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Source: *Art Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 1, Uneasy Pieces (Spring, 1992), pp. 38-44

Published by: College Art Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777252>

Accessed: 09/05/2010 15:14

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Gustave Courbet's *Venus and Psyche*

Uneasy Nudity in Second-Empire France

PETRA TEN-DOESSCHATE CHU

As late as January, or perhaps even February 1864, Gustave Courbet embarked on a large-scale figure painting destined for the upcoming Salon.¹ Writing to the dealer Jules Luquet, he described the work as “two nude women, life size, and painted in a manner that you have never seen me do.”² In later letters he suggested that he might call it *Venus in Jealous Pursuit of Psyche*. But in April, when he submitted it to the Salon, he gave it the neutral title *Etude de femmes*, or *Study of Women* (fig. 1), which allowed for a maximum freedom of interpretation.³ The painting, which has since disappeared, showed a blonde woman (“Psyche”) sleeping on a large four-poster, while a dark-haired companion (“Venus”), seated on the edge of the bed, drew away a curtain to gaze at her.⁴ Like *Return from the Conference* (destroyed), submitted the previous year, *Study of Women*, after some apparent disagreement between the jury and the Count de Nieuwerkerke, superintendent of the Fine Arts Administration, was barred from the Salon for reasons of immorality.⁵

Courbet's case was at once taken up by Jean-François Millet, who wrote on May 4 to Courbet's close friend and supporter, the critic Jules Castagnary:

I have heard that a painting of nude women by Courbet has been refused for reasons of “impropriety.” I have not seen the said painting and I cannot judge the motives those gentlemen of the jury may have had to do so, but it seems to me quite unthinkable that a painting by Courbet could be more improper than the indecent paintings of Messrs. Cabanel and Baudry that could be seen at the last Salon, for I have never seen anything that in my opinion is a more real and more direct appeal to the passions of bankers and stockbrokers.⁶

Millet's comments must have been grist to the mill of Castagnary who, in his review of the Salon of 1863, had written a sarcastic critique of Paul Baudry's *Pearl and Wave* (Prado, Madrid), one of the paintings Millet referred to in his letter. Castagnary had mocked the coy eroticism of Baudry's nude and, like Millet, had stressed its venal overtones:

Wouldn't this pretty woman with the looks of a Parisian modiste be much more comfortable on a sofa? She who lived so

well in her rich apartment on the chaussée d'Antin, she must be ill at ease on that hard rock, near those hurtful pebbles, those sharp-edged shells.

But here is a thought: what is she doing there alone at this hour, rolling her enamel eyes and wringing her dainty little hands? Is she lying in wait for a millionaire to stray into this deserted place? Perhaps she is not the Venus of the boudoirs but rather the Venus of the bathing resorts.⁷

The comments of Millet and Castagnary both raise a crucial question. Why was Courbet's *Venus and Psyche* refused for reasons of “impropriety,” while Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and Baudry's *Pearl and Wave* were celebrated at the Salon? Indeed, why was Courbet's painting censored while paintings and sculptures of nudes in the most lascivious poses and in deviant encounters with fauns, bulls, goats, and swans were accepted in large numbers by the jury, praised by the critics, and sold to the state for distribution to provincial museums?⁸ Even Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), a challenging image of a contemporary *cocotte*, one year later gained access to the Salon, and Courbet's own *Woman with a Parrot* (fig. 2), a much more obvious and erotically charged courtesan image, booked a moderate success at the Salon of 1866.⁹

To answer this question, it is necessary to read the painting with a period eye, notably with the “knowing” eye of a nineteenth-century *homme du monde*. As T. J. Clark has shown, the genre of the nude had become ambiguous, even embarrassing in the 1860s, and the dividing line between decency and indecency had become strangely convoluted, or at least so it would seem to a twentieth-century viewer.¹⁰ To understand the subtleties of the nineteenth-century sense of decency requires some understanding of the politics of sexuality and, conversely, the sexuality of politics during the Second Empire.

