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book review of

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Nancy Locke

Manet and the Family Romance

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001

viii, 223 pp.; 97 b/w ill.; \$49.95

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Nancy Locke, associate professor at Wayne State University, presents a tightly written and compelling revision of her identically titled 1992 Harvard dissertation under T. J. Clark. In modern painting, as in modern life, an illusion of reality cannot be found without some type of tension. Édouard Manet's paintings display figures ill at ease in social situations; Charles-Pierre Baudelaire claimed that seemingly natural social relations were in fact, illusions. This concept, coupled with Sigmund Freud's idea of the "family romance" (used by Locke in the broadest sense of a mythology of the family created through tensions: desire, conflict, repression) and Louis Althusser's "ideology of the family" (important for its determination that psychoanalysis cannot be produced without consideration of historical materialism) provides the basis for this investigation. Locke does not believe in the application of Freud's theories by art historians, however, and prefers to "look upon Freud as a kind of ethnographer-or mythographer-of the nineteenth century" (p. 2).

Locke's thesis is, as she states, "more Foucauldian than Freudian" (p. 7) as the formation of self in relation to a wide range of social structures. She also sees her task as historical, and contingent on the writings of Baudelaire, Gustave Flaubert, and Guy de Maupassant; the biography of the Manet family; social changes, especially as they affected the upper bourgeoisie; and the artist's personal ambition to become a painter of modern life. Locke has a keen understanding of the paradoxical nature of positivism during the nineteenth century (amply demonstrated through a consideration of contemporary journal articles) and its resulting limited usefulness in decoding works of art by Manet. In fact, Locke argues that the paradoxes of positivism are themselves central to Manet's art and parallel a persistent quality of implausibility found in his paintings. Manet frequently painted members of his family, and a certain number of models appear with such regularity that they can be considered part of his family structure. While Locke examines many of Manet's masterpieces, *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862-63) receives the most attention, a pivotal work exemplifying a "family drama" and embodying many of the ideas put forth in this book.

Chapter one, "The Couch of Orestes," explains dream theories available to artists and writers during the nineteenth century, with particular reference to those promoted by Manet's circle of friends-Baudelaire and Edmond Duranty, among them-and the models upon which they based their ideas: Alfred Maury and Thomas De Quincey, whose *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) provides this chapter's title. Baudelaire was interested in De Quincey's belief that the mind was a "palimpsest of indestructible memories" thought to be the successive images "seen" during near-death experiences. Locke also explains Manet's interest in street people (such as those presented in *The Old Musician* of 1861-62) as not linked to their status as "modern" subjects per se, as most have claimed, but rather as a "dream image" expressive of Manet's interest in modern as well as past masters, including Velázquez.

The dream here operates as an "internalization of an earlier series of encounters": "the image displaces the figures from their discrete contexts and projects them onto what is almost a blank space" (p. 16). *The Old Musician* is interpreted through a consideration of De Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845). *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* is plumbed for its implausibilities with respect to historical material fact (bathing ordinances would not have allowed clothed men to be in close proximity to a nude woman); that it suggests "an anxiety dream of being naked in a social situation" (p. 22) leads to a documented analysis of portrayals of this type of dream scenario prior to the writings of Freud. Maury's well-known *Le sommeil et les rêves: Études psychologiques sur ces phénomènes* (1861) provided important information about the apparent "exteriority" of dreams which make them seem real, in addition to involuntary brain activity and hallucinations. Duranty not only used the term "pure paintings" to describe dreams, but also suggested that images "superimpose themselves on the blank, black background of the mind's eye-literally the eyelids" (p. 25). Locke does not have to strenuously argue that this theory could explain the blank backgrounds in Manet's paintings. The dreams and hallucinations similarly explain the uniting of figures seemingly disconnected from each other but nonetheless expressive of the familiar, the family. Locke considers actual dreamers in paintings by Paul Cézanne, Gustave Courbet, and Nicolas Poussin in order to demonstrate the gendering of the gaze in Manet's works as definitively male and to show how his art demonstrates materialism/positivism beyond the subject matter of *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*-to "the involuntary life of the mind" depicted there-and that it was fear of this representation that resulted in criticism.

