

**Eunice Lipton, *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Model and Her Own Desire*. New York, Meridian, 1994 (first published London, Thames and Hudson, 1993), 181 pp., no illus.**

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This also leads to a proscription on representation of any kind, and it is in fact the position to which Belton is led: the repudiation of any kind of imagery whatsoever, whether in poetry or in art, as inherently alienating and objectifying. He proposes instead, after Alice Jardine, that “we enter together an era of post-representation” (257), Jardine’s utopian vision of direct communication – one that is not all that different from the utopia envisioned by Tristan Tzara in his 1935 book *Grains et Issues* – which Belton wants to accomplish in the now, and to which surrealism furnishes the negative example. Representation must become political and conscious; it must step outside the realm of the image, which is equated with the Imaginary, with its constructions of Woman that are entirely ideological in character. At the same time, so many of the author’s other views – a normative sexuality which is highly distrustful of perversion, masturbation and non-genital sex; a faith in abstract reason; a belief in the necessity of social integration – are frighteningly conservative.

There is no question that the surrealists were frequently sexist and even misogynist, in an all-too-frequent replication of the pervasive sexism of their society; this needs to be subject to the kind of sustained scrutiny that Belton undertakes here. Xavière Gauthier’s lively and often brilliant polemic *Surréalisme et sexualité*, published in 1971, is still worth reading in this regard, and Susan Suleiman’s *Subversive Intent* remains, in my opinion, the best introduction to date to what such a critique would look like, one which attends to form and intertextuality in its dissatisfaction with the kind of thematic reading for the plot engaged in by Andrea Dworkin, for example, in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. It is perhaps the integral nature of Belton’s critique of representation (its rejection, even), that leads him to his own thematic reading, a forgetting of the specificity and complexity of imagery that makes his reading of surrealism both monolithic and disputable.

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EUNICE LIPTON, *Alias Olympia: A Woman’s Search for Manet’s Model and Her Own Desire*. New York, Meridian, 1994 (first published London, Thames and Hudson, 1993), 181 pp., no illus.

Admittedly I began reading *Alias Olympia* with fanciful preconceptions about feminist identifications and desires, intimated I thought by the words “woman’s search” and “desire” in the book’s subtitle. A few hours later, I concluded somewhat dejectedly that it was necessary to highlight the

- 1 Susan Gubar, “Representing Pornography: Feminism, Criticism, and Depictions of Female Violation,” *Critical Inquiry*, 13 (Summer 1987), 712-41; Mary Ann Caws, “Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art,” in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), 262-87.
- 2 Belton is quoting Carolyn Dean here, from her discussion of Pichon in *The Self and Its Pleasures* (Ithaca, NY, 1992).
- 3 See “The ‘Old Mole’ and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* and *Surrealist*,” trans. Donald M. Leslie, Jr., in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, 1985), 32-44.
- 4 Belton is citing a passage here from the *Second Manifesto*, which he had discussed earlier. Can we see the hostility to any kind of modernist art practice here?
- 5 The brackets interpolate Belton’s own words into a quotation from Erich Fromm’s *Greatness and Limitation of Freud’s Thought*, in which Fromm is characterizing narcissism.
- 6 Belton associates a series of photographs of Zürn in bondage, taken by her partner Hans Bellmer in 1958, with her suicide twelve years later, though wisely he does not posit any *direct* connection between the two events.
- 7 A closer look at the photograph in question suggests that Chirico’s *Dream of Tobias*, positioned directly behind Breton’s head, could function as a papal tiara, if one were inclined that way. Breton was first referred to as the “pope” of surrealism in October 1924, in an article by Maurice Martin du Gard in the *Nouvelles littéraires*.
- 8 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, trans. Patrick Camiller (1984; London, 1994), 49-50.
- 9 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 16; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, 1986), 45.

words “her own” from the subtitle and the word “Alias” from the title: Lipton adopts the alias “Olympia” for her own searches, frustrations, anxieties and sexuality, while the elusive Victorine Meurent merely haunts the shadows of a book written a scant ninety-five years after her death.

