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Men Looking at Women through Art: Male Gaze and Spectatorship in Three Nineteenth-Century French Novels

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> "Her body is arranged the way it is, to display it to the man looking at the picture. The picture is made to appeal to *his* sexuality. It has nothing to do with her sexuality. . . . Women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own."
>
> John Berger

> "Representing creativity as masculine and Woman as the beautiful image for the desiring masculine gaze, High Culture systematically denies knowledge of women as producers of culture and meanings."
>
> Griselda Pollock

Recently, feminist criticism has shown an acute interest in the role played by the gaze in the creation of male erotic fantasies. By associating vision with the masculine perversion of voyeurism, feminist criticism, particularly in the study of cinema and art history, has demonstrated a renewed interest in the psychoanalytic notion of femininity as a visual representation of male

sexual desire.[1] Indeed, feminist criticism links the privileging of vision in Western societies with male sexual privilege (Owens 70). The nineteenth-century male esthete did not have erotic movies at his disposal, but he is often depicted as spending considerable time gazing at art objects such as paintings and statues. In Eugène Fromentin's *Dominique*, for instance, the protagonist gazes upon a painting of his beloved during a period in which she has forbidden him to see her. Thus, for the duration of the art exhibition, the painting serves as a replacement for his absent loved one. In Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the esthete d'Albert frequently gazes upon art objects, while his goal in love is to find a woman who is as beautiful as a work of art. Indeed, the number of male artists and esthetes in nineteenth-century French literature is striking. Women are generally portrayed as the muse, model, or object of art (or some combination of the three), but rarely as those who actively look at or produce art. An examination of three different protagonists' encounters with paintings and engravings, in light of Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," will serve to explore nineteenth-century depictions of the esthete/art object relationship. By examining three novelistic examples, in works by the Goncourts, Flaubert, and Huysmans respectively, I hope to gain some insights into the male artist's gaze and the power relationships it implies.

Scopophilia, Voyeurism, Fetishism

Filmmaker Laura Mulvey's essay, in associating cinema with the masculine perversions of voyeurism (sexual pleasure gained through seeing alone, without active participation in the sexual act) and scopophilia (what Freud defined as taking other people

1. Although we are not convinced that only men are voyeurs, most psychologists and feminist critics conceive of voyeurism as primarily a masculine perversion. See Freud, Irigaray, and Mulvey.

as objects by subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze) has generated an enormous amount of discussion in the last decade on the distinct masculinity of the cinematic gaze. Using Freudian and Lacanian theory, Mulvey argued that visual pleasures in mainstream Hollywood cinema are based on voyeuristic and fetishistic ways of looking. The major trope of the cinematic apparatus is the active, mastering male gaze which subjects the passive, fragmented, and silenced image of woman. Thus, visual pleasure derives from and reproduces a structure of male looking/female "to-be-looked-at-ness" which replicates the structure of unequal power relations between men and women. Because of the ways the looks are structured, the spectator necessarily identifies with the male protagonist in the narrative, and thus with the objectification of the female figure via the male gaze. That is, through scopophilia, voyeurism, and fetishism, the male spectator is able to identify with the film's active male protagonist and simultaneously disarm the threat posed by the image of the "castrated" female body.[2] Thus, the construction of woman as spectacle is built into the apparatus of dominant cinema, and the spectator position which is produced by the film narrative is necessarily a masculine one. This sort of structuring of visual pleasure, Mulvey concludes, must be disrupted in order to facilitate a feminist cinema.

In the present study I will discuss some examples (or near-examples) of the genre called the "nude"--a genre practiced almost exclusively by and for men as a male construct of female desirability. In several cases, the male protagonist gazes upon a painting which portrays fully-clothed men gazing upon nude or semi-nude women who perform, as spectacle, for both the spectator of the painting as well as the spectator within the painting. Thus, many of the artworks described in these novels enact pictorially the active/passive dichotomy--a dichotomy which Mulvey sees as the main structuring device in main-

2. See feminist critics Kofman and Schor for interesting theories on the possibility of female fetishism.

stream Hollywood cinema. The "active" male "looker" gazes upon the "passive" female who is "looked at." However, I hope to explore the notion that this strict active/passive dichotomy may not be as clear-cut as it seems.

Manette Salomon

The first work I would like to discuss is the Goncourt's novel *Manette Salomon* (1867), which depicts the painter Coriolis' struggles as an innovative modern artist and his romantic relationship to his muse and model, Manette. As a Parisian artist who briefly visits the Orient, Coriolis becomes a real voyeur in peering through a hole at some dancing women. Interestingly, it is a woman who empowers him and makes this voyeuristic experience possible, by making the hole that he peers through:

> il y avait une femme qui m'y avait fait un petit trou pour voir. . . . En allant . . . à Thérapia, je suis passé sous les fenêtres d'un harem . . . [où,] sur les raies de lumière des persiennes, on voyait se mouvoir des ombres . . . , les houris de la maison . . . qui dansaient et sautaient sur la musique. . . . (46)

If this scene represents the male right to gaze at and possess women in exotic lands, this right also exists in the heart of Paris, for the painters in Coriolis' group (all men) go out into the street to subject the neighborhood women, who wish to exit the bathhouse, to their unrelenting gazes:

> Quand elles sortaient de l'établissement, charmantes, frissonantes, caressées sous leurs robes . . . elles avaient à déranger des lazzarones couchés en travers de leur chemin. Elles passaient vite, en se serrant; mais elles sentaient tous ces regards d'hommes les fouiller, les tâter, les suivre. . . . (49-50)

