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The Masquerade in Watteau and Marivaux

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AUTHOR Alexis Redish



I am a senior majoring in French, and Foreign Languages and International Economics (FLIE). I am an Honors Student and a member of the Golden Key International Honour Society, and Pi Delta Phi French Honor Society. I have received a Bluegrass Merit Scholarship for all four years and the Zembrod Scholarship in Spring, 2003. In addition, I have been on the Dean's list for each semester of my four years at the University and have been placed on the National Dean's List. I graduate in May of 2004. I plan to return to France in the Fall of 2004 to teach English and, following this, perhaps pursue my masters in French, perhaps with a special interest in the 18th and 19th century, comparing literature to other artistic expressions.

In the beginning, this study was written in French for a class on the *Commedia dell'Arte*. In this course, I became fascinated with the social commentary that was expressed through so many artistic media, specifically painting and theatre. I loved writing the paper and studying the paintings when I first wrote it in French. After this, I gained the experience of translating my own work into English and discussing the topic in greater depth. My faculty mentor and I worked on the translation that I did and the organization of the paper after it was translated. In addition, she would give helpful input concerning the way in which I expressed my ideas in the paper.

I am also a dancer in the UK Dance Ensemble, where I find an outlet for my creative expression as a classical, modern, and contemporary dancer. I both perform and choreograph for the Dance Ensemble. In addition, I am very involved in the work at my church, Quest Community Church, where I often dance, help with Sunday mornings, and work with the kids worship team.



Mentor:
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This study explores important interdisciplinary parallels and intersections between painting and theatre in eighteenth-century France. Through careful analysis of two paintings of Watteau, *La Danse* and *Le Faux Pas*, and Marivaux's captivating romantic comedy, *Arlequin, poli par l'amour* [*Arlequin Polished by Love*], the reader comes to understand conventions of love and sociability during this period as belonging to the realms of both the theatrical and the natural. The enchanting world of Watteau's *fête galante* blurs the distinction between the country life of simple peasants and the pastoral amusements of courtly society, as does Marivaux's world of the Italian *Commedia* in French context. Tableaux and text depict the changing roles and costumes of theatrical disguise. But this masquerade was harbinger a of a society poised to become more flexible in this new emphasis on shifting identities. One of the most interesting facets of this essay is not merely the concern with parallels between painting and literary text but those that Alexis shows to exist between these and the arts of dance and music within the paintings. Alexis Redish manifests her love of and commitment to the arts through her work as a dancer as well as through scholarly activity, which, when possible, relates literary and social concepts to the domains of art, music, and dance.

The Masquerade in Watteau and Marivaux

Abstract

The bourgeois French of the 18th century were characterized by a social code that required a certain manner of speech and action in the areas of dress, love, parties, and childhood. Following these rules rendered one elegant, charming, and elite, in addition to ensuring social success and proving one's inner nobility. The comedic works of Marivaux and the breathtaking paintings of Watteau's collection *La Fête Galante* eloquently summarize this mode of life. Under the guise of art and entertainment, Watteau and Marivaux, respectively, reveal the lifestyle and intentions of the bourgeois community in the same indirect manner by which that very community led their lives. In his work, *Arlequin, Poli par l'Amour*, Marivaux introduces Arlequin into the masquerade lifestyle of the bourgeois and Arlequin slowly becomes accustomed to the requirements of this world of rules and fêtes, primarily as they apply to love. Watteau produced two works, *La Danse*, which reveals a microcosm of the adult world through children's playtime, and *Le Faux Pas*, which gives insight into the rules of gallant love. Further examination and comparison of these modes of critique uncovers new commentary concerning the French bourgeois lifestyle of the 18th century.



Jean-Antoine Watteau
(1684, Valenciennes; 1721, Nogent sur Marne)
La Danse (The Dance)
Oil on canvas (97 x 116 cm)
1716-18
Dahlem, Staatliche Museen, Berlin



Jean-Antoine Watteau
(1684, Valenciennes; 1721, Nogent sur Marne)
Le Faux Pas (The Mistaken Advance)
Oil on canvas (40 x 31.5 cm)
1716-18
Musée de Louvre, Paris

Early eighteenth century France included several social classes whose status was distinguished by their mannerisms. For the French upper bourgeoisie and aristocracy, certain codes of self-presentation prevailed in all aspects of social interaction. These codes informed conventions of dress as well as of communication and were especially conspicuous and detailed in the rules of love. One had to appear gallant and maintain an air of charm and superiority. After a person transforms him- or herself into an ideal member of society, he or she is said to have proven inner nobility (Plax, 2000, p. 112). In order for members of this society to follow this code of sociability, they must take lessons, specifically in the areas of music, dance, and love. Many of these lessons were taught through the example and advice of others more advanced in the art of sociability. While, at the same time, other lessons were taught through formal instruction.

