

Pierrot's Silence

Marika T. Knowles

The theatrical *personnage* Pierrot first appeared on the French stage in the late seventeenth century. Beginning as a white-suited *naif*, his face framed by the halo of a simple straw hat, his jacket ornamented with a long row of white buttons, his shoes tied with pink bows, Pierrot would metamorphize over the course of the next two hundred years into a rail-thin mime, whose face was caked with white powder and crowned with a black skull-cap. Throughout his career on the stage, Pierrot has exercised a particular fascination for visual artists, who seem compelled to represent Pierrot in their work, often at the expense of characters whose role may be of greater narrative significance. There is something about Pierrot, and this 'something', I would suggest, is his silence, and the opportunity his silence creates for nervous, visionary outpourings on the part of his viewers and his critics. Pierrot's silence takes a number of different forms, each of which I will address in this essay. On the one hand, there is Pierrot's silence as a theatrical character, and the way his visual appearance on stage references the silence of the work of art amidst the 'noise' of text-based theatre. There is also the way Watteau represents Pierrot's silence in visual form in the large painting, *Pierrot, dit Gilles* (Plate V). This painting, as I show, not only represents silence, but as well is a silent object, a fragment unmoored from history, with very little in the way of text to pin it to its notoriously laconic creator, Watteau. Somewhat paradoxically – but it seems that all attempts to speak about silence are destined for paradox – this essay will try to explain what Pierrot's silence speaks, and what, finally, it refuses to speak.

Performing Silence

Artists who represent theatrical characters face the challenge of translating a sonic, spatial, temporal medium into a silent and still medium. Over time, different visual conventions develop in order to signify movement and speech through specifically visual analogies. For example, Poussin's complex texturing of the surface of his painting through hand movements, varied postures, and contrasting vectors succeeds in creating the impression of noise and action. Pierrot, however, presents the unique problem of a character whose presence on stage is often, already, silent and still. Thus the artists who represent Pierrot must replicate the sonic effect of this silence and stillness within a silent and still medium. This is not as easy as it might seem, because as

painting developed in France over the course of the seventeenth century, painters had wanted to avoid silence at all costs, expending great efforts in order to make painting speak. Faced with a character that was more like a painting than like theatre, most artists would have recoiled. Watteau, of course, did not, because his interest in theatre was not textual, but rather, atmospheric and suggestive. Like a great white canvas moving about the stage, Pierrot had the potential to represent, within the theatrical scene, the silence of visual art. As such, the different ways that audiences chose to interpret, and to fill Pierrot's silence throughout his history on the French stage, give insight into how viewers negotiated the silence of the work of art.

Let me begin, however, by noting that Pierrot was not always silent. On the stage of the Comédie Italienne, Pierrot could be quite voluble, telling off his master or mistress in deliciously frank terms. In this capacity, Pierrot played the traditional role of the *Hofnarr*. Protected by the pretence of foolishness, the clown could speak on topics about which the other courtiers were forced to remain silent.¹ While this privilege signified Pierrot's status as an exceptional outsider, a quality that definitely attracted Watteau to the character, there were other moments in the repertoire that specifically aligned Pierrot with the silent work of art. One of these moments came in *Columbine Avocat Pour et Contre*, when a nearly blind painter mistakes Pierrot for a blank canvas and covers his face with paint. Pierrot, sobbing, cries, "he morbleau, prenez donc garde, Monsieur; je ne suis pas le Tableau, moi".²

Yet Pierrot, in his capacity as a valet, standing silently beside his master, Harlequin, awaiting orders, would indeed have appeared like an empty canvas, awaiting the artist's intervention. The sudden eruption of a canvas into the play's intrigue would have referred to the traditional base of commedia dell'arte scenarios, a brief outline of scenes and situations that was pinned up backstage and called a *canevas*.³ This controlled form of improvisation could be compared to the creation of a painting: the *canevas* provided a sketchy outline, akin to the charcoal sketch that preceded the painting of a canvas, and the actors' performance filled in the design, as colour filled in the black and white sketch. Play within a restricted surface, using words, but also physical movement, underpinned the Comédie Italienne, opposing it to the linear unfolding of a drama structured through text.

In 1697, Louis XIV expelled the Comédie Italienne from Paris because of a rumoured slander against Madame de Maintenon. Yet the King's edict succeeded only in silencing the troupe, whose players moved to the fair theatres, where they continued to perform, but without the privilege of dialogue.⁴ The players made a virtue, and a joke, out of the enforced silence. Bawdy physical pantomime appeared in lieu of spoken words, or characters would pop onto stage, deliver a line, and pop off while another character appeared to speak his line in turn. Finally, placards inscribed with dialogue descended from above the stage; the audience would sing the dialogue aloud to the tune of popular vaudevilles. As a sign of their approbation, and their complicity, the members of the public gave the players a voice.