More significantly, however, the male gaze at woman in this novel is diffused throughout the entire work in the more general concept of the artist's gaze at the woman and his search for

truth in art. In a repetition of the harem scene, Coriolis sees Manette for the first time at a "spectacle"--a "bal parisien"--where all evening he gazes voyeuristically at the dancing women whom he describes as an array of aesthetically pleasing body parts:

> Il reconnut . . . ces femmes qu'ils avait vues au plein air du Temple et dans les boutiques. . . . C'étaient des blondes d'Alsace, à la blondeur dorée du blé mûr, des chevelures noires et crépées, des nez busqués, des ovales fuyant dans des pâleurs ambrées de joue et de cou. . . . (179)

Certainly, Freud's notion of fetishisism is applicable to Coriolis' gaze. For Freud, fetishism involves the subject's tendency to deny the sexual object's wholeness and individuality in order to concentrate on only certain body part(s) or accessories which replace the "normal" sexual object: "The substitute for the sexual object is generally a part of the body but little adapted for sexual purposes, such as the foot, or hair, or an inanimate object . . ." (1930, 70). Drawing on Freudian notions of fetishism, Mulvey emphasizes classical Hollywood cinema's voyeuristic tendency to fragment the female body through its generous use of close-ups--shots which, in highlighting Dietrich's legs or Garbo's face, tend to flatten and iconize images of women while denying their three-dimensional individuality (367). Likewise, when Coriolis sees Manette, he immediately imagines her potential as his model, examining her body parts one by one, and fragmenting her into a series of poses: "Coriolis aperçut un bras enveloppé dans un châle dénoué, un coude appuyé sur la balustrade, une main soutenant une tête, un bout de profil, un ruban feu nouant des cheveux" (179). Coriolis underlines his complete objectification of Manette in remarks that betray his narcissistic gaze: "je voyais le reflet de ma toile sur son corps" (187) and "Il l'aimait pour sentir devant elle une inspiration et une révélation de son talent" (196). Such statements reveal that for him, Manette is not a woman with her own personality and character but a mere reflection of Coriolis' artistic talent.

In turn, since Manette does not have have a subjectivity that might return his gaze, she facilitates his ability to objectify her. That is, since she does not return his look, she cannot defy that look. She has no consciousness of being viewed, because she is immersed in her own narcissistic contemplation of herself. In a scene reminiscent of the many painted nudes with mirrors (such as Velasquez' "Rokeby Venus"), Manette looks at herself in the mirror, admiring herself, and her gaze does not take into account that of the artist:

> Elle était nue, n'était plus qu'elle. . . . [E]lle se caressait d'un regard jusqu'à l'extremité des pieds, et se poursuivait encore au delà, dans la psyché au bout du divan, qui lui renvoyait en plein la répétition de son allongement radieux. (213-14)

Here, the female gaze is a narcissistic one in that it encompasses herself but does not move back to the artist. She becomes the image, the passive object to be observed by the active male gaze. Her aim is to be looked at (symbolized by the mirror), not to look (Kelly 115).

Coriolis achieves some fame and recognition in large part through his paintings of Manette. However, their relationship becomes increasingly adverserial when they have a child. For Coriolis, Manette the mother ceases to be Manette the erotic object and model. In giving birth, he says, "le modèle avait été tué soudainement" (327). What Coriolis perceives as Manette's negative change in character corresponds almost exactly to the cold critical reception of his painting. Thus, Manette becomes his scapegoat and he explains her sudden selfishness and domineering nature as the surfacing of her "jewishness": "Des entrailles de la mère, la juive avait jailli" (327). When in rapid succession three of his paintings meet with negative critical and public opinion, Coriolis becomes increasingly despondent, angry, and unable to produce art. However, one day, his frustration moves him to create a visual representation of his rage, a painting which portrays an old man gazing with "[des] yeux de viol" upon a nude young girl lying on a bed.

The painting is in some ways an allegorical representation of

Coriolis' and Manette's own relationship (Coriolis' interpretation of it, that is). The similarity to the artist/model relationship is evident in the painting in which feminine beauty is displayed for the titilation of the male spectator. The hierarchical spatial relationship between the two figures, which places her in a lower position and him bending over her, emphasizes the vulnerability inherent in her nudity while underlining a relationship of masculine dominance versus female subordination. Coriolis' use of dichotomies emphasizes a sort of visual regime of sexual difference. The two figures are described as diametrically opposed: the young girl represents youthful and innocent feminine beauty, she is a "lumière," "un matin de corps" (346), whereas the man represents vice, senility, and old age, "la galvanisation de l'érotisme sénile" (346). The dichotomies of light and dark, youth and old age, beauty and ugliness, purity and vice underline a chasm between the sexes which mirrors Coriolis' and Manette's own adverserial relationship. In being displayed for both the old man in the painting and for the spectator Coriolis, the young girl creates a relationship between the two men that is crucial to the domination of the male gaze. That is, in order to control the fantasy he sees, Mulvey tells us, the narrative must be constructed around a main controlling figure with whom the male spectator can identify:

> As the spectator identifies with the male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of . . . his surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (367)

Clearly, Coriolis identifies with the old man and lives out his fantasy through him. By describing the man as lusting after the perfect incarnation of feminine beauty, Coriolis describes his own desire to possess the female body through his art. He creates a painted man who has the privilege of gazing upon the untouched, virginal model that he desires--the one he lost, in his mind, when Manette became a mother.

