, SOAP BUBBLES, AND SECOND EMPIRE POLITICS

While the eighteenth-century philosophical, political and economic milieu fostered the evolution of *homo bulla* to connote the limitations of reason and political authority, similar subversive and failed efforts toward republican reform under Napoléon I and Louis-Philippe further cultivated allusions to soap bubbles. Not only did the politics and economics under the Second Empire mirror earlier attempts at establishing democratic ideals, and inhibit the institution of reform, but also access to artistic and literary allusions to soap bubbles critiquing authoritarian regimes and unsuccessful strides toward liberalism could have necessitated and inspired Manet’s interest in *homo bulla*. This context also would have cultivated an audience well-attuned to such associations of the *homo bulla* as political critique.

In the complicated history of nineteenth-century France, the Second Empire comprises the period of about eighteen years in which Napoléon III presided over France as emperor. Elected in 1848 as president of the Second Republic, Louis Napoléon Bonaparte usurped the power of the parliament and citizens, thus becoming emperor of France in 1852. Though he was elected as president and became emperor as a result of public referendum, Manet never supported his rule. Prior to Napoléon III’s despotism, Manet wrote to his father lamenting and foreboding Louis Napoléon’s feigned appeals to republicanism. As Manet suspected, Louis Napoléon quickly transformed the Second

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82 Rouart and Wildenstein, 30.
Republic into the second Napoléonic empire. To quell opposition at home and abroad during his career, Napoléon III appealed to the papacy by waging a war against the republican revolutionaries attempting to overthrow the Papal States, imposed censorship of the press in France, and began imperial campaigns that, in theory, would improve France’s prestige economically and as a major world power. To garner more political support, however, Napoléon III eventually reinstated liberal reforms, providing more power to the parliament and press.

The political history of Napoléon III recalls the nineteenth-century definitions of bulle issued by the Académie française, as well as the deceptive promises of liberalism propounded by Louis-Philippe and Napoléon I. Like the meanings previously discussed, bulle refers to the election of an emperor and the papal decrees. After his presidential nomination, Louis Napoléon staged a coup d’état and instituted a public referendum providing him the legal rights to the French throne. Evoking the papacy’s support of, and confrontation to democratic reforms in 1789, Pope Pius IX lent ecclesiastical support to Napoléon III’s rule by endorsing Bonapartism. Redolent of the revolutionary prints challenging Pope Pius VI’s clout and influence, Napoléon III’s despotic reign relied on, and in turn, supported Pope Pius IX’s papal authority despite Italian and Republican campaigns to suppress it.

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85 Pope Pius IX did more than serve as a political alliance. He also was godfather to Napoleon III and Eugénie’s son, Napoleon Eugène Louis Jean Joseph (1856-1879). Desmond Seward, Eugénie: The Empress and her Empire (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004), 90.
Historians studying Manet’s oeuvre situate *Boy Blowing Bubbles* toward the end of 1867 or the beginning of 1868. Within the history of the Second Empire, 1867 served as a turning point from an authoritarian regime to the implementation of liberal reforms and the gradual relaxation of censorship laws by 1868. In fact, Napoléon III heralded the new year by publishing a series of reforms on January 19th. Echoing appeals to republicanism, the *Exposition universelle* appeared as a harbinger of universal peace and progress through industrialization. However, the execution of Maximilian, which occurred during the world’s fair, destroyed ambitions of liberal reform by reminding France of Napoléon III’s imperialism and conniving intrigues, and betrayed the impossibility of democracy and world peace under the Second Empire. As part of his imperial dominion that reflected and sought to compete with American dreams of “Manifest Destiny,” Napoléon III’s “Grand Design” placed the Austrian emperor’s brother, Maximilian as ruler of Mexico in 1864. As in Europe, nineteenth-century Mexico saw aspirations of republicanism that contended with the installation of a foreign monarch. Securing an Austrian archduke in Mexico was a strategic plan that would allow Napoléon III to govern vicariously, as well as act as a treaty between France and Austria—the latter of which lost land in Italy due to Napoléon III’s campaigns.

Likewise, European allies in Mexico facilitated economic speculation, bringing to mind

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86 “In 1849, when still Prince President, he [Louis Napoleon] had sent the French army to Rome, to put an end to Garibaldi’s Roman republic and restore Pope Pius IX.” Ibid., 138; “Even the major foreign policy initiative of the Republic, the expedition to Rome to discourage Austrian advances from the north and to protect the Pope against the Roman republic, was a preview of the later embroilment in the Italian campaign of the Empire.” David Baguley, *Napoleon III and his Regime: An Extravaganza* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2000), 11-12.

87 Ibid., xx.

88 Brombert, 213.

89 Ibid., 213.
earlier futile financial investments, such as the Mississippi bubble. Napoléon III’s objectives quickly failed as Mexican revolutionaries assassinated Maximilian in 1867.

In reaction to France’s culpability, Manet aligned himself with the left and in opposition to Napoléon III’s regime by painting and printing *Execution of Maximilian* (1867-1869). Working after Goya’s *Third of May, 1808* (1814) compositionally and conceptually, Manet rendered several paintings and a lithograph as a critique of French imperialism, drawing a connection between Napoléon III’s power and that of Napoléon Bonaparte. Whereas Manet’s work was less a critique of the execution than of Maximilian’s rule and France’s role in the situation, Goya’s work explicitly condemned the actions of the invading soldiers against Spanish civilians. Because of the evident political message in Manet’s work, publishers were nervous and perhaps, unable to publish and disseminate the print legally. As deplored by Manet in a letter to an art critic and printmaker, Philippe Burty,

The Maximilian affair becomes more complicated. Now, the printer refuses to render it [the image] in stone and demands that I erase it. I refuse, of course, to do that as well as [refuse to take] his advice to approach to lift the ban, and I sent the summation to the bailiff yesterday. You cannot destroy a cliché, stone, etc. …without judgment.