This was a strict and often hypocritical society, for their actions were representations of the code of sociability more than an honest representation of their feelings. For example, in regard to love, a person must resist amorous advances and control his or her desires in order to be gallant. Much literature of the period dealt with teaching and learning how to understand and how to assimilate these codes, how to practice the art of sociability.

In the romantic comedy by Marivaux, *Arlequin, Poli par l'Amour* (originally written and performed as a play in 1720), a magical fairy, representing the fashionable aristocracy of the time, kidnaps the main character Arlequin with whom she falls precipitously in love. She attempts to train him in the acceptable social conventions of love. Through dance lessons and bribes she attempts to create a suitable partner for herself. Yet, the initially coarse Arlequin remains untaught and far from the sophistication of this aristocratic society. Instead, he falls in love with the simple peasant Silvia. Their interactions parody the conventions of love that were influential at the time.

In this play, there are examples of lessons taught by instruction and advice: first, the Fairy who had kidnapped Arlequin insists that he submit to dance lessons, which are to train him in the codes to which her society adheres; second, later in the play, the cousin of Silvia advises her on the way in which she is to treat the romantic advances of Arlequin. These lessons exemplify the required code of sociability in the areas of dance, music, dress, and communication. More importantly, they show how the rules of love were influential in the countryside (Silvia and Arlequin are peasants) as well as for members of the upper class, who must control their desires in order to maintain their noble appearance.

In the same century, Jean-Antoine Watteau painted representations of this gallant upper class, using an impressionistic and dreamy style. His paintings communicated a commentary on the social interactions of the upper class. Two paintings in particular also indirectly demonstrate the situations of Silvia and Arlequin. The first, *La Danse* or *The Dance*, describes through its images the case of Arlequin as the Fairy attempts to teach him the proper social codes. It contains children playing instruments and dancing outdoors. On the one hand, they seem to imitate what they have noticed in the life of the adults. On the other hand, they are practicing what they have been learning in their lessons. In their playtime, they imitate the artificial and gallant lifestyle they see in their parents and superiors, which symbolizes their position in society (Plax, 2000, p. 118).

The second painting, *Le Faux Pas* or *The Mistaken Advance*, shows a peasant man attempting to kiss a woman. The woman seems to push the man away, but one cannot be certain if she teases or if she truly wishes to be left alone. If the former is the case, one could say that the woman, like Silvia, follows those rules of love demanded by the high society of the period, to refuse advances of love in order to obtain it.

It seems that many questions can be asked relating to these paintings and the period. Are the children in *La Danse* really playing or are they practicing the artificial rituals of their upper class world? Concerning the painting *Le Faux Pas*, the status of the characters is questionable, because they appear to demonstrate the rules and conventions of the upper bourgeois and aristocratic societies towards love. Are these characters really peasants of the countryside? This last question arises from the following description. In the book, *La Fête Galante: Watteau et Marivaux*, Robert Tomlinson cites Alfred Jeanroy to describe “the thirst of sophisticated people for a simple life,” in precisely this way:

En somme la pastourelle a été en Provence ce qu'a presque toujours été la poésie pastorale: l'amusement d'une société élégante qui se repose d'elle-même en se travestissant sous un aimable costume. Ce sont en effet, on l'a souvent remarqué, les sociétés les moins simples et les moins innocentes qui jouent le plus volontiers à la bergerie (Tomlinson, 1981, p. 77).

[In summary, the pastoral life in Provence was defined by pastoral poetry: the amusement of an elegant society that relied upon dressing in likeable costumes. This was the effect often remarked, that the least simple and least innocent societies most voluntarily play as peasants.]

The social identity of the upper classes was often ambiguous with regard to their dress, because they enjoyed costumes of all types. In the same way, Watteau's characters in *Le Faux Pas* may not have clearly defined identities.

Both paintings contain several clues that reveal their actual subject. At first glance, they communicate very different messages than originally seemed to be the case. Just as Marivaux's play emphasizes particular social customs, Watteau's paintings illuminate hidden aspects of

the societies. By further scrutiny of the facial expressions, colors, and style, one discovers many of Watteau's possible intentions. After comparing these with Arlequin's situations in Marivaux, one reaches a further understanding of the mannerisms and conventions within the French upper bourgeois and aristocratic societies of the period.