This partnership between the silent performer and a speaking audience would continue throughout Pierrot's history as a theatrical character. Yet this relationship already suggests one way that viewers respond to the silence of the work of art: by imaginatively filling the work's silence through sympathetic projection. After the heyday of the fair theatre, the Comédie Italienne was restored to its privilege as the Opéra Comique, and Pierrot's role lost much of its significance.⁵ Like the other characters, he sang couplets and danced minuets, a content valet to his flirtatious masters and mistresses. In the early nineteenth century, however, Pierrot again rose to prominence as one of the most beloved characters of the popular Parisian boulevard theatre. Like the fair theatre of the early eighteenth century, the boulevard theatre was subject to censorship and strict controls, all intended to protect the Comédie Française, bastion of text-based theatre. The Théâtre des Funambules, where Pierrot appeared, was at its inception a pantomime theatre, without rights to speech.⁶ As the hero of the pantomime, Pierrot never spoke a word or made a sound. Instead, the audience spoke for him, shouting encouragement from the cheap seats in the paradise, shushing those chatteringers who kept them from 'hearing' Pierrot.⁷ The audience was boisterous and unruly; sometimes they wanted to 'listen' to Pierrot, sometimes they wanted to fill his silence with their own words.

Certainly, this was the desire of the Romantic critics who flocked to the Funambules and penned accounts of what they saw. Jules Janin, one of the most notoriously prolific theatre critics of the early nineteenth century, spilt gallons of ink describing Pierrot and heralding the identification between "*le peuple*" and the mime who played Pierrot, Jean Gaspard, 'Baptiste', Deburau.⁸ Until Janin began writing about Deburau in the *feuilleton dramatique* of the *Journal des Débats*, Deburau was known only to his working-class audience. Janin gave Deburau a voice in fashionable circles, attracting critics like George Sand, Gustave Flaubert, and Charles Baudelaire to the Funambules. Yet Janin's voice for Deburau was very much the critic's own creation, a strong interpretation of the mime's silence.

On 1 November 1830, Janin began his *feuilleton* with an account of the Comédie Française's production of *Le Nègre*.⁹ Ozanneaux's tragedy depicts the struggles of a slave and his son, fatally enamoured of his white *sœur du lait*. Brushing aside the play's soft philanthropy, Janin declares the subject of the play the same old "Brutus", but a Brutus clothed in dark skin, a wig, and a *décor tropique*. "Pour ma part", Janin declares, "plus j'écoute ces espèces de chefs-d'oeuvres, comédies musquées, comédies morales, drames romantiques, drames en grands et en petits vers, et plus je suis persuadé qu'il n'y a qu'un acteur vraiment comique à Paris aujourd'hui; qu'il n'y a qu'un drama vraiment intéressant; cet acteur, c'est Délubrau, le Gilles des Funambules [...]"¹⁰

Listening to text and song – "plus j'écoute" – is exactly what Janin protests against, because theatrical language has become affected and corrupt, an endless collage of "petites phrases entortillées, du persiflage délicat, du gros rire, des mots à double sens,

des allusions piquantes, des ingénuités sans fin [...].¹¹ For all the tirades of Molière, for all the “vers croisés” of Ozanneaux, Deburau substitutes “une casaque de pail-laisse, un peu de farine sur la figure, quatre chandelles pour son théâtre, deux violons faux, et pour le poète, le premier décorateur venu qui lui donnera une forêt, un temple, une taverne [...].¹² For words, Deburau substitutes his costume and his white-floured face; for author, he takes a set-decorator. The visual spectacle pre-empts the performance of text. Yet it is just this absence of text within the play itself that allows the verbose critic to intervene, to speak on behalf of a silent actor and his silent, illiterate public.

Deburau performed his own mystique by rarely speaking in public. When Deburau killed a man by hitting him with his walking stick, a curious public flocked to his trial in order to hear him speak.¹³ It was this particular incident that so fascinated Jean-Louis Barrault, whose accidental encounter with Jacques Prévert and Marcel Carné in Nice in 1943 led to the making of *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945).¹⁴ This historical epic restages in meticulous detail the Funambules and the Boulevard du Temple of the 1830s. Its recreation of the pantomime theatre, as well as the long sequences that recreate particular pantomimes, has been interpreted as a tribute to the era of silent film, when France was a preeminent producer for the international market.¹⁵

The film juxtaposes Deburau, played by Barrault, with the master of orality, Frederick LeMaître, played by Pierre Brasseur. In LeMaître’s final performance, which sets into motion the events leading to the film’s denouement, Brasseur appears in blackface as Othello. In this calculated decision on the part of the screenwriter Prévert, blackness, text, and speech oppose whiteness and silence. Interestingly, Janin’s polemical rejection of text-based theatre had also juxtaposed a verbose actor in blackface (Ozanneaux’s *Nègre*) and a silent actor in whiteface (Deburau’s Pierrot). This duality would appear as well in the very first “talkie”, *The Jazz Singer* (1927). In this hybrid sound and silent film, the son of a conservative cantor finds success – and a voice – singing in blackface. A character’s donning of black makeup heralds sound’s definitive entry into cinema.