If female nudes in art have always to a greater or lesser degree been the function and object of male desire, to the nineteenth-century viewer the nude carried a particular association with venal love.¹¹ Salon critics continually drew connections between exhibited nudes and the contemporary



FIG. 1 Gustave Courbet, *Study of Women (Venus and Psyche)*, 1864, oil on canvas, 57 × 77 inches. Location unknown.

demimonde—witness Castagnary’s critique of Baudry’s *Pearl and Wave*, or Emile Zola’s scathing attack on Cabanel’s *Birth of Venus* on the occasion of its exhibition at the Exposition Universelle of 1867:

*The goddess, bathed in a river of milk, looks like a delightful lorette [prostitute], made not of flesh and bones—that would be indecent—but of some kind of white and pink almond paste.*¹²

The identification of painted or sculpted nudes with courtesans is also a common *topos* in nineteenth-century literature. In Alphonse Daudet’s novel *Sapho*, for example, the *cocotte* Fanny Legrand is the model of Cadoual’s famous sculpture of Sappho, reduced copies of which were found in bourgeois homes throughout provincial France.

This direct association in the mid nineteenth century of nudity in art with prostitution is perhaps not surprising. Numerous social and historical studies have pointed to the rapid rise of prostitution in nineteenth-century France and its increasingly central position in society, particularly during the Second Empire.¹³ The pervasive presence of prostitution not merely on the fringes but among all social classes gave rise to a complex hierarchical order in which there was a place for those who catered to the ruling class and upper bourgeoisie as well as those who served the proletariat.

At the top of this hierarchy were the *courtisanes*, the Harriet Howards and Cora Pearls, who sold their favors dearly to the emperor, his male relatives, and the rich and famous of their circle. These women, commonly referred to as *lionnes* or *cocottes*, were the most expensive commodities that money could buy, and literally embodied the empire’s much-vaunted prosperity. On a lower echelon were the *soupeuses de restaurant de nuit* and the *femmes de café*. Unlike the *lionnes*, who had a steady following, they had an ever-changing clientele, mostly comprising foreign tourists and visitors from the provinces. Though not exactly glamorous, these women, who generally had no more than one date a night, greatly contributed to the reputation of Paris as a city of fun and pleasure. On the rank below them were the *filles insoumises*, unregistered streetwalkers, who each night would take a number of clients in succession to a *hôtel garni* or other clandestine meeting place. At the very bottom of the prostitution hierarchy were the *filles isolées*, registered streetwalkers, who led their clients to a *maison de rendez-vous*; and the *filles publiques*, the brothel prostitutes who worked in the *maisons de tolérance* or *maisons closes*. In the course of the nineteenth century the numbers of these registered and medically supervised prostitutes dropped proportionally as the illegal prostitution practiced by the *lionnes*, the *soupeuses*, the *femmes de café*, and the *filles insoumises* rose. Brothels in particular



FIG. 2 Gustave Courbet, *Woman with a Parrot*, 1866, oil on canvas, 51 × 77 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929.

showed a sharp decline, dropping from some 225 at the beginning of the Second Empire to less than 150 at its fall. To an extent this may be explained by the Haussmannization of Paris, which caused the destruction of many of the *maisons de tolérance* in the old parts of town, but, perhaps more important, it was due to changing sexual demands. While previously little more had been required of a prostitute than to satisfy a physical urge, under the influence of Romanticism, and as a result of prostitution's own movement into the bourgeois sphere, sex increasingly became associated with romance and seduction. As a result men grew disenchanted with the professionalism and mass consumption of the brothel, preferring instead the seductiveness of clandestine love.¹⁴

Increasingly reviled, the *maison de tolérance* came to be perceived as the locus of all the sordidness and evils associated with prostitution: venereal disease, alcoholism, criminality, and deviant behavior.¹⁵ Thus, paradoxically, precisely at the time of its decline, the brothel found itself at the heart of the nineteenth-century debate about prostitution.¹⁶ Indeed, it became the embodiment of the downside of a social phenomenon that was not only publicly and socially condoned, but had become something of a national institution.