A deeper analysis of *Le Faux Pas* may uncover further commentary of this gallant lifestyle. In particular the elements of line, color, organization and facial expressions serve an important role in the overall effect of the painting. Before studying these elements closely, this painting seems a simple pastoral scene; through closer scrutiny, one begins to see many details that suggest otherwise. First, the lines appear for the most part curvy and very fluid, demonstrating an action that the character has yet to finish. For example, the lines on the back of the woman's shirt show the tension exerted by the hand of the man. These lines accentuate the opposing forces of the man trying to hold the woman and her attempts to push him away. Furthermore, the thin lines on their shirts give a wrinkled appearance that renders their clothing less formal, less elegant, and more natural.

Second, the colors communicate multiple emotions and bring up several questions. For the most part, Watteau painted in various shades of brown in order to formulate a natural scene. The hair and shirt of the man, the earth, and even the plants vary in brown shades to produce a monochromatic natural effect. This technique induces thoughts of peasants in their normal atmosphere; yet some clues suggest the contrary. First, the red cape on the ground beside the woman presents an interesting enigma. It raises several questions such as, how did it end up on the ground? Did the woman voluntarily allow it to fall to the ground? If the answer to the latter question is yes, then that reveals some inclination on her part toward the man's advances. At the same time, the color of the cape is highly significant. Red expresses a certain confidence, freedom, sexuality, and directly opposes innocence and nature. This cape may reveal some of the actual desires of the woman, which are traditionally less obvious than those of the man. According to the rules of love, her advances cannot take the form of responsive actions, but they must be controlled and almost resistant.

Next, the way in which Watteau painted the sky transforms the natural setting into a sort of unreal dream. The sky contains blue, purple, red, and green to form an incredible and almost unreal mixture. At this point, the sky seems less natural and even begins to resemble a backdrop to a play. Such a dreamlike sky is often seen in theatrical representations, such as

plays or ballets, in order to make the scene seem something it is not. This finding is supported in Tomlinson's introduction, in which he describes Watteau's paintings, saying:

L'amour est le thème central, vu à travers un symbolisme érotique inhérent au choix des cadres rustiques et c'est sous la forme d'un débat sur l'amour dans un décor naturel que la fête galante reprend le genre pastoral en y ajoutant l'optique du théâtre (Tomlinson, 1981, p. 2).

[The central theme is love, seen through erotic symbolism inherent in the chosen rustic surroundings and it is in the form of an amorous encounter in a natural setting that the gallant festival recalls the pastoral genre and adds a theatrical illusion.]

Suddenly, the peasants become characters in their own play, in which their actions may or may not portray the real state of their emotions. It is possible that Watteau did not wish for his painting to represent a scene from a play, but to communicate that the love within the painting symbolizes the game of love played by the nobles. Their actions are rehearsed from their code of sociability. If this is the case, then we would regard the refusal of the woman more as a flirtatious gesture, as she controls her actual feelings and desires. This motion embodies the advice of Silvia's cousin. In *Arlequin, Poli par l'Amour*, the cousin of Silvia counsels her in this way:

Garde-t'en bien, ma cousine, sois bien sévère, cela entretient la passion d'un amant ... il ne faut point aussi lui dire tant que tu l'aimes (Marivaux, 1720, Scene 9, p. 131).

[Protect yourself well, my cousin, be severe, that will maintain a lover's passion, also you must not tell him too often that you love him.]

Watteau wishes to present the woman as severe in this case, just as one would expect to see in the

game of love. A woman's actions are of primary importance in the rituals of love, as she must appear controlled and must give the appearance of keeping the man at a distance. For this reason, she appears illuminated in the center of the scene. His use of dark colors in most of the painting has the effect of illuminating the woman. The dark atmosphere emphasizes that their meeting is in secret, hidden from the world. The woman, illuminated by her pale skin and light shirt, becomes the focal point of the painting. This aspect is important in the overall organization of the painting. The visual path is easy to locate. One's eyes are drawn first to the red cape, then to the man as he attempts to kiss the woman, then to the woman as she reacts to his advance, and lastly to the sky and scene in general. In my opinion, Watteau used the red cape as an attention grabber in order to communicate that the subject is love. The cape and actions of refusal represent love in its eighteenth century form, as a game or a series of rehearsed actions that maintain the actors' noble appearances.