The particulars of Manet's biography pertinent to Locke's study are taken up in chapter two, "Family Romances." His family's social standing, as members of the upper bourgeoisie, is considered in conjunction with Auguste Manet's profession, providing legal counsel to a number of specific social types, including prostitutes, who appear in Édouard's paintings. But the most important fact to be debated is the relationship between Suzanne Leenhoff (Édouard and Eugène's music teacher) and the painter's father. Léon Leenhoff, a son born to Suzanne and believed to have been fathered by Auguste, assumes an important role in the Manet's "family romance" because Édouard later married Suzanne and claimed the boy as his own. This unusual triangle of course has Freudian implications (even more so after Auguste's death, the probable result of syphilis), but Locke is measured with her assertions, never going too far afield from what could be reasonably assumed from painted evidence, including *Portrait of the Artist's Parents* (ca. 1859-60). The appearance of Eugène and his future wife, Berthe Morisot, in Manet's paintings, in addition to representations of Suzanne and Léon, are considered in terms of revealing the family's structure after Auguste's death. It is also proposed that Victorine Meurent's status as one of Auguste's clients explains her role in the oeuvre as a surrogate family member. While *La pêche* is the primary revelatory painting interpreted in this chapter, the "implausible" and the dream image are also applied convincingly to works featuring Victorine, such as *The Street Singer*. The construction of an implicitly male spectator is proposed to be Manet's father, as if Manet is "seeing (or imagining) what the father would have seen" (p. 83); this concept is then applied to *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*.

Chapter three, "The Space of Olympia," examines more carefully Victorine's role in the staging of Manet's family romances. Important here is the concept of desire and the role of prevalent prostitution in the artist's decision to compose Olympia in a particular way. The

literature of Flaubert is considered here, as are Alain Corbin's studies of prostitution and the considerable literature devoted to interpretation of Manet's masterpiece. Locke must distinguish her ideas from those of her mentor, T. J. Clark, and a significant portion of the chapter is devoted to this, as are the historical interpretations of Victorine's gaze. Freud and Lacan are discussed in conjunction with the painting, but ultimately Locke turns to Balzac and his *La muse du département* of 1843 (thought to have provided Manet's title for the painting), a fragment of which suggests the possible revenge of a husband who had been held prisoner in a cage under Olympia's bed.

The remainder of the book continues in the vein established by the third chapter, exploring relationships in conjunction with dream theory and nineteenth-century literature. Chapter four, "Manet Père et Fils," considers representations of fathers and sons in Manet's paintings as evidence of the relationship expressed (and suppressed) by the artist due to the triangular relationship with his brother/stepson. Chapter five, "The Promises of a Face," is devoted to representations of Berthe Morisot as representative of fulfilled and unfulfilled desires on the part of both the painter and his sitter.

It is no small task to enter the fray of scholarship on Manet, which every year expands at such a rate it seems unlikely that anything new can or should be said. Some scholars may find fault with some of Locke's more tenuous claims, such as the lack of overt anxiety in *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, to support her interpretation of the painting as a manifestation of a "naked in a social situation" dream (p. 22). The connection between Manet's blank backgrounds and the notion of dream images appearing on the insides of the eyelids is similarly questionable. But the ideas combined with an impressive clarity in writing makes for an exciting read. Locke anticipates and deflects potential criticism of her blending of historical materialism with psychoanalytic interpretation by clearly exposing her methodology and reasoning through the pros and cons of her method. She carefully defines her use of terms—"the subject," "the object," and "desire"—without becoming tedious. Locke draws connections between her conclusions and those put forth by T. J. Clark, Michael Fried, and others, explaining when various theories reinforce each other and when they stand at opposite ends of the art historical spectrum. The same careful consideration is given to the potential pitfalls of various psychoanalytic approaches utilized by Meyer Schapiro, Jack Spector, Mary Mathews Gedo, Hal Foster Briony Fer, and Michel Foucault. Locke's "attempt to integrate the life of the artist into a reading of formal and contextual issues" and "unravel the ways in which the artist's 'work' encompasses more than what gets made in the studio" (p. 7) has, at least in this reader's opinion, been successful.