The official policy of the Second Empire toward prostitution was of necessity pragmatic. Napoléon III owed his

empire to the financial support of the famous British courtesan Harriet Howard and his mental health to a steady stream of paramours and *cocottes* who satisfied his legendary sexual appetite.¹⁷ He was hardly the man to take a moral stand against high- or even middle-class prostitution, the more so as his nation, and particularly his capital, owed so much of its reputation to its *vie galante*, the visible symbol of the financial well-being of the imperial regime.¹⁸ By the same token, he would not have thought of eliminating the long-established restraints on streetwalking and brothel prostitution, which continued, with waning success, to be controlled by the *police de mœurs*.¹⁹

The artificial distinction—indeed, double standard—that was thus constructed between *courtisane* and *putain* (common whore) and the hypocrisy required to uphold this duality, became important targets for the critics of Napoléon III's regime. They were quick to point out that, since both *courtisane* and *putain* sold their bodies for money, they belonged to the same classless breed of prostitutes.²⁰ They took pains to show how easy it was for prostitutes to move up and down the ranks of the hierarchical order. In *La Mascara de la vie parisienne*, for example, Courbet's close friend Champfleury traced the life of an innocent, illiterate girl who was drawn willy-nilly into the world of the theater. Discovered on stage by a banker, she became a celebrated *courtisane*, but after having squandered most of his fortune,

she abandoned him for her first love (who had meanwhile turned pimp), and fell back to the level of *fille publique*.

Scheduled for publication in *L'Opinion nationale* in the late fall of 1859, Champfleury's novel was seized by the censor. Apparently it was reprehensible not only because it demonstrated that the courtesan and whore came from the same mold but also because it showed how easily a combination of poverty, innocence, and a lax moral climate could lead a virtuous girl into debauchery. And it was precisely this lax moral climate that critics blamed on a regime that not only set the example of immorality but was felt consciously to encourage debauchery as a means to keep people subdued. "On masturbe les peuples comme les lions, pour les domestiquer," wrote the Goncourt brothers.²¹ The feeling was echoed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who, in his book *La Pornocratie*, proclaimed that debauchery was an important instrument of power: "All tyranny can be summed up in one word: prostitution."²²

The charge of "impropriety" leveled against Courbet's *Venus and Psyche* must be seen in the context of this moral and political climate. Surely Millet was right when he suspected that the painting was less blatantly erotic than Baudry's *Pearl and Wave* and Cabanel's *Venus*. Courbet stayed away from suggestive poses, was careful to avoid such traditional taboos as pubic hair and labia, and, generally speaking, conformed to the official rules of propriety. It was therefore not the nudes themselves who were shocking but rather the environment in which they were set and their relationship to each other.

To the seasoned male observer, Courbet's painting would have immediately suggested the interior of a brothel, complete with double bed, ruffled sheets, and "real" (as opposed to mythological) women, with tousled hair and bedroom slippers. The close proximity of two nude women in one bed, moreover, would have suggested the common practice of lesbianism in brothels. As the much-read nineteenth-century studies of prostitution by Dr. A.-J.-B. Parent-Duchâtelet and Louis Fiaux demonstrated, lesbianism was literally forced on brothel prostitutes not only because cramped conditions necessitated the doubling up of girls in bed, but also because it was openly encouraged by madams, who considered it a way to keep girls occupied in off-hours and times of slow business.²³ Madams also looked favorably upon lesbianism because it enabled their girls to put more realism into the lesbian *tableaux vivants* that were staged in brothels to wet the viewer's appetite, and that were a major selling point at a time when these establishments desperately needed a competitive edge.²⁴