The transition from silent to sound cinema would give rise to the same criticisms that animate Janin’s account of Deburau. Just as Janin bemoaned the pitter-patter of bourgeois comedy, critics of the talkies argued that trite plot-lines and incessant dialogue suppressed the true strengths of the cinematic medium.¹⁶ Whereas silent cinema allowed for long travelling shots or the vivid and abrupt cuts of Eisenstein’s montage techniques, sound films required a banal shot-reverse sequence. The purely visual element of film was thus subjected to the requirements of dialogue-furthered intrigue.

Pierrot’s life as a theatrical character traces the historical iterations of French theatre’s relationship to text from the late seventeenth through the mid-twentieth century. The very nature of the theatrical medium is contested through the presence of

a character that stands for the visual above the textual. Pierrot’s distinctive whiteness metaphorically represents a blank page, a canvas, or *canevas*, as opposed to a script. Ultimately, theatre’s visual element, divorced from its text, offered a point of imaginative entry and identification for audiences and critics exhausted by avalanches of words.

Silence In, and Around, Painting

When Pierrot appeared on stage, audiences felt compelled to fill his silence. Watteau compels his viewers to do the same in his large painting of Pierrot. By making this dynamic so very blatant, the painting forces viewers to reflect upon their evident desire to project upon the passive object. The painting poses the question, *why* can we not be satisfied with silence? Rather than take Pierrot’s silence as a sign of resistance, we want to believe that his silence is *for us*, an opportunity created, not to be lost, to make things mean as we wish.

Watteau makes Pierrot’s silence into his subject by having the figure turn directly towards the viewer, in a frank appeal for the viewer’s attention. Yet Pierrot provides no clue in his body or gaze as to how the viewer is meant to respond to this request. If movement and contortion of the body made painting ‘speak’ in the context of academic history painting, Pierrot declines to perform this visual equivalent of text.¹⁷ His posture, within the economy of painted expression, expresses silence.

Standing at attention, Pierrot submits himself to the viewer as the valet presents himself to his master, as the artist stands before his patron, as an empty canvas stands before an artist. When the visibly impaired painter of the Comédie Italienne mistook Pierrot for a blank canvas, Pierrot was most likely standing at attention, awaiting the orders of Harlequin, who had just summoned him. Just as Harlequin’s order would have filled Pierrot with purpose, the painter’s brush attempts to fill the surface that seems to present itself so receptively. The silent, inexpressive figure is interpreted as a figure that awaits the words of others. And by turning himself towards the viewer, as if awaiting orders, Pierrot presents himself as incomplete. Incompletion is another significant device through which silence can become manifest in a work of art. By asking the viewer to give him his orders, Pierrot manifests his own lack of a voice that completes him. Yet incompleteness is also a quality that can be produced over time, as the work drifts away from – or is forcibly separated from – its original context.

Nineteenth-century Paris was filled with objects that had fallen silent. Revolutionary upheaval and the wrath of the mob had displaced thousands of objects, sending candelabra, paintings, tapestries, and bibelots pell-mell to the vast dépôts of the Republican, then the Imperial government.¹⁸ Separated from the context that had made

them meaningful, not to mention the paperwork that might have provided clues to their past, these objects were fragments, and as such, particularly appealing to the Romantic imagination.¹⁹ A fragment, detached from its whole, exists without explanatory text; a fragment is silent. *Pierrot, dit Gilles* is most certainly a Romantic fragment. By this, I mean both that it was discovered during the Romantic period, and that its discovery has given, and continues to give rise to extraordinary storytelling.