In addition, Mulvey's understanding of castration fear may shed light on Coriolis' relationship with the painting. In psychoanalytic terms, Mulvey writes, the female figure in narrative poses a deep problem, for she connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. Thus, ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absense of the penis is visually ascertainable as the material evidence on which is based the castration complex (368). In this respect, Mulvey again relies heavily on Freud who assigned the central dynamic role in the development of fetishism to the boy's castration anxiety. The boy initially views the absence of a penis in the woman as evidence that castration is possible, and that he, himself, may be castrated. To avoid the anxiety this generates, he rejects his own perception by attributing the role of the penis to some other body part or object (Eidelberg 146).

According to Mulvey, the male gaze may try to overcome this fear in two ways, both of which Coriolis exemplifies in his looking at the painting. First, the look may opt for complete disavowal of castration by substituting a fetish object or by turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (368). One of the ways that male artists for centuries have created woman as fetish is by exaggerating her physical loveliness while ignoring her intelligence and inner life (Pollock 122). Indeed, central to Freud's understanding of the fetish is what he calls "overestimation" of the object, that is, a tendency to endow it with quasi-magical qualities (1930, 17). Likewise, for Coriolis, the young girl is not an individual (thus, the painting is not a portrait) but an idealization, an icon, a visual incarnation of youthful feminine beauty. She is "l'aurore d'une vierge, une de ces jeunesses divines de femmes que Dieu semble faire avec toutes les beautés et toutes les puretés . . ." (346). By exaggerating her beauty while ignoring her individuality, she is fetishized, and thus reassuring rather than dangerous.

Coriolis' gaze upon the painting is exemplary of what Mulvey articulates as another avenue of overcoming castration

fear--an avenue which, through its devaluation or punishment of the object "guilty" of causing castration, has close associations with sadism. Throughout the novel, Coriolis displays sadistic tendencies in relation to his paintings. In an angry fit, he erases and demolishes the principle female figure in his first major work, "Le Bain Turque," thus venting his rage upon the female body (170-71). Moreover, at the end of the novel, he burns all of his works. Likewise, with this painting, the old man's look, which reveals his desire to rape the young girl, betrays Coriolis' own desire to punish. In addition, one may see the enactment of punishment and mutilation in his execution of the work, for Coriolis' brushstokes are described as marks from a whip:

> L'exécution . . . était presque cruelle. D'un bout à l'autre, la main, emportée par la rage de l'idée, avait voulu frapper, blesser, épouvanter et punir. Des coups de pinceau ça et là ressemblaient à des coups de fouet. Les chairs étaient rayées comme avec des griffes. (347)

The streaks of blood in the curtains, bed and profusions of silk which surround the girl's body further testify to Coriolis' desire to vent his rage upon the young girl while contributing to the overheated, overcharged atmosphere of the painting.

L'Education sentimentale

The protagonist of Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale* (1869), Frédéric Moreau, displays similar ways of viewing art and women. Frédéric is a mediocre young provincial who comes to Paris, ostensibly as a law student, but full of vague, artistic pretentions. He dabbles briefly in writing and composing music, then turns to painting because it is, in his mind, the profession that will most impress his potential mistress, Madame Arnoux. Frédéric becomes infatuated with her after briefly spotting her on a boat. Thus, his desire is ignited through an initial viewing experience and depends wholly on his

overestimation of her physical characteristics. The sighting on the boat demonstrates Frédéric's fetishistic gaze; his look flattens and iconizes her image, as he describes her as a sort of cut-out figure or paper doll framed by her accoutrements against the blue background of the sky:

> Ce fut comme une apparition. . . . Ses bandeaux noirs, contournant la pointe de ses grands sourcils, descendaient très bas et semblaient presser amoureusement l'ovale de sa figure. . . . [S]on nez droit, son menton, toute sa personne se découpait sur le fond de l'air bleu. (6)

In the following months, Frédéric's main goal is to meet his idealized love, and he looks for her constantly at her husband's art shop. His desire is fed by his missing her altogether or catching only rare, incomplete glimpses of her various body parts. One day at the shop, he sees "le bas d'une robe disparaître" (40). Days later, he again sees her as fragmented: "Comme elle se trouvait enveloppée d'ombre, il ne distingua d'abord que sa tête" (45). Months later, he catches a fleeting glimpse of her foot: "comme elle descendait les marches, il aperçut son pied" (80). The novel's construction of the fetishistic gaze is not only limited to glances of Madame Arnoux, but extends to other women also. For instance, one evening at a ball, Frédéric's male friend Cisy is described as accompanied, not by a "woman," but rather by "un chapeau rose" (74). Drawing upon Mulvey's ideas, feminist film theorist Anne Friedberg describes such fetishistic gazing as emblematic of the "metonymy of the body" created by classical cinema:

> the conventions of cinematic representation enforce a metonymy of the body; a face, a hand, a leg, all cut up. The star becomes recognizable and familiar . . . yet it is never fully unified as a body. The cinema provides part-object identification, creates part-object fetishes. . . . (41)

Such observations can readily be applied to Flaubert's novel since Frédéric's gaze constantly denies women's wholeness in

favor of such "part-for-the-whole" constructs--ones that define a woman by her feet, hat, or dress.