Courbet's *Venus and Psyche*, then, would have been read by most male viewers as an immoral statement; coming on the heels of *Return from the Conference* (submitted to the Salon of 1863), that scathing comment on Napoléon III's clerical policies, it could even be considered subversive—an attack on the moral laxity both permitted and encouraged by a

regime that viewed sex, like religion, as a palliative for social discontent. Indeed, like *Return from the Conference*, *Venus and Psyche* could be considered a conscious attempt at moral—and by extension political—satire. As Proudhon, Courbet's closest friend in the mid 1860s, saw it:

One day, in his painting of Venus and Psyche, refused in 1864, Courbet tried to make in painting what such moralists as Ezekiel and Juvenal have done in poetry: a satire on the abominations of his time. But the means of the painter are not those of the writer. He would not dare to paint the phalluses of the Assyrians and the Egyptians; he would not dare to show Ooliba in the posture described by the prophet . . . ; he could not show us Messalina after her twenty-fifth copulation; nor that other woman bellowing like a rutting deer at the sight of an artist; nor the woman who pissed in the moonlight against the statue of Modesty; nor the one of whom it was said: Ipsa medullinae frictum crissantis adorat.

Those things are impossible in painting. The painter has therefore been forced to use a disguise. [He has used] no gesture that shows even the slightest indecency; no pose that suggests the slightest lewdness; not even complete nudity. [Instead, he shows us] a sleeping blonde, who a young girl would naturally take for a Psyche waiting for Amor; a brunette comes tiptoeing through the dark and looks at her with a glance that can express jealousy, as well as other things.

The inhabitants of Ornans must have seen in it two women who, during the dog days, have taken off their shirts to be more comfortable and to breathe more freely. Other people have taken them to be bathers.

One must be informed to understand the artist. One must have read George Sand (Lélia), Théophile Gautier (Mademoiselle de Maupin); one must know the hypocrisy of the sense of propriety of our time. One must remember that Courbet has been blamed for not being able to paint the nude, and that he blames his critics for not appreciating in the nude anything but desire [volupté]. . . . One must have seen the exhibitions of the last few years; one must know that M. de Nieuwerkerke has made the emperor buy a Leda with a swan between her legs. . . .

It is to that entire world that Courbet says through his painting: "You are a bunch of lechers and hypocrites; I know you; I know what you want and what your pimps are asking you for. You are not interested in the art of painting the nude; you are not hungry for natural beauty, but for dirt. Here, this is how one paints the nude, and I defy you to do the same. And that is what you are all looking for, you race of pederasts and lesbians."²⁵

When reading Proudhon's lengthy and passionate exegesis of *Venus and Psyche*, one cannot help wondering whether he had any part in the conception of the picture. One must remember the close ties that bound the artist to the philosopher in 1863–64, as Proudhon, inspired by Courbet's *Return from the Conference*, was writing his *Du Principe de l'art et de*



FIG. 3 Gustave Courbet, *Woman Kneading*. Tentative reconstruction, on the basis of Courbet's written description, of a painting never executed. Drawing by Anthony Triano.

sa destination sociale.²⁶ Courbet's *Venus and Psyche* also appears to reflect many of the ideas that Proudhon was jotting down at this time for *La Pornocratie*, which, like *Du Principe de l'art*, appeared soon after the author's death in 1865.

While it seems uncharacteristic for Proudhon actually to have suggested the subject of *Venus and Psyche* to Courbet, it would have been typical for Courbet to want to play into the hands of one of his supporters by painting a picture that would harmonize with his ideas. *Venus and Psyche* was no doubt intended to give substance to Proudhon's well-defined notions about the place of women in society—his thesis that since woman's place was in the home, all those who refused to serve husband and family were of necessity prostitutes.²⁷ Proudhon's simplistic division of womankind into harlots and housewives (*courtisane ou ménagère*) was certainly known to Courbet.²⁸ In December 1864 he informed the philosopher that he was going to paint a pendant to *Venus and Psyche*, showing a housewife baking little cakes for her children (for a tentative reconstruction of this painting, see fig. 3). "My dear friend," he wrote,