I turn here to a line of research that I was directed towards during my year at the DFK. Briefly put, the history of the painting, *Pierrot, dit Gilles*, is completely silent prior to the early nineteenth century.²⁰ There is neither textual nor visual record of the painting's existence prior to around 1815, and this despite the fact that Watteau's oeuvre was painstakingly documented by a number of meticulous connoisseurs. If the painting did exist during the eighteenth century, all of Watteau's many biographers, collectors, and cataloguers chose to remain silent on its account. While it may seem difficult to understand now, when the painting is acknowledged as a great masterpiece, by eighteenth-century standards the painting would have been extremely odd. A life-size figure, doing nothing, being silent, far larger than his status deserves or his genre allows – the painting makes no sense according to eighteenth-century criteria for elevated painting.²¹ Was *Pierrot, dit Gilles* regarded as such an embarrassing failure that the critics thought it best to keep silent? Yet this too, seems unlikely, given the romanticizing nature of the post-mortem accounts of the painter, which would not have passed over the opportunity to describe a heroic effort on the part of the reclusive painter, met with incomprehension and ridicule.²² Silence also characterizes another explanation of the painting's origins: that Watteau worked on the painting *en clandestine*, telling no one of his intentions. In this case, either he passed the painting on, secretly, before his death, or Jullienne, who bought the works left in Watteau's studio, passed over the work in silence, declining to include it in the *Recueil Jullienne*.²³

The painting's first recorded appearance is, fittingly, not textual, but visual. Before his death in 1826, Dominique-Vivant Denon sketched the salon of his home-qua-cabinet on the Quai Voltaire (fig. 1). Through the salon's open doors is seen the antechamber where Denon hung the largest paintings in his collection. *Pierrot, dit Gilles*, sketched by Denon, appears above a mantelpiece decorated with vases and a stuffed parrot (a suggestive juxtaposition given that the parrot, a 'speaking animal', references the prelapsarian state, when animals possessed the privilege to speak). In his notes for a catalogue of his collection, Denon refers fleetingly to the painting as "un tableau à personnages plus grands que nature, dans lequel il a fait le portrait de ses amis, et par lequel on peut juger combien il conservait de couleur et de vérité dans une dimension qui lui était si étrangère".²⁴ Denon never indicates, in writing, the provenance of the work. The painting did not sell at Denon's well-attended posthumous sale, despite a flattering catalogue essay by A. N. Pérignon, which called the painting "le tableau le plus important et du caractère le plus original qui soit sorti du

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1 Dominique-Vivant Denon, *Denon chez lui*, ca. 1820, ink on paper, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France – Estampes et Photographie

pinceau de cet excellent colouriste".²⁵ The painting was bought-in and went to the medieval curiosities collection of Denon's nephew, Brunet-Denon.

With Denon's drawing, followed by A. N. Pérignon's catalogue entry, the painting's silence is broken; *Pierrot, dit Gilles* enters the historical record, almost a century after the death of Watteau. I have been intrigued by the different reactions that this line of my research has provoked. I have been met mostly with excitement and curiosity, but also with anger, and one time, an eminent scholar encouraged me, as it were, to keep silent.²⁶ Critics are perfectly right to point out that I have no proof that the painting is not by Watteau. My point is that they too have very little in the way of evidence.²⁷ Both parties stake their claims on argued probabilities. I find that it is both more interesting and more responsible to break the silence of the painting's history by initiating a dialogue between a number of possible narratives. This is a richly perplexing situation, the exploration of which can only help to illuminate the way that images are received and made sense of over time. In other words, if the work's own history is silent, it is still possible to study the ways that historical figures have made the work's silence speak.

In an early nineteenth-century Paris haunted by worlds of silent objects, it was absolutely necessary to invent narratives that would lend voice to the fragments. Almost thirty years after the appearance of *Pierrot, dit Gilles*, however, stories began to be told about its 'discovery' by Denon. Versions differed.²⁸ If Denon was the source of the accounts, this is no surprise; Denon, in his loquaciousness, was not always precise. Clement de Ris, however, in his telling of the story in 1877, claimed that

Denon found the painting in the Carrousel du Louvre.²⁹ It is not accidental that de Ris would choose this backdrop for his narration of Denon's big find. During the 1830s and 40s, the Carrousel du Louvre, haunt of antiquarians, *curieux*, and buyers of live birds, acquired a legendary status amongst the nostalgic Romantics.³⁰ The neighbourhood was a narrow enclave of four or five streets, a dusty, sunken grid, shut off from the rest of Paris by the looming walls of the Louvre.³¹