In addition, Mulvey's understanding of cinema as a machine of desire may bring some insights to Frédéric's voyeuristic fascination with windows, mirrors, and paintings. Mulvey notes that the pleasurable expectations of narrative cinema depend largely upon the objectification of the erotic figure--an objectification made possible, in part, through "the separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen" (365). This "distance" between spectator and screen contributes to the voyeuristic pleasure of looking in on a private world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience. Moreover, writes Mulvey, the voyeuristic experience is enhanced in the movie theater by the extreme contrast of light and dark provided by the auditorium versus the cinema screen.

A sense of this voyeuristic separation is created in *L'Education sentimentale* through the use of light and dark in the construction of Frédéric's gaze. On many occasions he displays the classical voyeur's fascination with lighted windows. As he stands in the dark street at night gazing longingly at the squares of light emanating from Madame Arnoux's home, the play of images is similar to the spectator's cinematic experience of gazing at a bright screen while seated in a dark theater:

> Au-dessus de la boutique d'Arnoux, il y avait au premier étage trois fenêtres éclairées chaque soir. Des ombres circulaient par derrière; une surtout, c'était la sienne; --et il se dérangeait de très loin pour regarder ces fenêtres et contempler cette ombre. (23)

Thus, like the cinema screen, windows provide a convenient frame for the human body as well as a distanced relationship between the "performers" framed by the representational apparatus and the "spectators." The windows also provide Frédéric the voyeuristic pleasure of imagining himself as a participant in the narrative he views. One evening as he gazes at the windows, he believes he catches a glimpse of Monsieur Arnoux (76). As we have seen, Mulvey's notion of visual

pleasure positions the male spectator as a subject who is invited to identify, through voyeurism, with the film's active male protagonist. Likewise, I would like to suggest that Frédéric identifies with Monsieur Arnoux and plays out his fantasy through him. That is, through befriending Arnoux and spotting him in the window, Frédéric believes he may vicariously participate in Arnoux's relationship with his wife and, accordingly, indirectly possess Madame Arnoux.

Mulvey's understanding of the gaze in film is also pertinent to Frédéric's narcissism and vanity. For although the cinema screen is not exactly a mirror, it does provide an apparatus which promotes narcissistic impulses. Indeed, for Mulvey, the male spectator pleasurably identifies with the male hero because he sees him as a kind of ego ideal--a more perfect version of himself that he first saw in the mirror phase. Frédéric's unwillingness to consumate his relationship with Madame Arnoux (in favor of living it vicariously through her husband), coupled with his constant fascination with his own mirror image, suggests that, in reality, he is more interested in finding a reassuring image of himself than in exploring woman's difference in a possible relationship. After returning from a soirée at the Arnoux's, Frédéric is more enthralled by his own image than Madame Arnoux's: "Son visage s'offrait à lui dans la glace. Il se trouva beau,--et resta une minute à se regarder" (50). And again, upon returning from a soirée, he evaluates the impact of his appearance: "Frédéric, en se couchant, résuma la soirée. D'abord, sa toilette, (il s'était regardé dans les glaces plusieurs fois), depuis la coupe de l'habit jusqu'au nœud des escarpins, ne laissait rien à reprendre . . ." (163).

Likewise, Frédéric's interest in painting is not a sincere one but rather an undertaking that feeds his vanity and ambition. Indeed, what Frédéric hopes to see in art is primarily the face of his own virility and wealth. At Monsieur Arnoux's art shop, Frédéric meets Pellerin, a pretentious "painter" who at fifty years of age has never actually completed a painting. Nonetheless, Frédéric admires him and, hoping to impress Madame Arnoux with his art, hires the painter to give him art lessons.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Arnoux introduces Frédéric to one of his mistresses, a prostitute named Rosanette. Frédéric, now dreaming of becoming Rosanette's lover, commissions Pellerin to do a portrait of her. In so doing, he hopes not only to flatter Pellerin, but also to impress Arnoux with his money and at the same time ingratiate himself to the art dealer by offering him the portrait as a gift. Most importantly, Frédéric hopes that the portrait sittings will allow him the necessary time to seduce Rosanette. Thus, in using painting as a token of exchange in view of impressing people and obtaining favors and sexual gratification, Frédéric participates in the commodification and prostitution of art--an important theme for Flaubert.[3]

Although Frédéric's scheme backfires, the portrait remains an insistent presence in the text: in opting for the style of Titian and the depiction of Rosanette as a Venetian, Pellerin makes a reference to perhaps the most famous of all nudes, Titian's "The Venus of Urbino," and thereby tries to place himself in the grand tradition of "great" Renaissance art. However, with this painting's overt imaging of female sexuality in an economic context constructed for and controlled by men, it is more akin to pornography. Pellerin's use of imagery emphasizes Rosanette's physical characteristics and vanity--that is, her power as an icon of male desire. Although he decides to paint her clothed and standing (descending a staircase), her bare arms, "seins découverts," "cheveux dénoués" (235), and adornment (strings of pearls in her hair, velvet dress, and jewelled belt) offer the traditional convention of the nude--the passive, seductive, and decorative female body displayed for the delectation of the male spectator. A peacock, displaying its plumage against the wall behind Rosanette and nibbling at her shoulder, offers an obvious (and tasteless) emblem of her vanity, while giving the viewer the flattering illusion of being privy to woman's narcissism (235).