Finally, one must examine the young man's face in order to see the variety of emotions expressed. For example, his eyes communicate patience and an attempt to persuade the woman to submit to his advances. At the same time, his forehead wrinkles slightly, showing his frustration with this difficult woman. The shape of his lips seems to betray the entire scene. His lips form a slight smile as if he understands and enjoys the game of flirtations and desire in which he and the woman are entangled. This multiplicity of emotions mirrors those found between Arlequin and Silvia in scene 11 of *Arlequin, Poli par l'Amour*. In this scene, Arlequin and Silvia have their second encounter and are flirtatiously getting to know one another, yet Silvia has recently received and processed the advice of her cousin.

Arlequin: (Arlequin ici badine, et l'interroge pour rire.) M'aimez-vous beaucoup?

Silvia: Pas beaucoup

Arlequin, sérieusement: Ce n'est que pour rire au moins, autrement...

Silvia, riant: Eh! Sans doute.

Arlequin, poursuivant toujours la badinerie, et riant: Ah! Ah! Ah! Donnez-moi votre main, ma mignonne.

Silvia: Je ne le veux pas.

Arlequin, souriant: Je sais pourtant que vous le voudriez bien.

Silvia: Plus que vous; mais je ne veux pas le dire.

Arlequin, souriant encore ici, et puis changeant de

façon, et tristement: Je veux la baiser, ou je serai fâché.

(Marivaux, 1720, pp. 133-134)

[Arlequin (Arlequin is joking here, and questions Silvia hoping for a laugh): Do you love me a lot?

Silvia: Not a lot.

Arlequin, seriously: It was only a little joke, otherwise...

Silvia, laughing: Eh! Without a doubt.

Arlequin, continuing the joke, laughing: Give me your hand, my sweet one.

Silvia: I don't want to.

Arlequin, smiling: I know nonetheless that you would like to very much.

Silvia: More than you; but I do not want to say it.

Arlequin, smiling again, then changing his mood, and sadly: I want to kiss it or I will be angry.]

One sees here how Arlequin, like the man in *Le Faux Pas*, becomes frustrated, even though he understands that both he and Silvia are teasing. In the game of love, when desires are hidden and actions are misleading, one is always subject to doubts about the true thoughts and feelings of the other person.

The question now arises, are the characters of Watteau's painting really peasants after all? There are many reasons why they may not be who they seem. According to the studies of Amy Wyngaard, the nobles quite enjoyed going to the countryside for their vacations. They gave expensive pastoral parties and many times dressed as peasants on the one hand for fun and on the other hand to relax (Wyngaard, 2000, p. 533). The poet René de Bonneval described their circumstances and actions in the following way:

Cette bergère si simple dans ses habits, et dans ses manières, est peut-être une Princesse qui veut se débarrasser ce soir des respects qu'on doit à son rang. Cette autre dont la parure éclatante annonce quelque personne distinguée, n'est pourtant qu'une bourgeoise qui prétend s'attirer l'hommage des plus grands seigneurs. (de Bonneval, 1717, p. 110-1)

[This peasant woman, so simple in her dress, and in her mannerisms may be a Princess, who wants for the evening to be rid of the respect owed her status. This other, of whom her stunning appearance suggests a distinguished person, is no more than a bourgeois woman pretending to attract the homage of the greatest Lords.]

A second example of dressing other than one's class is that of Peirre Pasquereau as told by Gueullette:

Sous le nom de Bertrand et sous l'habit du vrai paysan, il copiait avec tant de naturel et de perfection

les gens de ce caractère, pour le langage, pour le chant et pour la danse, que si, changeant de figure et de vêtement, on le faisait souper avec les personnes qui ne l'avaient vu que cette fois, elles ne le reconnaissent pas, et lorsqu'on le démasquait, pour ainsi dire, ne pouvaient croire que ce fut le même qu'elles avaient vu dans l'après midi (Gueullette, 1938, p. 69).

[Under the name of Bertrand and dressed as a real peasant, he so very naturally and perfectly imitated the people belonging to this class, in his speech, his singing and his dancing, that if, changing his mannerisms and his clothes, he would dine with people who had seen him only at that one time, they would not recognize him and when he unmasks himself, so to speak, they could not believe it was the same man they had seen in the afternoon.]

These examples show that people may seem most naturally to belong to a certain class and yet this might not always be the case. Furthermore, disguising oneself in the manners and dress of another social class was a very enjoyable pastime for many among the aristocratic and upper bourgeois societies. At the same time, the social code of the aristocracy and nobles demanded that one control one's desires in the area of love (Plax, 2000, p. 112). On the other hand, disguising oneself, in particular as a peasant, could free a person of these rules and he or she could then treat love with the rustic passion of peasants.