The adjective most frequently used to describe the enclave was "silent". While Balzac noted "les ténèbres, le silence, l'air glacial", Gautier described the Carrousel as "une oasis de solitude et de silence".³² Baudelaire, in his poem "Le cygne", recalling the old Carrousel after its demolition, described a staggering swan, escaped from its cage, "traînant son blanc plumage" through "l'air silencieux".³³ The Goncourts remembered buying their first drawing, a watercolour by Boucher, at a dealer in the rue Saint Thomas du Louvre, "une rue d'ombre et de silence".³⁴ Houssaye, finally, boasted that "au milieu de Paris, nous jouissions du silence".³⁵ Despite being a neighbourhood packed with prints, drawings, medals, "des flèches de sauvages, des armures rouillées, des têtes de Zélandais, des crocodiles empaillés, des bahuts et des momies", not to mention live birds, these authors insist on the neighbourhood's silence.³⁶ Sonically speaking, this seems less than likely: the old stone walls, creating an echo chamber, must have rung with the sounds of passing carriages and the squawks of unhappy birds, all that rusty armour would have made a ruckus when it fell atop the candelabra and the savages' arrows. Thus the epithet of "silence" referred not to the actual level of noise, but to the weight of the historical past, so densely present in the Carrousel both in the form of the architecture of the ancien régime, pressing in on three sides, and in the form of the dusty shops of the *marchands de tableaux et de bric à brac*.

It was in one of these shops that Clement de Ris situated Denon's discovery of *Pierrot, dit Gilles*:

En 1804, [Pierrot, dit Gilles] était étalé par terre à la porte d'un obscur marchand de bric-a-brac de la place du Carrousel, à qui il servait d'enseigne. Pour attirer les chaland, le pauvre diable avait écrit à la craie, sur la figure même, ce refrain d'un ancien vaudeville :

Que Pierrot serait content
S'il avait l'art de vous plaire!

Denon passait tous les jours devant cette boutique. L'appel incessant de cette enseigne finit par lui agacer les nerfs. Il céda à la tentation, et, malgré les reproches de son maître David, finit par emporter le Gilles pour 300 francs. En un demi-siècle, la somme a dix fois centuplé.

L. Clément de Ris, *Les Amateurs d'autrefois*, Paris, E. Plon et Cie, 1877, p. 446.

Apparently, the *marchand* felt that the painting's silence made it unsellable. Hence the addition of a 'caption', a little line of dialogue to give the painting a voice. It is this plaintive call that reaches the passing Denon. The painting's acquisition of a voice breaks its own [Pierrot's] silence, while also breaking into the silence of the historical record, lending the painting an origin, although this origin is none other than the floating world of the Carrousel, where history is experienced not as text and narrative but as the silence of objects whose past is unknown.

Thus the nineteenth-century narrative tells us relatively little about the origins of the painting, except to identify the work as coming from a place of mysterious silence. In this sense, what the narrative does reveal is the tendency of the nineteenth-century intelligence to want to identify mysteries. The rise of the detective novel in the nineteenth century signified the desire to both present fragments and then to piece these fragments together into a meaningful narrative.³⁷ The detective has the ability to interpret things – a frayed sleeve – that mean nothing to the ordinary observer. To the detective, however, the frayed sleeve indicates that the wearer is left-handed, which means he could not have wielded the dagger with his right hand, and so on. Thus fragments cease to be silent and come to signify, making the detective novel into a kind of cathartic therapy for the reader unmoored by the shocks, and the silences, of modernity.

The accounts of Denon's discovery of the painting are not unrelated to the dynamics of the detective novel. A fragment presents itself in the form of a clue, a trace of a great artist, Watteau, whose ability to paint in *grandeur naturelle* was formerly unknown. Neglected by the average passer-by, the detective identifies the fragment's importance, and acquires it for his collection – that great repository of fragments, the explanatory narrative for which is created by the collector. Giving voice to the silent object in the form of historical context of sense-making narrative was the great task of the nineteenth-century collector and critic, because the silence of a work of art signified the loss of history and the loss of sense. Without sense, without narrative, history was experienced as an oppressive silence, as dark and as dank as the walls of the Carrousel du Louvre. If, as I suggested earlier, Pierrot asks for his master to give him a voice, the Pierrot in the Carrousel, lent a plaintive cry by the words of the *marchand*, asked Denon to transform his cry into a statement of triumph.

Criers

Silence can operate both as a constraint and a privilege. The nineteenth-century pantomime did not possess the privilege of speech. Although the extraordinary Deburau made a virtue of this restriction, the right to speak was a privilege accorded only to a higher class of performer and theatre. In other cases, however, silence signifies

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a kind of absolute power – the privilege not to have to explain or justify one's appearance through text. As this brief history of Pierrot's silence shows, Pierrot has never been allowed to remain silent. I would like to conclude this essay then, with a brief discussion of a genre of image in which the silence of figures is explicitly not allowed.