3. For a discussion of art as a token of economic and sexual exchange, see Bernard.

A sword, money bag, and shower of gold coins provide a generous amount of phallic imagery--imagery that, according to Mulvey, allows the male spectator the opportunity to disavow the threat of the woman's "castrated" body by lending her fetishized parts of the male anatomy. Pellerin succeeds particularly well in associating the phallic images with money, thereby emphasizing Rosanette's profession as a prostitute and the power of male money to buy her. The sword provides obvious phallic connotations, while serving as an emblem of aristocratic wealth. The shower of gold coins, which spews from a small chest and leads the eye toward Rosanette's foot (another classic fetish) suggests an orgasm of money:

> un coffret de vieil ivoire un peu jaune dégorgeant des sequins d'or; quelques-uns même, tombés par terre ça et là, formeraient une suite d'éclaboussures brillantes, de manière à conduire l'oeil vers la pointe de son pied. . . . (151)

Finally, the red money bag which she holds in her hand is actually a "bourse"--a term that signifies both "money bag" in standard French and, in familiar French, "testicle" (235). This money bag/testicle is particularly meaningful in the context of this painting, for in this image, money and male sexuality are united in a single signifier. Sexuality and reproductive powers are equated with money. The money bag/testicle emphasizes Rosanette's role as a visual symbol of male desire, for she holds the possible gratification of that desire in her hand. Painted by a man for male pleasure, Rosanette the prostitute is the ultimate commodity of exchange among men. In addition, the grandiose, palatial Italian architecture (including columns and arcades), orange trees in the background, and other expensive accoutrements such as a silver platter, add to an atmosphere of opulence and underline Rosanette's function as a sort of sex goddess of money.

Thus, with the portrait of Rosanette, Flaubert seems very interested in exploring the power of art to commodify objects and people, particularly women. John Berger's understanding of the gaze as it relates to oil painting may offer some insights

into this commodification of art. In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger perceives an important analogy between "possessing" objects and the "way of seeing which is incorporated in oil painting" (83). In fact, Berger states, one of the primary functions of oil painting, a function often overlooked by art experts and historians, is to show the male spectator/owner "sights of what he may possess" (85). For Berger, oil painting has a special "propensity to procure the tangible for the immediate pleasure of the owner" (92). "Many oil paintings," he writes, "were themselves simple demonstrations of what gold or money could buy. Merchandise became the actual subject-matter of works of art" (99). Certainly, for Frédéric, the portrait of Rosanette is primarily a visual representation of an object that he wishes to possess. Indeed, just before commissioning the painting, Frédéric articulates his desire for Rosanette in terms of ownership: "il la désirait, pour le plaisir surtout de la vaincre et de la dominer" (150). Moreover, Berger emphasizes oil painting's technical power to visually render the materiality of objects in such a way as to underline their value as commodities:

> a way of seeing the world, which was ultimately determined by new attitudes to property and exchange, found its visual expression in the oil painting, and could not have found it in any other visual form. Oil painting did to appearances what capital did to social relations. It reduced everything to the equality of objects. Everything became exchangeable because everything became a commodity. All reality was mechanically measured by its materiality. (87)

After the painting's completion, its value as a commodity is again emphasized, for it becomes the object of an increasingly public gaze. When Frédéric, Arnoux, and Rosanette have all three refused to purchase it, and it has also been refused admission to the Salon, Pellerin has the work placed in the display window of an art seller in order to constrain Frédéric to pay up. Now it is on display for all of Paris, capable of appealing to thousands of men's voyeuristic fantasies. The label on the painting reads: "Mademoiselle Rose-Annette Bron,

appartenant à Monsieur Frédéric Moreau, de Nogent" (235). Certainly, the term "appartenant" is a loaded one, with financial as well as sexual connotations. In addition to objectifying Rosanette as a commodity that "belongs" to her male client/owner, the term implies that Frédéric not only has the money to possess the painting, but to possess the prostitute as well. Indeed, painting and prostitute are united as one possession. Art and money are living in sin. Again, Berger's comments, which underline oil painting's special power to celebrate male buying power, are pertinent to Flaubert's novel:

> Works of art in earlier traditions celebrated wealth. But wealth was then a symbol of a fixed social or divine order. Oil painting celebrated a new kind of wealth--which was dynamic and which found its only sanction in the supreme buying power of money. Thus painting itself had to be able to demonstrate the desirability of what money could buy. And the visual desirability of what can be bought lies in its tangibility, in how it will reward the touch, the hand, of the owner. (90)

A Rebours

Des Esseintes, the hero of Huysmans' decadent novel *A Rebours* (1884), offers a particularly interesting and informative example of the nineteenth-century male gaze, for his descriptions of Gustave Moreau's Salome paintings constitute one of the longest, most detailed, and highly explosive examples of ecphrasis in French literature. In *A Rebours*, Des Esseintes is a dilettante who, bored and disgusted with the materialism of modern Paris, decides to withdraw into an isolated country house which he turns into his private shrine to art. His moving into his new home corresponds to his discovery that he has become impotent and his conscious decision to abandon all contact with women while surrounding himself with rare books and plants, jewels, perfumes, and little-known paintings. He further emphasizes his break with women when, installed in his

new home, he decorates his room as a monk's cell. Des Esseintes' desire to exclude women from his aesthetic environment echoes to some extent Huysmans' own modernist artistic project. In the 1903 preface to *A Rebours*, the author expressed his desire to subvert the constructs of Zola's naturalist novel--a goal that depended upon, among other things, the exclusion of women: "le désir . . . m'appréhendait de briser les limites du roman . . . [de] supprimer l'intrigue traditionelle, voire même la passion, la femme . . ." (71). For both Huysmans and his fictional character, a major irony becomes apparent: despite considerable effort to abandon women all together, Des Esseintes inadvertently brings "woman" into his house in the form of two feminine icons (Antosh 139). The same irony is then applicable to Huysmans in that he seeks to write a book in which woman plays no part, yet he offers her up, it could be argued, as the book's central image. From a Freudian perspective, Huysmans' fictional character displays typical symptoms of fetishism in which genital discharge being impossible under normal conditions, the fetish takes the place of the normal love object (Eidelberg 146). In the case of Des Esseintes, the fetish is the image of Salome--a love object which he substitutes for "real" women when he discovers he is impotent.

