

**Nancy Locke: Manet and the Family Romance, Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press 2002, 223 S., 97 b&w-illus., ISBN 0-691-11484-6, GBP 18,95**

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The essential premise of Nancy Locke's study of Manet is that we can understand and interpret much of the artist's œuvre in terms of family psychology, especially in works in which Manet uses members of his family and immediate circle as models. As we might expect, much of this book is grounded on Freudian ideas of family dynamics although we also hear about pre-Freudian notions of dream theory in the 19th century and how such theories implicate meaning in Manet. Early on in the book Locke tells us about Manet's relationship with his father and how this rapport gives energy and significance to his paintings. Many of Locke's arguments for meaning in Manet depend upon her claim that Suzanne Leenhoff's son Léon was not the child of Suzanne and Manet born out of wedlock as many have assumed, but the son of Manet's father, Auguste. Although there is no real evidence to support this allegation, the notion complicates the family romance that she sees as pivotal to understanding the artist's works. Manet married Suzanne Leenhoff in 1863 when Léon was eleven years old. According to Locke Manet thus married the mother of his half brother. Although the author is primarily interested in the Oedipal situations in the Manet family she also explores the legal issues involved in legitimate and illegitimate children in 19th-century France and devotes a chapter to the theme of fathers and sons in Manet's art broadly defined (she includes his paintings of Christ and Hamlet as well as his numerous portrayals of Léon who appears in so many of his paintings).

In her introduction Locke explains why she believes psychoanalysis provides a useful model for looking at Manet. She evokes Foucault's complex ideas of the family structure in his "History of Sexuality" [1] when she explains how she wishes to use psychoanalysis as a methodological approach in a broad rather than narrow or dogmatic way: "My thesis here is more Foucauldian than Freudian. In these essays I wish not so much to propose a Freudian source for a certain image or pictorial interest as to consider how a particular sort of repression might operate in contradictory ways: as the internalized enforcement of a bourgeois code of conduct, and at the same time, an incitement to rebel against it." (7). Throughout the book, in fact, Locke employs multiple methodologies: she uses the biographical model as the underlying basis of her study, the Freudian or psychoanalytic model in terms of specific paintings within the larger framework of social art history and finally employs techniques of close looking and visual analysis to demonstrate

her points. She references Clark's "The Painting of Modern Life" and Fried's "Manet's Modernism" as major precedents which inform her study but from which she will significantly diverge. [2]

In chapter 1, "The Couch of Orestes", before she launches into the family romance theme which occupies the remainder of the book, Locke addresses dream theories of the 19th century that may have influenced Manet as they did his friends Duranty and Baudelaire. She discusses in particular the importance of Maury's "Le sommeil et les rêves". [3] Referencing liberally Thomas de Quincey's "Confessions of an Opium-Eater" of 1821 as well as its use by Baudelaire in "Les paradis artificiels", she posits that an understanding of theories concerning dreams and the unconscious which were compelling for the educated elite in France help to explain the mysterious or oneiric qualities of such paintings as 'The Old Musician' (c. 1861-2) and the 'Déjeuner sur l'herbe' of 1862-63 (we also hear about Cézanne's treatment of the latter theme). Locke believes that these paintings, composites of the real and the imagined, reveal Manet's interest in the suspension of free will and moral volition that characterize the dream state (23, 27, 37-38).

In chapter two, "Family Romances", Locke reveals how she proposes to look at paintings by Manet that lend themselves to an analysis based on biography, works in which family members appear as subjects or models. She states the thesis of her book in the following succinct terms: "the theme of the family was not only a central one in Manet's art [...] but also [...] a kind of family romance can be seen to develop in and through his figure paintings. [...] By 'family romance' I mean a Freudian drama, complete with Oedipal desires, dilemmas of illegitimacy, and real and imagined deaths and absences." (41-42). Central to her analyses of paintings in this chapter is that Manet imagines his father as the primary viewer so that the subjects and styles are directed principally to this "ideal" spectator: "I would like to imagine the father as the imaginary spectator of the 'Absinthe Drinker' and I will be pursuing this line of thought with several early Manet paintings. [...] the presence of this special form, or position of 'spectatorship' - let us call it seeing (or imagining) *what the father would have seen* - is crucial to my argument that we can observe an Oedipal family drama at play in Manet's early work." (64, 83). In other words, for her analyses of these paintings as Oedipal to work we need to accept her idea that Manet is directing his art to his father, that his father is both voyeur and sometimes subject in these works. In addition to family portraits and genre paintings that are really group portraits of family and friends such as 'Music in the Tuileries Garden' (c.1862), she applies this idea of the father as ideal viewer to the 'The Absinthe Drinker' (1859), 'The Street Singer' (1862), 'Fishing' (1861) and 'The Surprised Nymph' (1859-61).