The *marchand* who wrote the verses of a vaudeville on *Pierrot, dit Gilles* effectively transformed the painting into an enormous iteration of the genre of the *Cri*. The genre of the *Cris*, popular in seventeenth- through nineteenth-century Europe, shows itinerant vendors advertising their wares in urban settings.³⁸ These etchings and engravings are not portraits, but types, yet they do pay an unprecedented amount of attention to the appearance of members of the lower classes, represented, for the first time, alone, and not as part of a group. Appearing alone is another kind of privilege, a statement of the ability to hold the stage of the image without help. Yet the criers do not appear entirely alone, rather, they are accompanied by their 'cry',

² Jean Baptiste and Henri Bonnart, *Le porteur d'eau*, s.d. (ca. 1676), hand-colored engraving on paper, 36.5 × 23.8 cm, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

written beneath the figure. The "cry" identifies the person with their ware. In this way, the appearance of the crier becomes subject to the merchandise he or she offers for sale, so that the attached text justifies the figure's presence. Thus the genre of the criers gave urban dwellers a typological map of lower-class types.³⁹ Text, in this case, disciplined the lower classes, categorizing and labelling a threatening silence.

Rather than show themselves triumphantly, the criers appear beleaguered (fig. 2). The weight of their wares, bundled onto their bodies, distorting their silhouettes into weird hybrids of person and object for sale, is equalled only by the obligation to self-identify according to what they sell. Watteau captures some of this *ennui* in his representation of Pierrot, the fatigue of being forced to present oneself *as* something else, in this case, *as* Pierrot, the laughing stock and the fool. Yet Pierrot, except for the brief, apocryphal moment in the Carrousel, does not possess a legend, and in this sense he is distinct from the crier. What the crier wants is enter the world of pure visuality, where text is not needed, where silence reigns supreme. There is a certain, conspicuously silent pleasure taken by Louis XIV, as he wraps his enormous ermine robe around his shapely calves, beneath his great crimson tent, sur-

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³ Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Louis XIV*, 1701, oil on canvas, 277 × 194 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

rounded by the *accoutrements* of the Sacré (fig. 3). While the crier must vocalize his reason for being on the street or in a picture, thereby subjecting his identity to text, the king's visual identity communicates itself without words. In *Pierrot, dit Gilles*, Pierrot usurps the silence that is the king's privilege.

But also the animal's privilege. Another figure of silence in Watteau's large painting is the donkey. This donkey, whose doleful single eye fixes the viewer, is cropped to that eye, a brief stretch of head, and an ear. A rope is fastened around its neck, finished by a flourish of pink ribbon, tied in a bow. The pink ribbon establishes a definitive link between the donkey and Pierrot. Pierrot's white shoes – placed only a few inches away from the donkey – are tied with two pink ribbons, little Rococo flourishes to embellish Pierrot's great expanse of white. Using the rope tied around the donkey's neck, the cavalier in red attempts to tug the donkey and its rider, the black-suited Crispin-like figure, from left to right. The donkey, however, resists. The donkey's refusal to move also aligns him with Pierrot, who stands still, declining to participate in the left to right unfolding of narrative that marks the Poussinian historical subject. Both Pierrot and the donkey manifest a stubborn desire to remain silent, to taste for themselves the pleasure of the king, whose fabric-like unfolding across Rigaud's canvas creates a 'narrative' of visual magnificence. Never mind that neither Pierrot, nor the donkey, unfurls himself with the king's same gusto, this is part of the painting's burlesquing of the grand manner, to replace the king's silence with silent figures that are so very un-magnificent.

Audiences, critics, and collectors who have given Pierrot speech, whether by speaking for him (putting words in his mouth), writing about him, or telling stories about him, do not seem to wonder whether Pierrot in fact wants to speak. Lending Pierrot a voice says more about the desires of the audience than about Pierrot. Which is not necessarily to critique the desire – Pierrot exists in part to reflect, to willingly become whatever the viewer suggests about him. This is one of the ways in which Pierrot allegorizes the silence of the work of art as a space of projection. Perhaps, however, like Melville's Bartelby, Pierrot would "prefer not to" speak. In this case, the silence of the work of art assumes not transparency, but substance and opacity; Pierrot may say nothing to us, but he offers instead the substance of art itself, materially resistant to the mediation of text, existentially present. Thus Pierrot asks not to be spoken for, but to be granted the privilege of silence.

¹ On the *Hofnarr*, see Heinz-Günter Schmitz, "Claus Narr und seine Zunft, Erscheinungsformen und Funktion des spätmittelalterlichen Narren", in Katrin Kröll and Hugo Steger (eds.), *Mein ganzer Körper ist Gesicht: Groteske Darstellungen in der europäischen Kunst und Literatur des Mittelalters*, Romach, 1994, pp. 385–399.