Such a book is difficult to review and impossible to approach except from a personal position. At the very least, Lipton confronts the reader with the self and insists upon conflation, a kind of collapsing of boundaries between the position of art historian (intellect) and person (feeling). The

difficulty came when, as reader, I felt subsumed by Lipton's universal "we" while knowing (and sensing) that I was far removed from her totalized American art historian: "No matter what our actual ethnic background or political philosophies, we are all Protestant capitalists longing for permission to play." (p. 58) This quandary is endemic to the book: a pressure exists to be her kind of feminist, her kind of art historian; the book is personal but carries with it a statement which loudly declares, "admit it; this is you," and it is not always "you."

Most often I confronted a discrepancy between the feminist art historian and the desire to write about men. Even when writing about women, Lipton usually writes about men: "Morisot (1841-1895) was an obvious choice [to write about], despite the fact that I didn't much like her work. She was an ambitious artist and a beautiful woman whom Manet relished painting. Like other Impressionists, she specialized in domestic and bucolic scenes.... Manet made a number of extraordinary paintings of Morisot during the late 1860s and early 1870s..." (p. 39). When a grant did not materialize for the work on the French women artists, Lipton rationalized: "But I never got the grant, and I chucked Cassatt and Morisot. I had to admit, finally, that, however fascinated and outraged I was by their predicaments, their wealth and privilege bored me." (p. 42) Is the reader to assume that the wealth, the privilege and, one might add, the power of Manet or Degas did *not* bore her? Why not?

In 1982 Griselda Pollock wrote that "[m]uch theory has helped to warn us that the material of our feelings, our most intimate experience of identity and of sexuality are socially permeated, if not constructed and constrained by determinations outside our [sic] control and consciousness."<sup>1</sup> More recently Gen Doy scrutinized questions of gender and class, challenging feminist art historians to examine more closely and less dismissively concerns for economics as well as sex and sexuality. With reference to the female members of the French impressionist group, Doy suggests that "we need to be careful of categorizing men and women of the *haute-bourgeois* artistic circles into fixed role models of gender difference purporting to accurately describe the facts of their lives."<sup>2</sup> The wealth of Cassatt and Morisot provided privilege but did not erase the prescribed role as "woman" in a hierarchical society. Concomitantly, Meurant's lack of wealth and privilege did not totally oppress her any more than her gender totally oppressed her, and while sexuality, class and economics play an intricately entwined role in Lipton's book, the issues appear in her text only to disappear into flashbacks of Lipton's infancy, Lipton's adolescence, or Lipton's infatuation with Dostoyevsky (does

Lipton read literature written by women?). Lipton shows little concern for the broader class-related issues of "model;" her brief insights into the lives of this group of nineteenth-century women give only glimpses into how they lived, where they studied, and where and how they worked. Does Lipton surmise that many more women were artists as well as models? She mentions Suzanne Valedon and Victorine Meurent, but Gwen John modelled and so did Camille Claudel. What I miss in the book is a real concern for the historical producing and produced subject located within late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Parisian culture and society.

To her credit, Lipton remains interested in the life and work of the more "intriguing" Valadon, but because she "knew a smart woman who was already working on her," Meurent became Lipton's subject (p. 42), and thus began the difficult search for the model/artist. Lipton's Parisian archival pains and frustrations epitomize and categorize the struggles, the differences and the discipline of art history. Long criticized by historians (and by marxist art historians) for frivolously attaching meaning exclusively within the clearly bounded frame of a picture, art historians too often ignore the richness of the archive and too easily give up when its secrets resist probing searches. Anyone who has worked on the production of woman artists knows the feelings of thwarting and apparent or actual defeat only too well. Lipton, most comfortable with Picasso, Degas and Manet, had a career of successes rooted in easy access to visual and archival material before she tackled the more evasive, buried world of the woman artist. Here, as an aside and to elaborate upon her own feminism, I interpose Lipton's account of a late 1970s meeting of [mostly male] art historians at the Museum of Modern Art in New York which is, in almost every way, the centre of the book, and which represents most eloquently the conflation of female/feminist art historian with the to-be-looked-at non-producing model: Lipton alias Olympia resists her place but loses her job. (pp. 95-99) Thus, while it is clear that Lipton recognizes and adopts a feminist position, her pondering on Mina Curtiss ("although I had this gnawing feeling that she was just another girl who had lost her steam"), for example, raises many questions about her commitment. And while Lipton recognizes that she is searching for the "individual," thereby reproducing the kind of art history feminists have been carefully criticizing for years, she also recognizes the pain of abandoning an only recently discovered "real" historical female person (there are so few). I have asked before and shall ask again: does a deconstruction of the male genius do much for women? Does another book on Picasso, even if it analyses, re-writes and condemns his