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90 “A diplomatic maneuver: the choice of Archduke Maximilian, brother of the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph and formerly viceroy of Lombardy-Venetia as part of Napoleon III’s Italian policy. Financial speculation: new markets would be created, a huge commercial empire could be opened up, silver deposits exploited, and French investors, linked to a group of international financiers, would profit from the adventure….” Baguley, 177; Coincidentally, France experienced an economic crisis in 1867. “Le régime soutient cet essor économique en menant une politique de grands travaux en province, ainsi le drainage et l’assainissement de la Sologne, la création de la forêt des Landes, mais aussi à Paris où Haussmann, préfet de la Seine de 1853 à 1866, modèle une capitale nouvelle, percée de larges artères. La prospérité de l’Empire est donc indéniable et l’impulsion de l’État bonapartiste l’a favorisée. Mais toutes les régions n’ont pas bénéficié de cette prospérité au même degré et, passé les premières années du règne, le rythme de la croissance se ralentit notablement, avant même l’entrée dans la crise économique qui sévit, en 1867 et dans les années suivantes.” Jean Carpentier and François Lebrun, 282-283.

91 “Mon affaire Maximilien se complique. L’imprimeur refuse maintenant de me rendre la pierre et me demande de l’efface. Je refuse, bien entendu, aussi bien que de faire une démarche comme il me le
Because of the *Execution of Maximilian*’s political content, Manet faced difficulties in exhibiting and publishing his print and thus, it is probable that he feared the repercussions.

Though confronted, or perhaps feeling challenged by, French censorship laws, Manet did not quit painting or etching. In particular, subsequent to his artwork representing the execution of Maximilian, Manet painted and produced four states of an etching, aquatint and roulette to accompany *Boy Blowing Bubbles* [Figure 2]. It is plausible that Manet, afraid to display a more explicit political message, realized *Boy Blowing Bubbles* in favor of a latent meaning. Akin to earlier depictions representing the church’s challenge, and the government’s inability, to implement liberal reforms, Manet’s image continues the trend by showing literally, the unsustainability of bubbles, and figuratively, Napoléon III’s authoritative rule. Since the nineteenth-century print industry often was associated with progressives, Manet’s choice to produce prints also could imply the painting’s leftist political connotations. Moreover, in choosing to depict a bubble, which previously conveyed the illusion of papal authority and delusions of liberal reform, Manet intimates Napoléon III’s attempts at, and failures to separate church and state, and to democratize society. Echoing the intangibility of Enlightenment ideals, and the development of theories of *realpolitik*, current scholars characterize Napoléon III’s reign as an “…espousal of a *politique réale*…”\(^92\) Rather than institute reforms based on intangible or abstract notions of liberty and equality, Napoléon III established a government grounded in authoritarianism.

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\(^92\) Baguley, 95.
By approaching Manet’s painting and prints as politically inspired, it is then possible to make sense of Manet’s depiction of Léon’s clothing and age. Although Léon was sixteen the year in which the painting was produced, his likeness resembled that of a much younger child, and those of his earlier portraits, such as Boy Carrying a Sword (1861), rather than more contemporaneous depictions, such as Boy Peeling a Pear (1868). Furthermore, instead of accentuating the timelessness of childhood or grief for lost eras, he portrays Léon wearing garbs reminiscent of the Second Empire. In doing so, he refutes readings of the painting as a romanticized notion of childhood, in favor of a depiction of contemporaneity and a context-specific issue. Read as an allegory for the Second Empire which was “born” the same year as Léon, Manet appears to be insinuating that adults can remain childish and intellectually immature.93

Due to the time-frame in which Boy Blowing Bubbles was made, Manet’s overt republican leanings and expressions of disapproval concerning the Second Empire, and the manner in which Manet rendered Léon’s age and dress, one is able to see how his image intimates a particular political viewpoint. Not only does Manet seem to impute several political meanings, but also Manet appears to couple his republicanism with his admiration for puns and jeux de mots. Notably, Manet’s interest in homonyms and puns could be expressed in his famous painting, La Pêche.94 Not only does the title refer to

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93 Thus, bubble blowing becomes a kind of modern image of Folly. Similar interpretations of the manifestation of homo bulla in France have been noted. Mori writes: “An illustration engraved by the French Claudine Bouzouet Stella for the text, ‘Les Bouteilles de Savon’ in ‘Les Jeux et Plaisirs [sic] et l’Enfance’ by Jacques Stella (1657), does not demonstrate the strong moral lesson about the vain value of earthly matter like Cats, but points out that adults sometimes will fight for frivolous things as children do for soap bubbles. Therefore the meaning of soap bubbles is different than in Dutch traditional iconography. The French text reads, ‘Ceux cy se gourment tout de bon/pour ces Bouteilles de Savon/ Comme si cestoit des Pistoles ; / Mais souvent parmy les grans on voit naistre des differens pour milles chose plus frivoles.’” Mori, 162-164.
fishing, but also the French verb for “sin,” *pécher*, is a homonym of the verb, to fish.