For Huysmans' decadent hero, Salome is no mere art object but functions as his mistress. Each painting symbolizes for him a different aspect of the mysterious seductrice. The first, *Salome*, which portrays the moments before the beheading, is an oil painting of her dancing before Herod. The second, *L'Apparition*, is a watercolor in which, after John the Baptist's death, she contemplates the severed head which has risen up into the air to look down at her. It is apparent that of all his pictures, these are his favorites, for he offers them a central spot between his bookcases and night after night stands fantasizing before them. For years, Des Esseintes has been obsessed by the Biblical story of Salome, but until discovering the paintings by Moreau, he has not been able to find an artist's rendering that corresponds to his own image of her. In Moreau's works, he finds at last "cette Salome, surhumaine et

étrange qu'il avait rêvée" (148). She ceases to be an individual in order to become a true icon--indeed, Huysmans' use of capital letters underlines this iconic quality: "la déité symbolique de l'indestructible Luxure, la déesse de l'immortelle Hystérie, la Beauté maudite" (149). The two paintings are metaphors of his feelings, pictorial representations of his obsessions, mirrors of his dreams.

A sense of "voyeuristic separation" is created in *A Rebours* in the extreme contrast between the darkness of Des Esseintes' house (he sleeps during the day, lets little natural light enter, and uses only dim, artificial light) and the brilliance of Salome's jewels. The brightness of the canvases emphasizes his illusion of looking into a magical, private world which exists outside of time. Thus, one of the most striking elements of the paintings is their contrast to the lack of light in his house. Like the turtle whose shell Des Esseintes encrusts with precious stones, Salome's costume is covered with gold and jewels which dazzle him with their glinting brilliance. The tortoise dies, and it is Des Esseintes who does the adorning. His desire to change the tortoise's appearance by imposing on it his own vision of beauty is clearly a failed attempt to establish dominance. Likewise, Des Esseintes seeks to establish a relationship of dominance with Salome, and her jewelled costume offers him a similar fascination. In gazing at the jewels, he falls into a sort of trance similar to the cinematic experience Laura Mulvey describes--one in which the voyeuristic experience is enhanced by the contrast of light and dark provided by the auditorium versus the cinema screen (363).

In stark contrast to Des Esseintes' passive, sedentary existence, the descriptions of the paintings (written in the present tense, unlike the rest of the novel which is in the past tense) are full of life; he speaks of them as if he were watching a play, tracing the development of dramatic action in them, even describing the accompanying smells and noises (Kahn 54). He begins, with the first painting, by describing the architecture of the palatial setting in which Herod sits on his throne. Salome, before him, begins her dance. Her role as a performer

is crucial in both paintings. In this first work, the hierarchical spatial relationship between her and Herod, which places him above her and center, and her before him on what appears to be a stage, emphasizes the theatrical quality of the painting as well as her role as a dancer. Her coldness and indifference to her audience produce in Des Esseintes a sense of separation from her which plays on his voyeuristic fantasy. His predilection for performing women, for those whose very profession involves spectacle, is obvious: his two most memorable mistresses in Paris were a circus acrobat and a ventriloquist. Here again, Mulvey's discussion of male spectation is especially relevant to Huysmans' novel. She points out that performing woman holds a special fascination for the voyeuristic gaze by fulfilling a double purpose as erotic object for both the characters within the narrative as well as for the spectator, providing a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the picture. In her words, "As woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters . . . are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude" (367). Thus, Mulvey writes, "the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the narrative into a sort of no-man's-land outside its own time and space" (367).

As Coriolis of *Manette Salomon* identifies with the old man in his painting, so Des Esseintes lives out his fantasy through Herod. In describing Herod as a jaded king whose deadened senses are in need of being aroused by Salome's dance, he obviously describes himself. By means of identification with Herod, through participation in his power, Des Esseintes feels he may indirectly possess Salome. But his sexual needs are dualistic in that he wants not only to dominate, but to be dominated. Indeed, he is pleasurably impressed by "l'inquiétante exaltation de la danseuse, la grandeur raffinée de l'assassine" (148). Consequently, his pleasure in gazing upon the paintings stems largely from his ability to manipulate the image of a woman in such a way as to create for himself the fantasy of being dominated by her. His fantasy depends on holding her in his controlling look while at the same time giving himself

the illusion of being entranced by her power. Again, in this respect, he identifies with Herod, for both of them occupy positions of power yet feel the pleasure of being overwhelmed by her: "Tel que le vieux roi," he says, "Des Esseintes demeurait écrasé, anéanti, pris de vertige devant cette danseuse . . ." (152).