² *Columbine Avocat Pour et Contre, comédie en trois actes, mise au théâtre par Monsieur D*, in Evariste Gherardi, *Le Théâtre italien de Gherardi ou le recueil général de toutes les comédies et scènes françoises jouées par les comédiens italiens du roi, pendant tout le temps qu'ils ont été au service de sa Majesté*, Amsterdam, 1701, vol. 1, p. 312.

³ Richard Andrews (ed. and trans.), *The Commedia dell'arte of Flaminio Scala*, Lanham (MA), 2008, pp. xxxvii–xxxix.

⁴ On the Comédie Italienne at the fair, see N. M. Bernardin, *La Comédie Italienne en France et les Théâtres de la Foire et du Boulevard 1570–1791*, Paris, 1902, pp. 79–150. For an encyclopedic account, based on archival sources, of fair performers, business owners, and censor's reports on performances see Émile Campardon, *Les Spectacles de la foire, depuis 1595 jusqu'à 1791*, Geneva, 1970. See also François Moureau, *De Gherardi à Watteau: Présence d'Arlequin sous Louis XIV*, Paris, 1992.

⁵ On the transformation of the fair theatre into the Opéra Comique, see François Moureau, *Le Goût Italien dans la France Rocaille: Théâtre, musique, peinture, 1680–1750*, Paris, 2011.

⁶ On the Funambules, see Louis Péricaud, *Le Théâtre des Funambules, Ses Mimes, ses Acteurs et ses Pantomimes, Depuis sa Fondation, Jusqu'à sa Demolition*, Paris, 1897. See also Tristan Rémy, *Jean-Gaspard Deburau*, Paris, 1954.

⁷ George Sand wrote about the relationship between Deburau and his audience of *gamins*. See George Sand, "Deburau" [Feb. 1846], in *Questions d'art et de littérature*, Paris, 1878, pp. 215–222.

⁸ Janin's best-selling biography of Deburau was culled from previously published material in his feuilleton. See Jules Janin, *Deburau, Histoire du Théâtre à Quatre Sous* [1832], Paris, 1881.

⁹ Jules Janin, "Théâtre Français: Première représentation du Nègre, drame en quatre actes et en vers libres, par M. Ozanneaux", in *Journal des Débats*, 1 Nov. 1830, pp. 1–3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ On this incident and the subsequent trial, see Péricaud, 1897 (note 6), pp. 154–162.

¹⁴ This meeting is described in Carole Auroet, *Le Cinéma Dessiné de Jacques Prévert*, Paris, 2012, p. 109.

¹⁵ Jill Forbes, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, London, 1997, pp. 34–36.

¹⁶ Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*, Cambridge, MA/London, 1992, pp. 180–183.

¹⁷ For the pantomimic expression codified by the Académie's *conférences*, see Henri Testelin, *Sentiments des plus habiles peintres sur la pratique de la peinture et sculpture*, Paris, 1696, Table Troisième. On the 'mute poetry' of history painting, see also Volker Schröder, "Le langage de la Peinture est le langage des muets": remarques sur un motif de l'esthétique classique", in René Démoris (ed.), *Hommage à Elizabeth Sophie Chérou: texte et peinture à l'âge classique*, Paris, 1992, pp. 95–110.

¹⁸ Tom Stammers, "The bric-à-brac of the Ancien Régime: Collecting and Cultural History in Post-Revolutionary France", in *French History* 22/3, 2008, pp. 295–315.

¹⁹ On the Romantic fragment, see the classic text by Henri Zerner and Charles Rosen, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art*, London, 1984, pp. 24–28.

²⁰ This utter absence of documentation, as well as other factors that complicate the painting's attribution to Watteau, are discussed in Christian Michel, *Le "Célèbre" Watteau*, Geneva, 2008, p. 269.

²¹ This is an argument I explore in depth in my dissertation through close examination of influential period texts by Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, Paris, 1708; Charles-Alphonse du Fresnoy, *L'art de peinture*, Paris, 1688, translated from Latin by de Piles; and Antoine Coyrel, *Épitre à mon fils*, Paris, 1708. See also Thomas Puttfarken, *Roger de Piles' Theory of Art*, New Haven, 1985.

²² Here I echo Michel's argument that Watteau's current popularity is indebted to the ease with which Watteau – "instable, éternellement insatisfait, exprimant la mélancolie profonde qui l'habite dans ses toiles" – can be read as "un artiste romantique ou post-romantique". Michel, 2008 (note 20), p. 269. The reader of Pierre Rosenberg, *Vies Anciennes de Watteau*, Paris, 1984, will also notice Gersaint's, Caylus' and Jullienne's comments on Watteau's introverted and sulky temperament.

²³ Based on evidence culled from several inventories, Christian Michel has suggested that Jullienne and Gersaint bought all the unfinished work that remained in Watteau's studio. Michel, 2008 (note 20), pp. 43–44.