Patricia Mathews

Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art

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xii, 313 pp.; 83 b/w ills., 15 colorpls.; \$35.00

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It should come as no surprise that Symbolism has stimulated increasing interest among scholars and the general public over the past few years. As the twenty-first century arrived, the conditions of anxiety under which earlier artists had worked at the dawn of the twentieth century were repeated—even magnified—due in large part to significant advances in

technology. In her book *Passionate Discontent* Patricia Mathews, associate professor at Oberlin College, exemplifies a current tendency in art historical discourse: the reconciliation of historical context with feminist and post-structuralist theory.

Taking as her starting point a wide range of symbolist ideas present in literature, art, and culture, Mathews often focuses on gendered constructions of genius. Her primary consideration is the manifestation of symbolist tendencies in France, especially apparent in the writings of those critics termed "Idealists"-Albert Aurier, Remy de Gourmont, Camille Mauclair-and the artists who are linked with them, including Gustave Moreau, Puvis de Chavannes, Odilon Redon, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, the Nabis, Fernand Khnopff, Félicien Rops, and Jean Delville. The Idealist/Wagnerians Todor de Wyzewa and Joséphin Péladan, prominent Symbolist proponents in their own right, are considered to a far lesser extent. The other prominent group of Symbolists-those who are viewed as Neo-Impressionists-are not considered at all.

In the first chapter, "The Symbolist Aesthetic," Mathews relies heavily on her dissertation, published in 1986 under the title *Aurier's Symbolist Art Criticism and Theory*. But rather than providing a sweeping overview of "philosophical synthesis of genius and gender, of productive suffering, of creative responsibility and of artistic identity" (p. 3), as promised in the introduction, this chapter remains obfuscatory, in part due to a lack of specific documentation (especially noticeable with regard to the role of alchemy or the place of Péladan). While Mathews makes a very compelling case for the importance of Aurier and his theoretical position at the time, she does not firmly establish the ways in which artists agreed with or implemented Aurier's theories in their own works. Because Aurier's position was extreme, a reliance on his points of view results in a fundamental problem: Must every artist examined in Mathews's text be weighed against Aurier's conclusions? At the same time, Mathews does a good job in establishing a series of the basic tenets found in Symbolism, including the ways in which mystical "truth" (art) exists on a higher plane; how intuition provides insight into the absolute; the value of the anticommercial, cynical, isolated artist who is prone to suffering and even madness; and color theory, Neo-Platonism, alchemy, mesmerism, and hypnotism seen as scientific or quasi scientific influences. Somewhat less satisfactory are references to women's intuition "squandered and deformed by feminine shortcomings" (p. 6) and the notion that "history was the discourse against which the Symbolists asserted the value of the primitive" (p. 22).

Chapter two, "The Symbolist Aesthetic in Context," provides the missing context for Symbolism through a series of familiar themes that are given an extensive attention: the rise of the bourgeoisie; the advent of department stores; the increasing number of visible prostitutes; and rampant political issues that focused on universal secular education, nationalism, imperialism, and the validity of increased art education. In examining this material, Mathews cites a series of "classic" studies by Simmel, Benjamin, Adorno, and Veblen in order to put the alienation of the Symbolists into context while providing the basis for the group's critique of capitalism. In her discussion of the political foci of the Symbolists, Mathews utilizes Richard Terdiman's concept of counterdiscourse superficially rather than in the fabric of her arguments. More troublesome, she has difficulty examining the often contradictory nature of her assertions and it is difficult to prove her claims due to the Symbolists' very private nature.