In *Le Faux Pas*, the mixture of aristocratic ritual and natural peasant love seems enhanced (Wyngaard, 2000, p. 537). In this rustic atmosphere, the nobles allowed themselves to experience freedom in love. At this time, we can once more address the subject of the red cape, for this cape does not seem to be made with the simplicity of one we might expect for a peasant woman. It may, in fact, distinguish between the outward appearance of the lovers and their true social identity. Upon closer inspection, one may notice that the collar is gold. Such a rich collar added to an already elegant cape seems unlikely to belong to a peasant. Once again, the red may suggest passion and freedom and the gold suggests a higher class and richness that does not belong in such a natural atmosphere. Even if they are only peasants, one must

remark on the ambiguity caused by their apparent desire to impersonate those of higher status and to act out their love in a fashion regimented by rules. In light of all these instances in which dressing and acting as though one belonged to another class occurred, it seems possible that these peasants are not who they seem.

Next, let us analyze another of Watteau's works, *La Danse*. There is little question of the class to which these children belong. They wear clothes of a very rich texture covered with bright and elegant cloth in satin and lace. In this painting, line, color, texture, and facial expressions also play a very important role. Above all, line demonstrates many aspects of the children. The children seem elegant and delicate, due to the thinness and fineness of the lines, not the natural, rustic, harsh, and thick lines used to represent peasants. Although the lines curve where necessary, they remain for the most part straight and still. For example, each child either stands or sits with his or her back very rigid and straight as required by the code for his or her social status. They seem to remain fixed in the protocol they have learned since birth.

Second, Watteau used a variety of bright, beautiful, and rich colors, including gold. Without a doubt, the gold represents the nobility of these children. Such a variety of color and fabric further symbolizes the richness of the families to which these children belong. In order to make the scene appear gallant and joyful, the colors are primarily bright. The pale skin of each child signifies both their innocence and their status. These children are not required or even permitted to work outdoors as peasants; on the contrary they must remain indoors to tend to their lessons.

At the moment they were painted, one child plays the recorder while the girl in the center of the painting dances. They seem to practice the artificial rituals of the society as if it were an ordinary way of life. Their playtime is a microcosm of what they have learned in their lessons and what they have seen in the masquerades of the adult world. As all children, these mirror what they observed their parents doing. Therefore, their playtime becomes a representation of the dancing, music, and costumes that constitute the masquerade.

What are the social implications of this seemingly simple painting? First, the lessons of these children prepare them for the masquerade. They must learn to dance and appear controlled in order to give an impression of sophistication and gallantry. The dance in itself often leads to love; it is an act of seduction. According to Tomlinson, "La danse mène à l'amour" (Tomlinson, 1981, p. 35). [The dance leads to love.] The game of love begins with a dance,

whether at a masquerade, a ball, or in the country. Tomlinson discussed this role of dance further, citing Léandre Vaillat:

L'antique jeu des avances amoureuses se reconnaît au raffinement de ses saluts, de ses petits pas et de ses glissés, au rapprochement, puis à l'éloignement des danseurs, à leur manière de se chercher et de s'éviter, de se croiser et de se tenir côte à côte, de se faire vis-à-vis et de se détourner avec regret, mais non sans espoir de retour (Tomlinson, 1981, p. 36).

[The age old game of amorous advances is recognized in the refinement of greeting, small steps, glides, proximity, then the distancing of the dancers, their manner of reaching for one another, then avoiding, then crossing, and holding to one another's sides, to facing one another and turning away with regret, but not without the hope of returning.]

Thus, one realizes that in the masquerade and the game of love dancing plays a large role. With this fact in mind, one can easily decipher the strategy of the Fairy in *Arlequin, Poli par l'Amour*. She wants Arlequin to take dance lessons, for she knows that this type of action could lead to a love between them. She desires that he learn not only the dances, but the appropriate reverences and courtesies of the code of sociability in order that he might become more obliging and thus the possibility of a relationship between them would become more real. Arlequin's untamed nature, his lack of nobility, makes it difficult for him to follow this code.

The following text exemplifies this fact:

La Fée: Voulez-vous prendre votre leçon, pour l'amour de moi?

Arlequin: Non.

Après avoir lui donné la bague de la Fée.

La Fée: La voilà, en revanche, recevez votre leçon.