at the moment I am about to do the counterpart of that painting [Venus and Psyche]. It is a stout plebeian woman who is busy kneading [dough]. Her children are around the trough, the youngest is in his high chair, smearing himself with cornmeal porridge from a tin dish; on the table are gingerbread cakes, pastry boards, and flour. The children are waiting for the cakes. The splendid woman, blonde, fresh, and powerful, has tousled hair—but unlike that of the fashionable lionnes it is tousled by her work. With effort she lifts an enormous amount of dough, which falls down again heavily and puffs out. A big pot of hot water is on the cast-iron stove.²⁹

If completed, *Woman Kneading*, seen together with *Venus and Psyche*, would have illustrated Proudhon's categorical division of womankind. On one level, the paintings could have been read as a moral lesson showing the contrast between virtue and vice, or, more specifically, between such

classic feminine virtues and vices as chastity and lewdness, diligence and sloth, charity and envy. Such a pairing of virtue and vice would have been at once traditional (recalling the carved medallions on French Gothic cathedrals or the illustrations of Renaissance and Baroque emblem books) and modern, in a British Victorian way. Courbet's pendant paintings are reminiscent, for example, of such *Punch* illustrations as *Pin Money* and *Needle Money* (1848), which juxtapose a girl looking in the mirror, admiring the baubles she has bought with her pin money, with another diligently bent over her needlework.³⁰ One is also reminded of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paired figures of *Sybilla palmifera* (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, England) and *Lady Lilith* (Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington), completed between 1866 and 1870, which were accompanied by two poems with the telling titles "Soul's Beauty" and "Body's Beauty."³¹

However, unlike these British examples, which appear to be primarily, even exclusively, moralizing, Courbet's projected pendants could be read as a social statement as well. The juxtaposition of a married woman surrounded by numerous children with two lesbian prostitutes would have suggested that chaste but fertile sexual union of marriage as opposed to the deviant, sterile encounters with prostitutes. Jill Harsin has shown how the chain of associations leading from venal sex via debauch and lesbianism to sterility and death was an important *topos* in the nineteenth-century discourse about prostitution,³² one that found poetic form in Baudelaire's poem *Les Deux bonnes soeurs*, which reads in part:

*Debauch and Death, kind whores, though they're reviled
Are rich in health and prodigal in kisses:
Their wombs are virgin, for these ragged lasses
In endless labor ne'er have borne a child*

*Unto the poet, baleful family foe,
Hell's darling and a courtier down at heel
Beneath their bowers the tomb and stews reveal
A bed that no remorse can ever know.*³³

Finally, the two paintings together might have been given a political interpretation, which is no doubt what Proudhon would have done had they been finished and had he lived to see them. He considered the family the embryo of the republican state, and prostitution, and debauchery in general, inimical to the republic—or worse, "the signs and instruments of despotism."³⁴ To him, Courbet's two paintings, metaphors of despotism and republicanism, would have signified a direct attack on the imperial regime.

Combining these various readings, one begins to un-



FIG. 4 Gustave Courbet, *Portrait of P.-J. Proudhon in 1853, 1865*, oil on canvas, 58 × 78 inches. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

derstand the ultimate threatening implications of Courbet's *Venus and Psyche*. The painting conjured up a vision of a debauched society ruled by tyrants whose "instruments of despotism" were *cocottes*, femmes fatales who through their unwillingness to serve man and the home, and their refusal to bear children, would bring the world to an untimely end.

