

Criticism of Manet's Olympia as collected by T. J. Clarke in "Olympia's Choice," The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the art of Manet and his followers (Princeton, N. J., 1984).

"[Manet's] Olympia [is] stretched out on a bed, clothed only in a knotted red ribbon in her hair. The negress dressed in pink brings her a bouquet; the black cat arches his thin spine and stains the white sheets with singular colors. It is the most bizarre tableau that one could imagine. Each day it is surrounded by a crowd of visitors, and in this constantly changing group, reflections and observations are made out loud which spare the picture no part of the truth. Some people are delighted, they think it a joke that they want to look as if they understand; others observe the thing seriously and show their neighbor, here a well-placed tone, there a hand which is improper, but richly painted Very probably everyone is right to some extent, and such diverse opinions are authorized by the incredible irregularities of Monsieur Manet's work. He has shown mere sketches ... What is his aim? His canvases are too unfinished for us possibly to tell." [Bonnin, in the Republican paper *La France*]

"Olympia, the title of which raises the memory of a great Roman courtesan from the Renaissance, is inexplicable from any point of view, even taking it for what it is, a wretched model stretched out on a sheet. The flesh tones are dirty, the modeling nonexistent. The shadows are indicated by stripes of shoe polish of varying widths. What is there to say about the negress who brings a bouquet wrapped in a paper and of the black cat who leaves dirty paw-prints on the bed? We would excuse the ugliness, but only if it were true, studied, revealed by some splendid effect of color. The least beautiful woman has bones, muscles, skin, form and some kind of color. here, there's nothing, we are enraged to say, but the desire to attract crowds at any price." [Gautier]

"What is this odalisque with a yellow belly, ignoble model picked up who knows where, who represents Olympia? Olympia? What Olympia? A courtesan, no doubt." [Claretie, *L'Artiste*]

"What a picture! Olympia awakes, weary from ... dreaming [ellipses Postwer's]. She has had a bad night, that is evident. Insomnia and colic have disturbed her serenity; her color indicates as much. There are two 'black messengers': a cat which has unfortunately been flattened between two railway sleepers; a Negress who has nothing about her that 'recalls the amorous night' unless it be a bouquet bought at the florist's on the corner, and paid for by Monsieur Arthur, which tells me a great deal about Olympia. Arthur is certainly in the antechamber waiting." [Postwer, *La Fraternité Littéraire*]

"An armed insurrection in the camp of the bourgeoisie: it's a glass of ice water that each visitor receives in the face when he sees the belle courtesan's face light up.

"[It is a] painting of the school of Baudelaire, freely executed by a pupil of Goya; the vicious strangeness of the little faubourienne [resident of a district of Paris], woman of the night from Paul Niquet's [a bar in *Les Halles*], from the mysteries of Paris and the nightmares of Edgar Poe. Her look has the sourness of one prematurely aged, her face the disturbing perfume of a *fleur du mal*; her body fatigued, corrupted, but painted under a single transparent light, the shadows light and thin ... In brief, it's hideous, but that's still something." [Ravenel]

"We have never seen with these eyes a like spectacle and a more cynical effect. This Olympia, a sort of female gorilla, a grotesque in India rubber outlined in black, apes on a bed, in a state of complete nudity, the horizontal attitude of Titian's *Venus*: The right arm rests on the body in the same fashion, except for the hand, which is flexed in a sort of shameless contraction. On the other side of the bed, a negress, 'a

sweet black messenger,' brings her upon awakening a little bit of spring in the form of a bouquet of flowers that have no appearance of giving off any odor. We have no idea what the poor, thin, animal-black cat is doing there as it pitiably arches its back at the feet of 'the stately young woman in whom the flame burns.'" [Amédée Cantaloube, *Le Grand Journal*]

"The artist represents for us under the name of Olympia a young girl lying on a bed, having as her only garment a knot of ribbon in her hair, and her hand for a fig leaf. The expression of her face is that of a being prematurely aged and vice-ridden; her body, of a putrefying color, recalls the horror of the morgue." [Victor de Jankovitz]

"The young woman is a courtesan, with dirty hands and wrinkled feet; she is lying down, wearing one Turkish slipper and with a red cockade in her hair; her body has the livid tint of a cadaver displayed in the morgue; her outlines are drawn in charcoal and her greenish, bloodshot eyes appear to be provoking the public, protected all the while by a hideous Negress.

"No, never has anything so ... strange been hung on the walls of an art exhibition. ... The women who pass turn away, and the men only stop to protest in all possible manners." [Ego, *Le Monde Illustré*]

"She is a skeleton dressed in a tight-fitting tunic made of plaster, all surrounded in black like the armature of a stained glass window ... and who the horror of so much stupidity and ignorance now adds the disappearance of a finger ... which cries out for examination by the public health inspectors!" [Lorenz, *Revue galopante au salon*]

"Monsieur Courbet is surpassed by the length of the celebrated black cat. The moment chosen by this great colorist is the one when this woman is going to take a bath, which seems to us to be very much needed." [Bertall, *Le journal amusant*]

"Olympia is exposed quite naked on a bed like a corpse on the counters at the morgue, this Olympia from the Rue Mouffetard [a street where prostitutes plied their trade], dead of yellow fever and already arrived at an advanced state of decomposition." [Cantaloube, *Le Grand Journal*]

"Olympia is lying on her bed, having borrowed from art no ornament but a rose which she has put in her tow-like hair. This redhead is of a perfect ugliness. Her face is stupid, her skin cadaverous. She does not have a human form -- Monsieur Manet has pulled her so out of joint that she could not possibly move her arms or legs. By her side one sees a Negress who brings in a bouquet and at her feet a cat who wakes and has a good stretch, a cat with hair on end, out of a witches' sabbath by Callot." [Félix Deriège]

"Oh, how could he be the author of this Olympia, which by courtesy and in the interest of mankind I do not want to analyze; but I can characterize it in a few words by saying that it is not true, nor lifelike, nor beautiful (beautiful! Good God!); that it is shapeless, that she is lewd, that her body is dirty." [Aubert]