While the painting represents a landscape with figures walking, boating and fishing, an iconographic reading suggests that several facets convey a more personal meaning concerning the complicated relationship between Manet, his wife and Léon’s birth out of wedlock. Brombert explains:

The church and the rainbow signal the promise of marriage, the dog augurs fidelity, and the tip of the sword buried in the ground implies an oath to wound no more….Since Léon is encompassed within the ‘promise’ of the rainbow and is highlighted, like the couple, by a patch of sunlight, reparation would seem to apply to him as well. This is further emphasized by the pointing dog and Manet’s point right finger, both directed at Léon. Once the union is legitimized, so will be its fruit; the sin will be absolved….La Pêche may, therefore, be understood as an allegory of Manet’s honorable intentions and a confession of his past transgression.95

Though this reading cannot be substantiated, it provides one instance in which Manet played with the variety of definitions attributed to certain words.

Further bolstering the duality of meaning evoked by Manet’s work is his admiration for Baudelaire, an art critic and poet whose practice privileged notions of duality, homonyms, and symbols evocative of larger themes and meanings. As intimated in Baudelaire’s celebrated poem *Correspondances*, the theory of *correspondances* is the metaphysical belief, popular with Symbolist poets and painters, that there exist objects, colors, or simply, referential entities that correspond to abstract truths. Often used as an artistic method, Symbolists also employed this metaphor as a stylistic guide whereby the formal qualities of a painting evoke abstract associations and transport viewers to higher realms. Although Manet did not adopt Baudelaire’s interest in *correspondance*, he did

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95 Brombert, 85.
appropriate Baudelaire’s curiosity toward the duality of meaning which could stem from such ideals. For instance, Manet’s interest in homonyms and *double entendres* could derive from Baudelaire’s famous poem *Le Cygne*. Though the title translates to “The Swan,” the French word, *cygne* is a homonym for *signe* or sign, recalling Baudelaire’s playful tendency to imbue words with more than one sense. Rather than exploit homonyms, however, in *Les Bulles de savon*, Manet employs a word with a *triple entendre*.

While no one can be sure if Manet was aware of the political and papal associations with the word *bulle*, this complex *triple entendre* was directly accessible to him through the prints featuring criticisms surrounding the French Revolution, Louis-Philippe and Napoléon Bonaparte. As suggested by the large number of publications related to the French Revolution of 1789, democratic forces in mid-nineteenth-century France experienced a strong interest in memorializing and historicizing France’s first republic for its ability to convey indirect criticisms of the Second Empire.96 For instance, in 1857, Augustin Challamel asserted the importance of remembering the revolution, writing that: “To popularize these materials [dating to the French Revolution of 1789] is indispensable. The generation who revolted is almost extinct. Another generation succeeds it and must take advantage of or make the most of their work.”97

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97 “Populariser ces matériaux était chose indispensable. La génération qui a fait la révolution française est bien près de s’éteindre. Une autre génération lui succède, et doit, de toute façon, profiter de son œuvre.” Challamel, v.
eighteenth-century political satires drawing on *homo bulla* are not mentioned by Challamel, these prints are discussed, most famously, in Edmond and Jules de Goncourt’s *Histoire de la Société française pendant la Révolution*. Working in tandem, this fraternal literary duo earned great esteem for their contributions to nineteenth-century fiction and non-fiction, as well as for their revulsion of the Second Empire. In the case of the French Revolution, they provided an analysis of political propaganda employed by revolutionaries and by critics of the revolution abroad. In regards to the role of *homo bulla* within political satires, the Goncourts reiterate the *triple entendre* associated with the word *bulle* and could have reminded readers of Napoléon III’s political alliance with Pope Pius IX. They stated:

> And if the pope sends bulls/bubbles,--see “papal bulls/bubbles.” The pope enjoys blowing soap bubbles; the Abbot Royou beats apostolic soap with a dagger and feathers. Aristocratic women support the flying globes with their fans, and France, leaning on the constitution, bursts them [the bubbles] with a flick, while the Abbot Maury collects the papal glasses that he had broken.  

While Manet’s political agenda differed from the Royalist leanings of the Goncourts, his strong interest in republicanism and the celebrity status of the brothers lends support to Manet’s awareness of, and allusion to the politicization of *homo bulla*.

Another avenue through which Manet could have been familiarized with the political iconography of soap bubbles was Champfleury. Champfleury, a close friend of and participant in the salons *chez* Manet, published a historical description of the late-eighteenth-century anti-clerical and anti-monarchial etchings, and owned a print representative of the political notions attached to soap bubbles. In particular,  

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98 “Et si le pape envoie des bulles,--vîtes les Bulles du pape. Le pape s’amuse à souffler des bulles de savon ; l’abbé Royou bat le savon apostolique avec un poignard et des plumes. Les femmes aristocrates soutiennent les globes volants sur leur éventail, et la France, appuyée sur la constitution, les crève d’une chiquenaude, tandis que l’abbé Maury ramasse les lunettes du pape qu’il lui rend cassées.” Goncourt, 257.
Champfleury’s *Histoire de la Caricature sous la République, l’Empire et la Restauration* included an image recalling the previously discussed caricatures of the papacy during the French Revolution. He asserted that:

> From 1793 to 1797, the caricature movement would have been a mediocre interest, had the quarrels with Rome not awoken religious satire, which only a few pieces were produced in 1789. The philosophical and antimonastic spirit, which decreed the triumphal entrance of the remains of Voltaire to the Pantheon, blew symbolic soap bubbles that burst in the face of the pope, the Monsignori, the Capuchins and various religious orders of the papal city.  

Although published ten years after Manet painted *Les Bulles de savon*, this appeals to Manet’s familiarity with the political allegories employing soap bubbles. Additionally, an inventory and resulting catalogue prove that Champfleury possessed an edition of the print featuring Napoléon blowing bubbles, a copy of which Michel Henin also bequeathed to the *Bibliothèque nationale* in 1863.