Proudhon died on January 23, 1865, exactly six weeks after Courbet wrote to him of his proposed *Woman Kneading*. Upon the news of his death, Courbet at once abandoned that painting to devote himself instead to the portrayal of Proudhon surrounded by his family.³⁵ He had long wanted to paint the philosopher's portrait, and this appeared to be his last chance not merely to portray Proudhon but, by showing him with his wife and children, to express his philosophy about the importance of the family as the nucleus of society. In fact, conceptually, the *Portrait of P.-J. Proudhon in 1853* (fig. 4) evolved out of *Woman Kneading* and may well have been painted over the preliminary sketch for that painting. It is noteworthy that the Proudhon portrait is exactly the same size as *Venus and Psyche*, suggesting that the canvas was intended for that painting's pendant.

As its official Salon title tells us, Courbet's *Portrait of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1853* in its original form (fig. 5)



FIG. 5 Gustave Courbet, *Portrait of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1853*. Original version, from an old photograph.

represented his friend in the year when the philosopher had moved to a house in the rue d'Enfer after his jail term in Sainte Pélagie prison.³⁶ Proudhon, seated on the steps that lead into his backyard, is rendered as the philosopher-worker—philosopher through the traditional pose of meditation; worker through the white blouse and the writing tools that indicate the way he makes his living. To his left, seated behind and below him, Courbet had originally painted a pregnant Madame Proudhon listening to one of her little girls recite her ABCs, while watching another one play tea party in the sand. The painting reflected Proudhon's ideas about the family as an embryonic republic in which each member has rights and duties. Man's duty is to provide; woman's duty is to be the auxiliary of man, to nurture him, to facilitate his productivity, and to bear, raise, and educate his progeny.

Courbet's final version of Proudhon's portrait blatantly exposes the underlying reality of Proudhon's doctrine of separate spheres. No longer is a patriarchal and dominating Proudhon contrasted with a nurturing, self-effacing wife. Madame Proudhon is eliminated altogether and replaced by a mending basket. Though the reason for this change is ambiguous,³⁷ the significance is all too obvious: while man becomes a personality, potentially even a historic figure through the tasks he performs, woman is the tasks she performs. Hence, it is her functionality, not her individuality that matters.

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Notes

1. The satirical painting *The Source of Hippocrene*, which he had originally planned to submit, had been accidentally destroyed. See Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, "Courbet's Unpainted Pictures," *Arts Magazine* (September 1980): 135–36.
2. See Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, ed. and trans., *The Letters of Gustave Courbet*, (University of Chicago Press, 1992); letter 64–3.
3. See Alan Bowness, Marie-Thérèse de Forges, Michel Laclotte, and Hélène Toussaint, *Gustave Courbet*, exh. cat. (Paris: Grand Palais; London: Royal Academy, 1977–78), 39.
4. The painting was last seen in the collection of the art dealer Georges Petit. See Georges Riat, *Gustave Courbet, peintre* (Paris: Fleury, 1906), 216.
5. Chu, *Letters of Courbet*, letter 64–7.
6. Quoted in Bowness et al., *Gustave Corbet*, 39. My translation.
7. Quoted in Timothy Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 295, n. 127. My translation.
8. See, for example, the interesting group of photographs of state purchases at the 1865 Salon reproduced in Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, 118–19.
9. It would be easy to claim that the refusal of Courbet's painting was merely a gesture of revenge on the part of the official art establishment. Courbet had long been a thorn in their flesh and his exhibition, in 1863, of *Return from the Conference* could only have added to his reputation as an *enfant terrible*. Courbet surmised, in a letter to the dealer Haro (see Chu, *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, letter 64–5), that the empress and the priests surrounding her had used their influence to keep this work out of the public's eye. Nevertheless, this does not explain how one can justify the refusal of Courbet's painting while so many other, more provocative and potentially morally offensive paintings were accepted.
10. Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, 130–31. In order to update the nineteenth-century discourse about the nude, one might be tempted to replace the words *decency* and *indecenty* with *art* and *pornography*. It is important to realize, however, that the concept of pornography as such had not yet been defined in the nineteenth century. See Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 130.
11. See Beatrice Farwell, *Manet and the Nude: A Study in Iconography in the Second Empire* (New York and London: Garland, 1981), 29, and Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*, 131.
12. Emile Zola, *Mon Salon; Manet; Ecrits sur l'art* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1970), 126. My translation.