In addition, Des Esseintes demonstrates strategies similar to our other protagonists for overcoming castration fear. His gaze upon the first painting seeks to disavow sexual difference by making Salome a masculine object equipped with a fetishized object of male power--her lotus sceptre. Indeed, Des Esseintes attributes much of Salome's charm and power in the first painting to her masculinity. For instance, he remarks that the artist has placed in her hand, upheld in a gesture of commandment, a sceptre in the form of a lotus. He initially speculates that the sceptre has a "signification phallique" (150). He emphasizes this interpretation of the sceptre when he wonders if it suggests to Herod a sacrifice of woman's virginity ("oblation de virginité"), or perhaps an instrument that male surgeons and priests of ancient Egypt used to embalm and purify dead women's bodies by insertion into her sexual organs (150). He implies that in equipping her with this phallic sceptre, the artist has provided her with a kind of weapon, "armant son énigmatique déesse du lotus vénéré . . ." (150). Thus, Des Esseintes attributes to Salome a masculine object associated with power, overcoming castration fear by the substitution of a fetishized penis (Mulvey 368). His description of her jewelled costume as a sort of armour adds further to her masculine allure (Antosh 137). In addition, the verticality of Salome's palatial setting (note the columns) contributes to the dominance of phallic imagery.

Des Esseintes' gaze upon the second painting is exemplary of what Mulvey describes as a second avenue of overcoming castration fear. Here, he seeks to diminish the power Salome holds in the first painting while punishing her for the power she holds over him. Salome, he remarks, is considerably more naked, and therefore more vulnerable, in this painting. He

remarks that the phallic sceptre, symbol of masculine power, is absent here. No longer armed with this masculine attribute, Salome is, in his eyes, "moins majestueuse, moins hautaine," (152) but "vraiment fille; elle obéissait à son tempérament de femme . . ." (153). The term "obey" here is essential in understanding the change in Salome in this painting. Des Esseintes seems to imply that, in this painting, unlike in the former, she "obeys" her true "female temperament." For him, this means that she is more dramatic while more actively exciting: "elle réveillait plus énergiquement les sens en léthargie de l'homme, ensorcelait, domptait plus sûrement ses volontés . . ." (153).

This painting appeals to him more because her qualities seem amplified. Indeed, she is "more" of everything in this painting: "elle vivait plus raffinée, et plus sauvage, plus exécrable et plus exquise" (153). In addition, much of the appeal of this painting stems from her dramatic reaction to John the Baptist. Here, Des Esseintes sees Salome as fearful and terrified as she recoils before the horrible severed head which reminds her of her crime. She is "pétrifiée, hypnotisée par l'épouvante" (152). Des Esseintes sees her as weak and fearful not because of any sympathy he may feel for her nor because of any human feeling he imagines on her part, but because he wishes to act out a fantasy of seeing her punished. He imagines her as guilt-ridden, thereby neutralizing her power and subjecting her to the "proper" position under the male gaze of John the Baptist. Voyeurism "has associations with sadism," Mulvey writes; "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt, asserting control, and subjecting the guilty person through punishment" (368). The "apparition," to Des Esseintes, is like the ghost of John the Baptist who has returned from the dead to punish her for her crime of seduction. If we consider that for Freud, the decapitated head is a phallic symbol, John the Baptist's head can be read as a part of the male anatomy which has come back to seek its revenge. Thus, in this painting, Des Esseintes' narrative surrogate is not only Herod, who maintains a peripheral position, but John the Baptist, who reestablishes a spatial domination by gazing down upon her from above. When he

wishes to feel overwhelmed by Salome, he may identify with Herod. On the other hand, he may fulfill his more sadistic fantasies through identification with John the Baptist.

It is significant that Des Esseintes sees the vision as appearing for Salome only ("visible pour la Salome seule" 152). Herod, Herodias, the executioner, and the musician are all present in the painting. All played a part in John the Baptist's death. But for Des Esseintes, only Salome sees the vision and it fixes only her in its gaze. In what is for Des Esseintes a visual enactment of a punishment fantasy, only she pays for her crime. It is not surprising, then, that this painting appeals to him more, for while he is overwhelmed by Salome, the work nonetheless represents a sort of masculine triumph in its enactment of a punishment fantasy. As Mulvey writes, "Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat . . ." (368). The powerful woman of the first painting is now fearful and horrified before her crime. And even dead, the masculine gaze returns to haunt and dominate her.

In short, the two paintings portray for Des Esseintes different aspects of Salome which play off each other as his gendered gaze shifts back and forth between them. He sees her as quite powerful and masculine in the first painting--one which is particularly pleasurable in encouraging his masochistic desire to feel dominated. On the other hand, the second, more melodramatic painting, in which Salome is more "feminine," is especially exciting in evoking his sadistic desires of dominating and inflicting pain. The paintings, therefore, help him to combat the boredom of his sedentary life by offering him a variety of diverse role-playing activities and gender-switching opportunities. Des Esseintes may play the role of the woman before the first painting, in which he perceives Salome as quite powerful and masculine. His creative imagination may permit him to assume a more traditional role in his relationship with the second painting. In addition to offering role-playing opportunities, the paintings allow for the psychical mastery of

spectation that Des Esseintes' sedentary life would not otherwise afford him. And since they are paintings that cannot speak or return his gaze, he may look at them without himself being observed and by means of this uninterrupted gaze, he can hope to discover the secrets of Art and Beauty (Kelly).