> Along with the pervasiveness and accessibility of politically-charged prints featuring soap bubbles, allusions to *bulles* also figured into political written expression and became harnessed to messages often in relation to notions of justice or in support of republican reform. Despite its antique and early modern associations with moralization,

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99 “De 1793 à 1797, le mouvement de la caricature serait d’un intérêt médiocre, si les démêles avec Rome ne réveillaient la satire religieuse, dont quelques pièces seulement s’étaient produites en 1789. L’esprit philosophique et antimonacal, qui a décrété l’entrée triomphale des restes de Voltaire au Panthéon souffle de symboliques bulles de savon qui crèvent à la face du pape, des monsignori, des capucins et des divers ordres religieux de la cité papale.” Champfleury, 263.

100 In 1868, contemporaneous to or shortly after Manet worked on the painting and prints *Les Bulles de savon*, Manet made a print for Champfleury’s *Les Chats* (Paris: J. Rothschild, 1870).

bubbles figured as an allegorical tool in the nineteenth century in critique of or to incite support of governmental institutions. Within French literature, however, there exist several variations in meaning and references to bulles de savon. Nineteenth-century connotations of soap bubbles build upon the vanity of life to implicate the futile nature of reform and slander. The illusory nature of soap bubbles and the difficulty with which one can discern their form and substance additionally kindled complex metaphors within the minds of historians, philosophers, and writers. Most importantly, as seen in the prints, there existed a new means by which artists and writers understood the role of the bubble blower. Distinct from the vanitas tradition, in which the figure blowing bubbles served as a reminder of life’s fragility, or often served to mock the vanity of human efforts, nineteenth-century images of homo bulla in France were not moralizing and frequently attached a negative connotation to the bubble blower. To illustrate this, I look to writing by contemporaries of Manet including Thomas Carlyle, Victor Hugo and Eugène d’Auriac. While one cannot assume Manet read texts by these authors, it is likely he understood the connotations associated with soap bubbles.

Thomas Carlyle was a Victorian historian, philosopher, and satirist, renowned primarily for his ability to capture the complex political, economic and scientific transformations occurring in nineteenth-century Europe.\textsuperscript{102} Though Carlyle was born in 1795 in Scotland, his temporal and geographic distance from the French Revolution did not inhibit him from writing one of the most important histories of the insurgency.

Written in 1837, \textit{The French Revolution: A History} traces the trajectory of the political

\textsuperscript{102} “Carlyle saw literature as a vehicle by means of which he might encourage his contemporaries to respond productively to the challenges posed by the far reaching economic, political and social changes taking place in western societies.” John Morrow, \textit{Thomas Carlyle} (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 2.
dissatisfaction and resulting rebellion in eighteenth-century France, beginning with the
death of Louis XV in 1774.\textsuperscript{103} Despite the growing discontent with the French
government and aristocracy, and the fervor for republicanism spread by the revolution in
America, Carlyle describes the first ten years of Louis XVI’s dominion as relatively
peaceful.\textsuperscript{104} More particularly, Carlyle refers to the years preceding the revolution not
only as the era of hope, but also as the age of paper, titling book II, “The Age of
Paper.”\textsuperscript{105} This book is divided into eight chapters recounting the production of paper to
facilitate financial and philosophic transactions, and primarily, the political developments
causing the French Revolution. Specifically, Carlyle recounts the perpetual inability of
the French government to reverse economic decline and hardship, as well as the
immorality of French society, seen in the corruption of political figures and the declined
influence of the church. Read in its entirety, this section conveys the dual nature of this
time as a period of extreme impoverishment underlying unwarranted sentiments of hope.
While Carlyle reveals the harsh and discouraging realities underlying aspirations toward
economic improvements in France, he also explains that:

Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. And yet, as we said, Hope is but deferred;
not abolished, not abolishable….Hope does still light onwards the French Nation
through all its wild destinies. For we shall find Hope shining, be it for fond
invitation, be it for anger and menace; as a mild heavenly light it shone; as a red
conflagration it shines: burning sulphurous blue, through darkest regions of
Terror, it still shines; and goes sent out at all, since Desperation itself is a kind of
Hope. Thus is our Era still to be named of Hope, though in the saddest sense,--
when there is nothing left but Hope.\textsuperscript{106}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{103} Thomas Carlyle, \textit{The French Revolution: A History} (London: Chapman & Hall, 1837).
\item \textsuperscript{104} “Is it the healthy peace, or the ominous unhealthy, that rests on France, for these next ten
    years?” Ibid., 25.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 24-49.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 52.
\end{itemize}
Carlyle’s characterization of the era as an age of “hope,” prompts a question: how an artists and writers convey or depict hope for economic and political improvements in a way that will be understandable to the populace?

Although his allusions to paper recall the new economic strategies famously championed by economist John Law (1671-1729) which replaced coinage with paper money, it is likely Carlyle also meant to invoke the Mississippi and South Sea Bubbles of 1720 in which the production of paper money caused inflation, mass disenfranchisement and poverty. He writes:

Call it at least [a new age] of paper; which in many ways is the succedaneum of gold. Bank-paper, wherewith you can still buy when there is no gold left; book-paper, splendent with theories, philosophies, sensibilities, beautiful art, not only of revealing thought, but also of so beautifully hiding from us the want of thought! Paper is made from the rags of things that did once exist; there are endless excellences in paper.

In recalling the imposition of paper money, Carlyle also suggests the transformation of the economic sphere and the growing power and presence of the bourgeoisie in eighteenth-century France. As addressed in chapter three, the supposed insubstantiality of paper money as opposed to metal coinage, and the notion of economic bubbles play a role in the development and manifestation of bubbles in French literature and art.