Alors le maître à danser apprend à Arlequin à faire la révérence. Arlequin égaie cette scène de tout ce que son génie peut lui fournir de propre au sujet.

Arlequin: Je m'ennuie.

(Marivaux, 1720, Scene 2, p. 119)

[The Fairy: Would you like to take your lesson, for my love?

Arlequin: No.

After giving Arlequin her ring.

The Fairy: There, now, take your lesson.

So the dance master taught Arlequin how to bow. Arlequin amuses himself with all his mind could come up with in this area.

Arlequin: I'm bored.]

In this scene we can perceive the desperation of the Fairy, as she gives away her magical ring, and the limitations of Arlequin concerning the life of nobility. On the contrary, the children portrayed in *La Danse* question nothing of their life and the rules of nobility that it contains. They simply go through the motions they have been taught.

Finally, this painting is also highly theatrical. Color and perspective are the primary indicators of this illusion. The sky, a mixture of blue, white, purple and green, contains colorations that seem unreal. The clouds seem purposefully placed and lack any sense of motion. They appear simply painted on, to render the scene more beautiful and rich. This also gives the impression of a backdrop. The chateau and trees seem to lack perspective and pertain more to a backdrop than to an actual countryside. The trees, for example, to the left back of the painting lack depth and detail. All this lack of perspective and the idyllic imagery enhance the theatrical aspect, making this captured moment appear more posed. Just as in a play or a ballet, the setting is motionless and serves a more decorative purpose. The only perspective in the painting is among the children in the foreground, similar to what one would expect to see in a theatre. The real action occurs in the actors who were placed in an unreal scene. Furthermore, the obedience of the children seems slightly unreal. According to Pierre

Schneider, these children are small versions of the adults who frequent the masquerades and other paintings of Watteau (Schneider, 1967, p. 70).

Similar to actors in a play, these children train themselves for life. Their actions, their dances, and their manner of speech come from years of lessons in order to appear “natural.” These children seem to have memorized their actions and movements, as if they have repeated them millions of times and require little concentration. They seem almost bored or, as with the girl dancing, a little sad. The girl in the center is the only child who seems to look out of the painting at the viewer. Her lips form a half smile, but her eyes communicate a feeling of sadness and emptiness as if the child within has been stolen.

Even the dog sleeps, lacking any interesting diversion. At this moment, they represent students of the noble life; just like Arlequin, nothing exists to entertain them at this stage. Yet, unlike Arlequin, these children know that they require these lessons in order to survive in their society, so they do not refuse to attend to and practice them. Arlequin’s rejection of his lessons signaled his coarseness and his boredom as well as his subversive nature. By the end of the play, he seems well aware of the code of sociability and uses this code to his advantage in order to gain the kingdom and power of the fairy. At this point, his ignorance seems feigned and he is no different than the members of the upper class who use the tricks of their code in order to attain more wealth and notability.

In summary, the illusions in the paintings of Watteau and in the text of Marivaux reflect perfectly the ambiguities of the noble life and their manner of communication. The important elements in *Arlequin, Poli par l’Amour*, such as the dance lessons, advice concerning love, and the teasing flirtation between Arlequin and Silvia, are the same integral aspects found in Watteau’s art. One does not know for certain if the children of the court really enjoy the game of their music and dance lessons, but it is certain that these lessons are necessary in the society of the aristocracy and upper bourgeois, specifically concerning amorous relations. This necessity explains the rather strong desire of the Fairy to see that Arlequin follows his lessons.

On the other hand, the peasants of *Le Faux Pas* represent the game of love as described by the cousin of Silvia. The painting contains signs of the flirtation between “peasants” similar to that of Arlequin and Silvia. The rituals of love involve a battle between control and freedom of desires. The upper bourgeoisie and aristocracy must suppress and control these desires; yet, through the disguise of peasants, they

may more easily break their own rules.

Finally, the effect of the theatre becomes very important. The actions represented in the paintings seem a mixture of the life in court and a play. This effect places these two worlds, that of the theatre and the court, in parallel. They embrace that training of people toward a particular goal and the disguising of oneself. The themes in *Arlequin, Poli par l’Amour* and Watteau’s paintings are not only symbols of myths and fairytales of the time, but also a real way of life and a specific code of sociability that controlled and determined the various classes found in early eighteenth century France. The masquerade lifestyle occurred at a significant moment, when a new flexibility in social representation began to emerge. Over the next several decades, actual social identities began to shift in the same way as was represented in the works of Watteau and Marivaux.

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