Although it is clear that Des Esseintes is aroused by the paintings, that he has an erotic fixation for this picture-woman, he obviously thinks that all this fantasizing is just play-acting. He has chosen his paintings in view of the diversion and pleasure they can afford him, "pour la délectation de son esprit et la joie de ses yeux" (145), and thus remains unaware of their danger. After all, Salome is "only" a painting. But, as Mulvey writes," the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified" (368). Ruth Antosh has astutely pointed out the paintings' role in Des Esseintes' downfall. They, along with his collection of exotic plants, provoke a terrifying nightmare which leads to a worsening of his neurosis and his ultimate death. His frightening dream of the evil flower-woman, the allegorical figure of Syphillis, reveals "that Des Esseintes' sexual impotence is rooted in fear of women, whom he associates with danger and disease" (139). Thus, Des Esseintes' gaze, which he believed to control Salome, only provokes the surfacing of his deepest fears.

Conclusion

The three protagonists that I have discussed are far from being simply three isolated case studies. On the contrary, their voyeuristic gaze implies a general trend in much art and literature of their time. Indeed, the fetishistic transference of sexual desire from "real" women to art objects is an insistent theme of French nineteenth-century literature. When Fromentin's Dominique is unable to make love to a woman and finds himself aroused only in her absence when he finds himself before a painting of her, he is enacting just such a tranference. When Des Esseintes discovers he is impotent and henceforth uses the Salome paintings to meet his erotic needs, the same applies. The examples, as we have seen, are numerous. Likewise, in much of the art and literature of the period, woman is fetishized in that she is rarely painted or sculpted as an individual. As with Moreau's Salome, her physical beauty is conflated in order to idealize and iconize her. Much of the art of the period, painted by men for men (women were not allowed admission to the "Ecole des Beaux Arts") tells us infinitely less about female sexuality than male sexuality. In much of the art, woman functions as merely a sign which signifies male artistic creation and male sexual desires and anxieties. In other words, women are too often deprived of their subjectivity, functioning merely as objects--visual representations of male desire. If one considers Doctor Charcot's famous clinic (Charles Bernheimer has called it a "brothel for voyeurs" 251), where male doctors, artists, and writers gathered to watch "hysterical" women "perform" in various stages of undress, one realizes that this kind of portrayal of women as spectacle for the male gaze was prevalent not only in literary and artistic discourse, but in medical and psychiatric discourse as well.

The seemingly opposing scientific and artistic discourses of the nineteenth century converged in at least one important way: both trends purported to have achieved a purely objective, unideological, and disinterested way of looking at the world--the scientific trend through the supposed perfection of the empirical method, the artistic trend through Kantian and German Romantic notions of the true artist's "disinterestedness." However, one of the basic assumptions of feminist criticism is that all representation is inherently ideological. Since dominant cultural meanings both constitute and are reconstituted by representation, deconstructing art and literature from a feminist perspective entails uncovering the ideological determinants within which representation works. As an ideological act in its own

right, any work of art involves questions of property, ownership, authority, force, and the will to power (Dolan 41).

What I hope I have shown to some extent, in the context of late nineteenth-century France, is that the female body is particularly rich in ideological meanings and that one cannot paint, cannot see without already being contaminated by these meanings. These three protagonists' remarkable manipulation of male visual pleasure is emblematic of the period's various aesthetic movements--ones which intended to create an unbiased, unideological, and purely serene gaze upon the object. The nineteenth-century aesthetic doctrines tended to glorify art's transcendent power to raise one above the base, vile, and utilitarian bourgeois mores. Ironically, the exponents of these doctrines often fell into much the same trap as Des Esseintes. For instead of excluding women and sexuality from their artistic environment as they intended, they often in fact used art objects to meet their most basic erotic needs. Thus, movements such as impressionism and art-for-art's sake, while purporting to have achieved an unbiased outlook, were demeaning to women in that they allowed them a place in the world only to the extent that their visual attractiveness could be used to serve the gaze of the male artist/esthete. An understanding of the visual constructs of the male gaze is necessary before one can offer more meaningful portrayals of women as producers of art and explore relatively new areas such as the female gaze. What is needed, as Mulvey has eloquently put it, is the daring to "break with normal pleasurable expectations in order to conceive of a new language of desire" (363).

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Le Chronotope et le sujet féminin dans *Une page d'amour* de Zola

Comment la configuration temps-espace qu'est le chronotope est-elle reliée au personnage féminin? Telle est la question de base qui nous concerne ici. Pour y répondre, Mikhaïl Bakhtine propose qu'«en tant que catégorie de la forme et du contenu, le chronotope établit aussi . . . l'image de l'homme en littérature, image toujours essentiellement spatio-temporelle» (*ETR* 238), et Henri Mitterand va jusqu'à suggérer qu'«il existe peut-être autant de chronotopes que de personnages» (102). S'il est vrai que le temps-espace et les personnages s'engendrent réciproquement, le chronotope promet d'être un moyen efficace de déceler l'idéologie sous-jacente à la représentation du personnage. Il devrait s'ensuivre qu'une lecture chronotopique pourrait conduire à une nouvelle intelligence des personnages féminins dans les romans.

Le Chronotope bakhtinien

Les écrits de Mikhaïl Bakhtine sur le chronotope (qui datent pour la plupart des années vingt et trente) ont récemment été redécouverts comme en témoignent plusieurs articles, notamment ceux d'Henri Mitterand, de Janice Best, et de Mary