Throughout “The Age of Paper,” Carlyle connects notions of hope with economic prosperity and destitution. Moreover, he associates hope and sovereignty with allusions to hot air balloons. For instance, he asks: “Is Sovereignty some poor Montgolfier?; which, blown into by popular wind, grows great and mounts; or sinks flaccid, if the wind


be withdrawn?”109 In a similar vein, in the chapter titled “Windbags,” Carlyle discusses the balloon as a

Beautiful invention; mounting heavenward, so beautifully, so unguidably! Emblem of much, and of our age of hope itself, which shall mount, specifically-light, majestically in this same manner; and hover, tumbling wither fate will. Well if it do not Pilâtre-like, explode; and demount all the more tragically! So, riding on windbags, will men scale the Empyrean.110

Despite his explicit allusions to hot air balloons to convey “hope,” a French translation interprets “windbag” (in both the section title and previous phrase) as “bulles de savon.”111 While the French version provides a similar reflection on the hope associated with hot air balloons, one is left to question why the translator substitutes soap bubbles for windbags. According to etymological studies, windbag historically refers to the “bellows for an organ,” as well as informally to “a person who talks too much.”112 Extant definitions of a windbag beginning in the nineteenth century attach to talkative persons, notions of pretentiousness, self-aggrandizement, and emptiness of meaning, or as being full of “hot air.”113 Like the triple entendre associated with bulle, Carlyle seems to juxtapose the dual meaning of this word to reference the insubstantial means with which

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109 Ibid., 36; The Montgolfier brothers created the first hot air balloons. Today, the French word for hot air balloon is montgolfière.

110 Ibid., 46.


hope—in one example, the hope for sovereignty—, men, and balloons traverse great heights.

The decision to supplement *bulle de savon* for windbag relays much about the multiple allegorical meanings attached to bubbles. Since Carlyle associated hot air balloons with sovereignty, the physicality of the balloon, and the notion of empty speech or insubstantiality, then it would make sense that the translator chose *bulles de savon* to convey the same ideas. Given that no direct translation captures the dual notion of the term windbag, the translators rely on a closely related, air-filled phenomenon, a soap bubble, which refers to the insubstantiality of speech, or promises of republicanism.\(^{114}\)

This is not to say that Manet necessarily read Carlyle’s work; rather, one may surmise that Manet and the presumed beholders of his images recognized the various connotations associated with the act of blowing bubbles. One can presuppose that this imagery, published in French shortly before Manet’s painting and prints, inspired several meanings in audiences ranging from traditional *vanitas* to balloons and to the insubstantiality of words or promises. Through this translation, one can better comprehend the means with which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French artists understood the iconography of bubbles. Akin to the prints satirizing the French political figures and papacy, the use of *bulles de savon* intimates the fragility or delusion of hopes and meaningless speech abetting, or allowing man to “scale the Empyrean,”\(^{115}\) but also foreshadowing their demise.

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\(^{114}\) Traditional translations of windbag only encompass its formal meaning of chatterbox, interpreted as *moulin à paroles*, or more literally, a mill producing words.

\(^{115}\) Carlyle, 46.
Translations of Carlyle’s writing attests to the great significance and pervasive meanings attached to soap bubbles. However, nineteenth-century writers working more closely to Manet also employed similar allusions to hot air balloons and soap bubbles. Throughout his career, French novelist, and political satirist, Victor Hugo, alluded to bubbles and the bubble blower. For instance, this metaphor appears in his novel, *Les Misérables.* Hugo also appealed to audiences through this recognizable trope in the introduction to his “*Paris Guide.*” Coinciding with the 1867 *Exposition universelle,* which served to highlight the then current state of industrial progress internationally, Hugo collated and published an exhibition catalogue titled *Paris Guide par les principaux écrivains et artistes de la France.* Though Hugo was living in self-imposed exile in reaction to the installation of Napoléon III as emperor, he hoped to convey proverbial wisdom concerning the status of progress in France in the wake of this exposition. Hugo’s introduction is divided into two sections, including “L’avenir,” and “Le passé.” In “L’avenir,” or “The Future,” Hugo envisions a world without the atrocities of war and inequality, that is “…illustrious, rich, thoughtful, peaceful and cordial to the rest of humanity. It would have the gentile gravity of an elder.” Though he offers Paris as capital for this new nation, Hugo’s idealism is not limited to one country.

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Rather, his hopes appeal to the future of humanity. Following this, Hugo outlines the “Le passé,” or history of Paris. Towards the conclusion of the chapter, Hugo returns to the possibility of world peace in the wake of modern technology. He writes: “The shortening of the land by the railroad and electrical wire puts more and more into the hand of peace.” In other words, the introduction of technology facilitated globalism and the possibility to learn, experience or enjoy new cultures.

Although Hugo imagines a peaceful future coinciding with technological progress, he criticizes the supposed industrial progress associated with, and in direct reaction to the display of cannons at the exposition. After further conveying the possibility of future peace and in order to incite readers to dream of a peaceful future, Hugo explains that:

Dream! dream! dream! The enormous steel [cannon]balls, each costing a thousand francs, launched by the titanic cannons manufactured in Prussia by Krupp’s giant hammer, which weigh one hundred thousand pounds and costs three million, are just as effective against progress as soap bubbles blown through a pipe in the mouth of a small child.

In this comparison written shortly before Manet painted Les Bulles de savon, Hugo correlates the ineffectiveness of blowing bubbles to the production, or firing of cannons. As in the satirizing prints, Hugo’s bubble blower also works against progress or dreams.

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119 “Cette nation aura pour capitale Paris, et ne s’appellera point la France; elle s’appellera l’Europe.” Ibid., 4.