²⁴ Denon cited in Rosenberg, 1984 (note 22), p. 126.

²⁵ A. N. Pérignon, *Description des objets d'art qui composent le cabinet de feu m. le Baron V. Denon*, Paris, 1826, pp. 86–87.

²⁶ This was in response to a presentation of my work at a graduate student symposium, when a distinguished curator angrily refuted my arguments. Two weeks later, I was introduced to the scholar in Paris. He had attended, and remembered my talk and the animated discussion that had followed. He was eager to discuss the problem, but at the same time urged me to focus my attention on other things.

²⁷ The Louvre staunchly defends the attribution to Watteau. The Louvre's conservators and technicians have assessed

the painting's material condition. See Marie-Catherine Sa-hut and Elisabeth Martin (et. al.), "Pierrot de Watteau, dit autrefois *Gilles*, perspectives de recherche", in *Techne* 30/31, 2009–2010, pp. 82–95. These reports indisputably establish that the painting was made in the eighteenth century. Yet no further attribution to the 'hand of Watteau' is possible, especially since there are no other extant paintings that show Watteau painting figures at this scale, an enterprise that requires quite a different technique from that used for his stock in trade of small, miniaturized figures.

28 The first account of Denon's discovery appeared in an article published by Pierre Hédouin in *L'Artiste*. *L'Artiste* was one of the first periodicals to begin publishing articles about the art of the eighteenth century, well before the Goncourt's publications on the period in the second half of the nineteenth century. See Pierre Hédouin, "Watteau III", in *L'Artiste*, 4ème série/5, 1845, p. 79. Hédouin locates Denon's discovery in the shop of 'M. Meuniez, marchand de tableaux'. A search for *marchand de tableaux* in Tynna's *Almanach de Paris*, between 1798 and 1812 yields a "Meunier", listed for eight consecutive years as a *Marchand de tableaux et de curiosités* with a boutique at 11, Quai Voltaire, formerly the Quai des Théatins. See J. de la Tynna, *Almanach du Commerce de Paris, des Départements de l'Empire Français, et des Principales Villes du Monde*, Paris, 1808. Meunier probably died in 1808, because in 1809 his wife and son are listed at adjacent addresses on the Rue de Seine-St-Germaine, with Meunier fils selling the *curiosités* and Madame Meunier (presumably Meunier's widow), selling *tableaux*. After 1809, however, the entire family appears to have fallen out of business.

29 L. Clément de Ris, *Les Amateurs d'autrefois*, Paris, 1877, p. 446.

30 Between 1834 and 1836, Théophile Gautier, Arsène Houssaye, and Gérard de Nerval congregated in the apartment of the painter Camille Rogier in the Impasse du Doyenné, a dead-end street in the Carrousel. The "Cenacle du Doyenné", as the group came to be called, gave rise to several nostalgic accounts of the Carrousel, published during the 1850s, long after the Cenacle had disbanded. I have written about the Cenacle and their role in the nineteenth-century Rococo revival elsewhere, see Marika Knowles, "Pierrot's Periodicity: Watteau, Nadar and the Circulation of the Rococo", in Melissa Hyde and Katie Scott (eds.), *Rococo Echo*, Oxford, 2014.

31 For a history of this neighbourhood, see Carl de Vinck, *Place du Carrousel*, Paris, 1931.

32 Balzac, *La Cousine Bette* [1846], Paris, 1977, p. 100; Gautier, "Marilhat", in *Revue de Paris*, July 1848.

33 Baudelaire, "Le Cygne", in *Les Fleurs du Mal* [1861], Paris, 1975, p. 86.

34 Edmond de Goncourt, cited in Vinck, 1931 (note 31), p. 59.

35 Arsène Houssaye, *Les Confessions: Souvenirs d'un demi-siècle 1830–1880*, vol. 1, Paris, 1885, p. 288.

36 Emile de la Bédollière, 1848, cited in Vinck, 1931 (note 31), p. 70.

37 For one discussion of this phenomenon, see Shelley Rice, *Parisian Views*, Cambridge, MA, 1997, pp. 74–75.

38 Two helpful sources on the *cris* are Karen F. Beall, *Kaufrufe und Strassenhändler: Eine Bibliographie*, Hamburg, 1975, and Vincent Milliot, *Les cris de Paris ou le peuple travesti: les représentations des petits métiers parisiens*, Paris, 1995.

39 On the *cris* as a disciplinary regime, see Wolfgang Steinitz, "Les cris de Paris" und die Kaufrufdarstellung in der Druckgraphik bis 1800, Salzburg, 1971, pp. 18–22.