"The Ecstasy and the Agony," chapter three, addresses the role of genius and its connection to madness. Mathews tries to demonstrate how gender influences the "debate" over the nature of genius. To this end, hysteria is important because it maintains gender differences and female vulnerability. She states that the "feminizing structure" of ecstasy and intuition were central to the Symbolist aesthetic yet at the same time posed a threat to the "structure of masculine creativity" (pp. 3-4). These ideas rely on material from her first chapter, in addition to texts by Max Nordau, Lombroso, and Sander Gilman. Chapter three is divided into sections on the philosophers of degeneracy, the Positivists, and "artistic versus scientific constructions of genius." The latter compares Plato and Schopenhauer but fails to show how either is relevant to her thesis. Neo-Platonism, though frequently mentioned, is not defined as a theory. The question inevitably arises, Were the French fully cognizant of these theories? Mathews asserts that "those who threatened to destabilize society's increasingly institutionalized order, such as prostitutes, homosexuals, or liberated women, were relegated to the pathological realism as physiologically perverted" (p. 58). In this chapter Foucault is the favored post-structuralist theorist, and Mathews's most obviously contradictory claim is that scientists integrated mysticism into their theories, thus making mysticism "objective." If this is true, why didn't the Symbolists reject mysticism?

Mathews's artistic test case for madness in chapter three is Van Gogh; in chapter four, "The Gender of Creativity," Mathews focuses on the sculptor Camille Claudel, who, however, was institutionalized *after* she stopped creating works of art. Using the theoretical premises contained in Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Mary Jacobus' "Is There a Woman in the Text?," Christine Battersby's *Gender and Genius*, and Jacques Lacan, Mathews delves into a reexamination of cultural politics, biological determinism, hysteria, and feminism—none of which she links to the artist in question. The critical reaction to effeminacy is determined only by reliance on the work of Aurier. Humorous popular illustrations (ranging from much-too-early works by Honoré Daumier to appropriately dated contributions by Albert Robida) are properly introduced as indicators of gender attitudes but often they are interpreted without consideration of the accompanying captions—which sometimes reveal a meaning contrary to the one being advanced by Mathews. Similarly, the literature of Jules Bois is recognized as valuable but it is introduced without a fuller awareness of the broad range of his body of work. One cannot help but wonder how Camille Claudel's institutionalization in 1913 is compatible with Mathews's claim that female genius was perceived as threatening—it was, after all, decried in the press. Moreover, the paucity of documentation on the reasons for Claudel's institutionalization (and the fact that it may have been financially motivated by family members) makes her a less than adequate choice to demonstrate the theoretically across-the-board view of female genius as dangerous and in need of containment.

The weakest segment is the fifth chapter, "Gendered Bodies I: Sexuality, Spirituality, and Fear of Women." Mathews relies too heavily on Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity* and repeats many of the same images from this earlier book without regard to the nationality of the artists, their socio-political positions, or their specific personal situations. This chapter also includes digressions into academic romantic painting, the "gaze" as utilized in horror films, and a further use of the theories of Lacan. In her introduction, Mathews claims that this segment will consider "symbolist representations of 'woman' from the perspective of masculinities" (p. 4). While she does effectively study the power relationships existing in the

artist/audience/subject of works by male and female symbolists, Mathews's treatment of the *androgyny* is cursory; she ironically states that discussion of it, and the homosexual implications raised, are beyond the scope of her book. She also identifies three types of women—"femme fatale," "androgynous," and "pure woman" (alternately referred to as "tropes," "ciphers," and examples of "sexual uncanniness"). She does not, however, document how these types were expressions of "shifting public roles of women and increasing pressure on masculinities" or how they "exposed the precariousness of gender roles insistently normalized through cultural discourses" (p. 107).