120 “Elle s’appellera l’Europe au vingtième siècle, et, aux siècles suivants, plus transfigure encore, elle s’appellera l’Humanité.” Ibid., 4.

121 “Le rapetissement de la terre par le chemin de fer et le fil électrique la met de plus en plus dans la main de la paix.” Ibid., XLI.

122 “Rêves! rêves! rêves! Les énormes boules d’acier, du prix de mille francs chaque, que lancent les canons titans fabriqués en Prusse par le gigantesque marteau de Krupp, lequel pèse cent mille livres et coute trois millions, sont juste aussi efficaces contre le progrès que les bulles de savon soufflées au bout d’un chalumeau de paille par la bouche d’un petit enfant.” Ibid., XLI.
of liberal reform. Known for his ardent censure of Napoléon III, Hugo’s allusion could indicate the Second Empire’s resistance to peace and thus, progress.\textsuperscript{123}

Like Carlyle’s text and translation, however, Hugo and Manet also employ the hot air balloon as a symbol of progress in the poem, “Plein Ciel,” and lithograph, \textit{The Balloon} (1862) respectively.\textsuperscript{124} As expressed by Douglas Druick and Peter Zegers, Hugo’s notion of advancement is “…an abstract ideal that finds concrete expression in a technological mastery of the natural world, a gradual process marked by successive revolutions.”\textsuperscript{125} Despite this, they illustrate how, under the reign of Napoléon III, the balloon became a symbol of the emperor’s \textit{Fête nationale}, compromising the concepts of progress allegorized by Hugo.\textsuperscript{126} Related to soap bubbles, which signified fanciful illusions of liberal reform, the progress communicated by balloons became ensnared by aspirations of Napoléonic glory and also faced constant risk of deflation or destruction. With this in mind, it seems plausible that the hot air balloon becomes a modern counterpart to express the meanings associated with soap bubbles.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[126] “The Fête de l’Empereur was to many the very symbol of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte’s betrayal of the revolution of February 1848, which had ousted Louis-Philippe’s so-called July Monarchy and, to great expectations, ushered in the Second Republic.”; More importantly, “The annual balloon ascensions played a comparable role in Louis-Napoleon’s propaganda for the masses. Inevitably sporting the emperor’s monogram, these balloons became a symbol of his ascendancy. Launched into the heavens, they were the profane counterpart to the Assumption of the Virgin, which was decidedly overshadowed by the celebration of Saint Napoléon and the miracle of the Second Empire. Sometimes the symbolism of the ascension was more explicit, as in 1854 when the balloon bore the names of France and her allies in the Crimea…” Ibid., 40-41.
\end{footnotes}
Evidence of the new role of the bubble blower is seen in the writing by several other contemporaries to Manet, such as Eugène d’Auriac. In 1843 and during the reign of Louis-Philippe, d’Auriac, a French writer living in the nineteenth century, recorded the history of the so-called “citizen king” titled *Louis-Philippe: Prince and King*. Though his text does not rely repeatedly on the allusion to soap bubbles, he uses the reference as an appeal to the French public to no longer slander their king, or to represent the futility of slander—exhibiting an obvious connection to the print featuring d’Argis. Specifically, he writes:

> Pamphlets are like soap bubbles that the wind brings, that each can admire from a distance and that the slightest contact reduces them to dust, while the good deeds of princes are noble examples of the traits that calumny cannot erase, and which finds recompense in the memory of the people.

Therefore, the author expresses that in the future, Louis-Philippe’s actions will outlive the denigrations or condemnations of his reign.

Overall, a historiography of the use of the term *bulles de savon* illustrates how the phrase was employed in literary and political texts to articulate particular meanings, as well as attests to the ubiquity of the expression in the nineteenth century. Bubbles and the bubble blower became symbols of the intangibility and delusions associated with reason and economic prosperity in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France. While bubbles carried various associations ranging from the ephemerality of life to the study of


128 “Les pamphlets sont comme des bulles de savon que le vent emporte, que chacun peut admirer à distance, et que le moindre contact réduit en poussière, tandis que les belles actions des princes sont de nobles exemples que les traits de la calomnie ne peuvent effacer, et qui trouvent leur récompense dans la mémoire du peuple.” Ibid., 93.

129 The author may be overstating the ephemeral nature of pamphlets because of his focus on those containing ideas with which he disagrees. As my second reader, Dr. West, has pointed out, prints, pamphlets, journals and newspapers may be quite unlike bubbles in that they may disseminate weighty information and thoughts that assume permanence in the public consciousness.
light by scientists, such as Isaac Newton, the politicized reading is pertinent to the milieu in which Manet worked. Manet expressed aspirations for a republican government, free from papal authority; also his hatred toward Napoléon III and liability to suffer censorship likely aroused his decision to appropriate accessible, yet unpronounced or inconspicuous iconography and literary allusions.\textsuperscript{130} Because of the complex and extensive history of the \textit{homo bulla} tradition, one can read this image as series of neutral artistic references, such as to Chardin or as a contemplative gesture allowing humans to meditate on life’s transience, and as a critique of the French government under Napoléon III and its alliance with the papacy. Thus, it can be surmised that Manet adopted this subject matter because of its ability to effectively critique the church and state at a time in which the papacy and authoritarian governments rebuked republicanism, as well as its ability to \textit{seem} more aligned with art historical tradition and evolving academic standards.