13. The brief survey of prostitution that follows is largely based on Bernard Briais, *Grandes courtisanes de Second Empire* (Paris: Jules Tallandier, 1981); Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985). I have also benefited from Charles Bernheimer's *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).
14. Corbin, *Woman for Hire*, 118, 200–201.
15. This perception was not without a basis in reality, for in order to stay in business such houses were forced to cater more and more to the demands of the sexually deviant. See Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 182ff.
16. See Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 281.
17. The relationship between Louis-Napoléon and Elizabeth Ann Haryett (1823–65), better known by her stage name, Harriet Howard, began in London in 1846. Two years later Howard lent the future emperor 200,000 francs to finance his return to France after the 1848 revolution. See John Bierman, *Napoleon III and His Carnival Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 54–57.
18. The very word "Paris," according to the British poet Wilfred Scawen Blunt, evoked a picture of "vanity and profane delights, of triumph in the world and the romance of pleasure! How great, how terrible a name was hers, the fair imperial harlot of civilised humanity." Quoted in Bierman, *Napoleon III*, 259.
19. On this subject, see especially Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*.
20. The Concourt brothers, who moved a good deal in high society and thus visited the apartments of some of the most famous courtesans of the day, commonly referred to them in their *Journal* as *p. . . [utains] or c. . . [oureuses]*, words used to refer to brothel girls and streetwalkers.
21. Quoted in Briais, *Grandes Courtisanes*, 225.
22. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *La Pornocratie ou les femmes dans les temps modernes* (Paris, 1875), 2. My translation. *La Pornocratie* was first published in 1865, several months after Proudhon's death. The publication was based on a half-finished manuscript and several notes, largely written in 1864.
23. Parent-Duchâtelet's study, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, was first published in 1836 and reissued in an expanded popular edition in 1857. Louis Fiaux's *Les Maisons de tolérance: Leur fermeture* was published in 1892, based on earlier findings.
24. Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 302ff.
25. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Du Principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale* (Paris: Garnier, 1865), 261. My translation.
26. The work had started out as a pamphlet to accompany a planned traveling exhibition of Courbet's *Return from the Conference* in England, but was fast turning into a book-length treatise on art, in which several other works by Courbet, including *Venus and Psyche*, were discussed in detail.
27. Proudhon's ideas about the family were first formulated in his *De la justice dans la révolution et l'église* (1858), particularly in parts 10 and 11, devoted to "Love and Marriage." Strongly attacked by feminists and several liberals, Proudhon subsequently refuted the feminist position in *La Pornocratie*.
28. See James Macmillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society, 1870–1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 2, 9ff. Macmillan quotes Proudhon's formula and places it in its historical context.
29. See Chu, *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, letter 64–19.
30. Reproduced in Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1987), 25.
31. Reproductions and an intriguing discussion of these two paintings are found in Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 140–146.
32. Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 302. See also Corbin, who in *Women for Hire*, 23–24, points to the nineteenth-century medical theory that debauchery at an early age leads to sterility in men.
33. Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, trans. Alan Conder (London, 1952), 188.
34. Proudhon, *La Pornocratie*, 13.
35. The letters he wrote in the weeks following Proudhon's death clearly show Courbet's eagerness, even compulsion to carry out this "duty." See Chu, *Letters of Gustave Courbet*, letters 65–3ff. Courbet painted the work in Ornans, making use of photographs and a death mask of Proudhon. The figure of Madame Proudhon was put in provisionally, until such time as she would be able to pose.
36. See George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1956).
37. Various suggestions have been made. Toussaint (in Bowness et al., *Gustave Courbet*, 174) speculates that either Courbet had listened to the critics who found the pregnant figure "baggy" (*amoncelé*), or Madame Proudhon herself had asked to be eliminated.

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