In chapter six, "Symbolist Women Artists," Mathews reexamines Camille Claudel, supplemented with allusions to other artists, including Elizabeth Gardner and Marie Bashkirtseff, and brief mention of women artists who were truly Symbolists: Elizabeth Sonrel and Jeanne Jacquemin.

In chapters seven and eight, Mathews organizes case studies entitled "Gendered Bodies I" and "Gendered Bodies II" using Paul Gauguin and Suzanne Valadon, respectively. Neither of these artists were Idealists proper, and even the ideas of Paul Gauguin, as transmitted to Sérusier (those which come the closest to Idealist tenets), are undercut by reference to only his Tahitian works. A discussion of Gauguin in conjunction with his grandmother, French sociologist and feminist Flora Tristan, is rendered moot by footnotes that reveal he knew little about her theories. Suzanne Valadon's works, apparently included to show a woman using masculinizing tendencies in representations of female nudes, do not fit Mathews's stated time frame. Their late dates cannot really "prove" anything about how gender or class had an impact on how women's works were viewed by critics in the late nineteenth century. In arguing Valadon's "outsider" status, Mathews admits that this artist is not typical but nevertheless goes on to compare her paintings with Modigliani, Cabanel, Steinlen, and Manet, supposedly to reveal "symbolist tropes" and how "primitivism allows ciphers of the working class to be palatable/pleasurable" (p. 186).

I do not doubt that some will hail this book for deconstructing the Symbolists' strengths while suggesting that women artists active during the same period are worthier of attention. But overall Mathews has not delivered what she promises in her introduction—a consideration of a wide range of Symbolist artists and writers unified in their Idealist beliefs. Rather, she provides considerable study of Albert Aurier then focuses on works by artists whose individual connections to Idealist discourse remains tenuous. Her idiosyncratic case studies—Gauguin and Valadon—cannot stand as representative of tendencies in gendered representations and the resulting critical assessment. Similarly, her use of Van Gogh and Camille Claudel cannot be considered archetypal for the concept of madness. Their individual experiences are hardly representative of a "norm," and the brief time Van Gogh was in Paris does not warrant the attention he receives. Few of the examples the author uses to support her claims that "shifting gender boundaries threatened the coherency of what was the most rigidly theorized division between masculine and feminine conditions" and that "symbolists took on the creative personae of feminized masculinity, only to obfuscate it with masculinist rhetoric and imagery" (p. 1) demonstrate such a transformation. And she fails to deliver convincing evidence that the "nefarious and vaudevillian theoretical tactics" used by writers ensured that female genius remained a "structural impossibility" (p. 2) or

document an actual fight between the intuitive Symbolists and empirical scientists of the nineteenth century.

While there are significant ideas embedded in her text, Mathews short-circuits her scholarship with heavy reliance on secondary sources and a thinly developed use of feminist and post-structuralist theory. Her belief that her chapters form a contiguous, not continuous, narrative-"loosely interconnected cultural positions in order to convey complexity of the nature and gender of artistic identity and practice in fin-de-siècle France" (p. 3)-seems an excuse for a lack of central organization. Even the time frame under consideration, the end of the nineteenth century, is compromised by her female case studies, for both Claudel's madness and Valadon's genius fall well in the twentieth century. Mathews claims to reveal polarities, examples of "performative contradictions," and the degree to which women artists "reveal the limits of [gender ideology's] discursive formation" (pp. 219-20). She tries to describe the "multiplicity and ideological boundaries of the late nineteenth century French notion of the creative while at the same time exploring the sites and significances of its exclusion" (p. 220). Yet, in the final analysis, Mathews simply tries to tackle too much. Her study remains an amalgamation of generalizations, perceived history, and the utilization of contemporary theory often embedded in language that is difficult to comprehend. She is fully aware of the pertinent literature, as her substantial bibliography attests. What is needed is a more well-rounded examination of Symbolism, in all its diversity and complexity, while building on the imperative gender issues that Mathews has identified. In that light, this discourse must be viewed as a beginning rather than the definitive text on the topic at hand.

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