\textsuperscript{130} As noted by Baguley, writers in the nineteenth-century used a similar approach to critique the Second Empire. “The practice of history writing was far from being a purely scholarly and disinterested activity during the Second Empire. With strict and watchful censorship imposed on writings about the present, opponents of the regime took to writing about the past as a means of obliquely attacking the regime in the guise of scholarly pursuits.” Baguley, 77.
ADDENDA

MANET, CHARLES CHAPLIN AND THE POLITICS OF AESTHETICS

While Manet’s painting clearly critiques Napoléon III’s coup d’état and disinclination to institute a republican political system, it also seems to confront and reject the academic artistic style espoused by the Empress Eugénie (1826-1920). Although superficially similar to Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s Soap Bubbles (ca. 1733-1734), which serves as a visual counterpart to François Boucher’s rendition of the same subject in Soap Bubbles (1703-1770) [Figure 16], Manet seems to reinterpret an image of a girl blowing a bubble by Charles Chaplin (1825-1891) in order to refute aristocratic taste. Empress Eugénie, in her attempts to initiate a flamboyant style related to eighteenth-century and pre-revolutionary France, commissioned work by Chaplin. Shown in the Salon of 1864 and reproduced in the January 1867 issue of Le Magasin pittoresque, Chaplin’s Les Bulles de savon [Figure 17] most likely contributed to Manet’s desire to appropriate the subject matter and comment on conservative Second Empire taste.  

In the history of scholarship on Manet, academics often compare him to artistic precursors, such as Chardin, Hals, Velázquez, Murillo, Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), and Couture, as well as to his contemporaries and followers, such as Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), Henri Fantin-Latour (1836-1904), James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), and Impressionists including Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), and Edgar Degas (1834-1917). Despite the great attention devoted to Manet’s rapport with his

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predecessors, contemporaries, and followers, scholars have overlooked the relationship between Manet and Chaplin.

Regardless of Manet’s posthumous reputation, nineteenth-century critics and patrons often favored Chaplin, describing him as an excellent portrait painter, and praising his use of color. Not only did Chaplin receive compliments from leading critics, such as Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), but also he was a successful Salon artist commissioned by notable figures, including the Empress Eugénie. Evocative of the mawkishness of Chaplin’s artistic approach, “Edmond About writing of Chaplin’s best-known genre pictures in his new style, namely Les Bulles de Savon and Les Tourterelles exhibited in the 1864 Salon, said that the pictures seemed to have made themselves. ‘They are the dream of a happy spirit poised lightly on the canvas like a bud on a tree in bloom.’” Countering Chaplin’s sentimental subjects and optimistic tone is Manet’s artistic methodology relying on an unflattering realism and dark, neutral tones.

Though no one can be entirely sure of the relationship, or friendship between Manet and Chaplin, Chaplin attended Manet’s funeral. Moreover, Dr. Albert Robin claimed that Manet reciprocated Chaplin’s admiration, citing a conversation in 1882 in

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133 “Théophile Gautier in 1861 wrote that his painting combined realism with grace and a rare freshness of colour and that he had a ‘life-like portrayal of satins, gauzes and taffetas.’” Ibid., 146-147.

134 Ibid., 146-151.

135 Ibid., 146-147.

136 Ibid., 151.
which Manet acknowledged Chaplin’s immense talent.\textsuperscript{137} Manet and Chaplin also shared a mutual friend and student: Eva Gonzalès.\textsuperscript{138} Regardless of their mutual esteem or common acquaintances, read in light of Manet’s desire, yet inability to receive recognition through the Salon,\textsuperscript{139} and his lack of notoriety, one can imagine the competitive feelings Manet likely felt toward Chaplin. Similar to Manet, Chaplin primarily was renowned as a genre painter. Though critics and art \textit{amateurs} considered genre as less ambitious and worthwhile as other subject matters, such as history paintings or portraiture, Chaplin experienced great success.\textsuperscript{140} Distinct from Manet’s practice, which privileged modern life and dress, viewers admired Chaplin’s ability to recall eighteenth-century France. As explained by Morant,

\begin{quote}
Fortunately for Chaplin this retreat into the past, following the artistic styles of Chardin, Fragonard, Lemoine, and Lépicié struck a deep responsive chord in the France of the eighteen fifties. In particular it coincided with the taste of Napoléon III and the Empress Eugénie whose recreations harked back to a fancied Golden Age before the Revolution of 1789.\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

While the Second Empire ostensibly promoted artistic eclecticism, or a variety of styles within the \textit{salon},\textsuperscript{142} Manet’s work often was denied entry due to the unidealized and flat nature of his subjects. Despite several rejections, Manet continued to seek recognition

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\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 151.
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\textsuperscript{139} Therese Dolan, “Manet and Impressionism” (presentation, Manet seminar, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, November 6, 2012). While Manet was invited to exhibit with the Impressionists, he declined. This is likely due to Manet’s desire to succeed within the academic salon.
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\textsuperscript{140} She writes: “Charles Chaplin was one of the foremost of the so-called ‘official artists’ whose works dominated the Paris Salons during the Second Empire.” Morant, 143.
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\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 146.
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through the academic, or *salon* system, but did not receive as much success as Chaplin who espoused a style reminiscent of the eighteenth-century aristocracy that was admired and commissioned by Eugénie. In light of Chaplin’s great and royal achievements, it becomes clear why Manet’s *Les bulles de savon* could serve as a counterpart to, and attack on, academic or aristocratic tastes.