representation of women, mean that we know more about women? Does yet another book on the shelves about Degas mean that we “read” him differently and thereby assist the cause of women? Now, we have Lipton’s new book which, while it sometimes annoys (this reader), also lavishes caring and careful searching on the difficult-to-find female worker. Nevertheless, too often I read “conspiracy” into Lipton’s work, and too often I feel an unwillingness to seek beyond oppression toward a more theoretical and more practical searching for a subject: the woman working as an artist and as a model, surviving in a world that gave her small spaces in which to negotiate her claims for existence. In Lipton’s book Meurent speaks with Lipton’s voice: Lipton speaks *for* her, not *about* her. Thus, the twentieth-century art historian erases again, from her powerful position as “holder” of knowledge and information, the unobtrusive, almost disappearing voice of Victorine Meurent.

When it came to writing this review, I wondered how many art historians have fantasized themselves as writers of fictions; after all, Anita Brookner succeeded in the realms of both fiction and fact. How many of us have gazed intensely into the eyes of a painted portrait, longing to read the most intimate thoughts of the sitter and commit those thoughts to paper. Desire became printed matter for Eunice Lipton as she took her yearning to enter the mind of Victorine Meurent out of fantasy into the decidedly vulnerable world of scrutinizing readers. Thus, Lipton brings together her most poignant and personal anxieties with her most intense intellectual endeavours to make a different kind of history, but one which is honestly subjective if sometimes overly indulgent. Certainly, fictional accounts of lives can be written as well-researched reconstructions, but few have dared to combine fiction with what is lovingly referred

to as empirical evidence. Frances Sherwood’s eloquently written *Vindication* (1993) accurately as well as fictionally brings Mary Wollstonecraft to life for the late twentieth-century reader, while Jane Miller’s *Seductions* (1990) joins together the author’s coming to feminism with a personal story of her great-aunt and a critique of the theorists many feminists read and emulate: Raymond Williams, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon. Similarly, Catherine Hall, in her introduction to *White, Male and Middle-Class* (1992) treats us to her personal interaction with marxism and feminism in the early 1970s, and the coinciding of her own directions with those of *History Workshop*. Lipton’s history is more visceral. Written from the analyst’s couch, so to speak, its passion is more raw, its directions less contained. Confronting such palpable desire emanating from the mind of an academic is unusual. Lipton has “gone off the boil.” She has abandoned the serious and become frivolous, but with the frivolity come issues of desire, particularly female desire: how does desire co-exist with art history or, more to the point, *can* desire co-exist with art history? Certainly, if a book can raise such questions, it is an important book (even though its short sentences are annoying), and more certainly it is a book that will be loved and hated, perhaps at the same time.

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- 1 Griselda Pollock in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-1985* (London, 1987), 246.
- 2 Gen Doy, *Seeing and Consciousness: Women, Class and Representation* (Oxford, 1995), 64.

DAVID H. SOLKIN, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993, 312 pp., ill.

Some days I think that the primary function of certain recent writing on eighteenth-century British art is to demonstrate that the artistic milieu of the period was singularly influenced by the writings of the prominent aesthetic and moral philosopher, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Both Paul Monod in “Painters and Party Politics in England, 1714-1760” and Stephen Copley in “The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture” ground their arguments in the persuasive framework of the Shaftesburian discourse.<sup>1</sup> These two authors employ the terms of John Barrell, whose 1986 book, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to*

*Hazlitt*. “*The Body of the Public*,” begins with an account of Shaftesbury as the spokesman of the theory of civic humanism. Barrell borrowed this term from J.G.A. Pocock’s highly influential work of 1975, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Republican Thought and the Atlantic Tradition*. David Solkin’s most recent book, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, explicitly refers to and takes up the terms of Barrell’s model of civic humanism to explore the socio-political significance of specific cultural phenomena.

In short, civic humanism is a theory of government wherein a citizen’s private interests are allied with those of the public body and achieved through an active public life. For Shaftesbury and other eighteenth-century theorists, such as Jonathan Richardson and George Turnbull, art clearly