Similarly, in chapter 3, "The Space of Olympia", Locke asks us to see that the features of Manet's model Victorine Meurent resemble those of his mother as she appears in his portraits of her. If we accept that the prostitute Olympia, eponymous heroine of Manet's masterpiece of 1865,

is really the artist's way of representing his mother, then we will also be persuaded by the Freudian analysis Locke proffers: "What to make of this Freudian situation? What is the significance of a resemblance between a favored model and the artist's mother, or of a controversial image of a nude prostitute who is wearing the mother's jewelry (that fetishizes the artist himself)? And what if this favored model is the central subject of a group of paintings undertaken at a feverish pace, many of them in the year or so after the father's death, in which the model appears in roles and costumes ranging from itinerant to courtesan to travestied bullfighter? What would Freud say?" (105). The author then treats us to one of the classic passages of Freud's Oedipal theories in which the little boy discovers that his mother has sexual intercourse with his father and is jealous of this infidelity because he desires her himself.

Locke continues to explore the Oedipal theme in Chapter 4: "I have entitled this chapter 'Manet père et fils' because the arrival of Léon, as well as the death of Auguste Manet, create conditions in which Oedipal ambivalence could take palpable form." (133). Although Locke looks at the father/son nexus that she sees as the basis of Manet's paintings of Christ (1864, 1865) as well as Hamlet (1865, 1877, 1877-78), she principally examines the range of genre paintings in which Léon appears as a model. She offers a particularly engaging analysis of 'Le Déjeuner dans l'atelier' (1868) in which Léon appears as the central figure. Although she examines the reappearance of the oneiric in this painting she attributes the notable estrangement of the figures from one another, their lack of connectedness in this painting and Léon's singular aloofness in terms of his illegitimacy. She explains how Manet comes to terms with Léon's status in his many representations of him in light of the social standing of illegitimate children in France.

In the last major chapter, "The Promises of a Face" (a title taken from Baudelaire's "Les Promesses d'un visage"), Locke asks us to view Manet's many depictions of Berthe Morisot, his student and future sister-in-law, as self-identification or forms of self-portraiture. She writes: "What would it mean, I wondered, for Manet to paint Morisot as 'himself' or himself as Morisot? [...] The argument I would like to make here positions Morisot both as a subjectival presence in Manet's art and as a kind of feminine *reflection* of a male subject. Morisot's image, of course, would not represent anything like a literal self-portrait or mirror image, but rather, the projection of an ideal, or what Freud called the ego ideal. [...] One could say that in Manet's paintings of Berthe Morisot, there is a projection of the self onto a portrayal of the Other's gaze at that self, and that projection becomes legible in the act of viewing." (147, 164-165). In spite of this largely tendentious perspective Locke offers some perceptive visual analyses and discussions of several of Manet's major depictions of Morisot such as 'The Balcony' (1868-9) and 'Repose' (1870).

Her eclectic methodological approaches lead Locke to re-examine Manet's art from a variety of perspectives that make for interesting reading even if one does not accept her premises of the family romance and Manet's

Oedipal struggles revealed in his paintings. Her study serves to contextualize Manet's art in the realm of 19th-century pre-Freudian psychology (her examination of the importance of dreams and the unconscious is particularly relevant) and her forays into Freudian and Foucauldian analysis, if not always persuasive, nonetheless inspire the reader to look more closely and think further about this fascinating corpus of paintings.

Notes:

[1] Michel Foucault: *History of Sexuality*. New York 1988.

[2] Timothy J. Clark: *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*. New York 1984; Michael Fried: *Manet's Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*. Chicago 1996.

[3] Alfred Maury: *Le sommeil et les rêves: études psychologiques sur ces phénomènes*. Paris 1861.

Redaktionelle Betreuung: Ekaterini Kepetzis

**Empfohlene Zitierweise:**

Dorothy Johnson: Rezension von: *Nancy Locke: Manet and the Family Romance, Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press 2002*, in: **sehepunkte** 5 (2005), Nr. 2 [15.02.2005], URL: <<http://www.sehepunkte.historicum.net/2005/02/4327.html>>

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issn 1618-6168