Although Morant describes Chaplin as a follower of Chardin, in Chaplin’s *Les Bulles de savon*, his style resembles more closely that of Boucher’s. For instance, whereas Chardin’s *Soap Bubbles* represents two bourgeois boys at play, Chaplin’s interpretation of this subject matter features a naturalistic side-profile of a girl blowing bubbles and seated in a blue chair that matches her hair tie, soapy-water bowl and the outline and tone of her bubbles. Unlike Chardin’s disheveled children, Chaplin’s figure listlessly blows bubbles while sporting a seemingly aristocratic dress. As previously discussed, nineteenth-century critics and historians not only established Chardin as a conduit through which French artists could understand and analyze Dutch art, but also established Dutch artistic culture as a manifestation of republican ideals. In particular, the means by which art was made available to bourgeois audiences, as well as featured bourgeois subject matter and descriptive representations of northern seventeenth-century life appealed to many nineteenth-century avant-garde artists. Despite this, whereas Manet adopted a republican or Chardinesque methodology toward *homo bulla* through his representation of modern bourgeois life, Chaplin offsets similar readings by portraying his sitter in a historicizing manner reminiscent of the French aristocracy. As

143 Morant, 146.

144 Ibid., 146.
noted by Linda Nochlin in her discussion on the austerity of Manet’s still lifes, “Looking at these spare canvases, one may meditate on the relation of Manet’s still lifes [and as I argue, portraits] to the cultural norms of his time. In a sense, they constitute a powerful visual critique of the clutter, conspicuous consumption and ostentation of Second Empire décor and its nouveau riche ideas of sumptuousness.”\footnote{Linda Nochlin, “Death and Gender in Manet’s Still Lifes,” \textit{Art in America} (May 2001): 134.}

Rather than address an aristocratic audience, Manet’s decision to create an accompanying print within the context of fine art, could have been an attempt to upend the canon as defined by the Academy and Salon. However, Chaplin also created a concomitant print, published in 1867 by the progressive \textit{Société des aquafortistes}.\footnote{“Les Bulles de Savon (Soap Bubbles),” \textit{The British Museum}, accessed April 28, 2013, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=1347800&partid=1&searchText=les+bulles+de+savon&fromADC=ad&toADC=ad&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&currentPage=1.} Perhaps Manet, competing with Chaplin to contribute to their publications, felt jealousy toward Chaplin, whose work was commissioned despite its traditional, aristocratic rendering. Thus, although Manet’s painting could derive, in part, from the iconography of politically-charged prints, viewers also could recognize his work as subversive through its commentary on academic art, the artistic canon and the role of the artist vis-à-vis established, government-sponsored institutions and artistic preferences.
Edouard Manet, *Les Bulles de savon*, 1867, oil on canvas, 39.5 x 32.0 in. (100.5 x 81.4 cm). Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon
2 Edouard Manet, *Les Bulles de savon*, 1868, etching, aquatint and roulette printed in brown on laid paper, plate: 9.9 x 9.9 in. (25.1 x 21.5 cm), sheet: 16.9 x 12.7 in. (42.8 x 32.3 cm). Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit
Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Soap Bubbles*, ca. 1733-1734, oil on canvas, 45 ¾ x 38 ½ x 4 ½ in. (116.2 x 97.79 x 11.43 cm). The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
4 Thomas Couture, *Soap Bubbles*, ca. 1859, oil on canvas, 51.5 x 38.6 in. (130.8 x 98.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
5 Hendrik Goltzius, *Quis Evadet?*, 1594, engraving, sheet: 8.3 x 6.0 in. (21 x 15.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
6 Information des journées du 5 et 6 octobre 1789: le voila donc enfin ce secret plein d’horreur!!!!, 1789, etching and aquatint, 9.25 x 7.5 in. (23.5 x 19.1 cm). The British Museum, London
La France s’appuyant sur les droits de l’homme en écrasant la noblesse et le clergé: repoussé avec une chignaude patriotique les bulles apostolique du St Père préparées par l’abbé Royou battant de l’eau de savon dans un plat; les titres des princes, évêques cardinaux et rongés par les rats, 1791, etching, state i, 6.3 x 4.1 in. (16 x 10.5 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
8 Bulles du 18e siècle: pendant que Pie VI environné de sa garde fait jou-jou, l’abbé Royou armé d’un paquet de plumes qu’un général d’ordre lui a taillées avec un poignard, fait mousser le savon apostolique..., 1791, etching, state i, 10.2 x 15.0 in. (26 x 38 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
9 Réponse à l’auteur de la chronique, qui appelée bombe la bulle du pape: sandis [sic]
Monsieur de la chronique Je vous trouve un plaisant bouffon. 1791, etching, state i,
14.2 x 18.7 in. (36 x 47.5 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
10 Jean Jacques Boissard, *Homo Bulla*, from *Emblèmes latins*, 1588, engraving
Pièce facétieuse: Napoléon faisant des bulles de savon devant son fils, c. 1815, etching, state i/i. Bibliothèque national de France, Paris
12 Charles Philipon, *Mousse de Juillet*, 1831, lithograph, state i/i, 8.9 x 7.6 in. (22.5 x 19.2 cm). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
13 Frontispice to Pierre Poiret’s *De Eruditione triplici Solida*, 1707
Mississippi ou Monument consacré à la Posterité en mémoire de la folie incroyable de la XX année du XVIII siècle (concerning John Law and the Mississippi scheme; rioting crowds at the Rue Quinquen Poix as a nude woman ‘Fortuna’ surrounded by streams of light floats over their heads, and a winged demon behind a dark clouds blows bubbles in their direction, c. 1720, engraving, (29.4 x 36 cm). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin
Mississipi ou Monument consacré à la Posterité en memoire de la folie incroyable de la XX année du XVIII siècle [concerning John Law and the Mississippi scheme; rioting crowds at the Rue Quinquen Poix as a nude woman ‘Fortuna’ surrounded by streams of light floats over their heads, and a winged demon behind a dark clouds blows bubbles in their direction, detail, c. 1720, engraving, (29.4 x 36 cm). Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin
16 François Boucher, *A Couple Playing with Soap Bubbles*, 1734, engraving after the painting
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