Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting, 1830-1908, by Marcia Pointon. Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. xi, 160; 48 illus. ISBN 0-5213-8528-8 (hardcover), $50.00; ISBN 0-5214-0999-3 (paperback), $19.00.

Synthesizing semiotics and history, Marcia Pointon offers innovative and striking readings of canonic paintings. Focusing on the representation of the body, she examines works by Delacroix, Eakins, Renoir, Manet, Courbet and Madox Brown, exploring the meanings of the representation of the female nude. She frequently includes cartoons and lesser-known artists' works to situate her readings in contexts of reception, both historical and contemporary.

Her method is to go beyond studies of production (mostly Marxist and feminist and concerned with the powerlessness of female images) and public reception, and to ask instead "how makers and consumers of art invest images with communicative identities and relevances that are particular as well as communal" (1). Her intent is to examine the power and authority invested in the image of the female nude and the space produced for the communication of desire and pleasure through a disunified, polyvalent, but nonetheless intersubjective discourse: "Reading as a woman. . .does not construct a simple alternative hermeneutic" (8). Pointon is not driven to closure in her readings, but instead opens up points of interpretation in her exami-

nation of the gendering of reading.

Beginning with an exploration of the centrality of the nude and of nudity in Western art, Pointon maps the historiographic and theoretical issues which problematize the nude. Art historians have treated this subject as timeless, outside history, and as abstract, eliding it with style or with iconography, but never with desire or sexuality. Eschewing this hypostatized categorization of this subject, Pointon argues that the female body, whether nude or dressed, "works like a series of terms constantly shifting and yet structurally related" in creative practice. The post-Renaissance nude mediates in several ways the notions of woman as between nature and culture, and some of those ways inscribe power or anxiety on her image. Pointon reads the female nude in the context of all the signifiers in each painting. The female body also signifies male creativity, artistic professionalism and masculinity, by virtue of woman's existence in the re-presented, symbolic, mythic world in which, as represented, she serves creativity, but does not possess it. Surveying various interpretations of the female body, clothed and nude, in her first chapter, Pointon demonstrates the limitations of sociological analyses which assume a realistic depiction in paintings against which she pits multiple readings and semiotic relationships of images within and across paintings and sculpture to reveal that "woman's body is constructed as a terrain where different kinds of knowledge compete" (33).

Pointon's subsequent chapters include a critique of Michael Fried's study of Eakins and the method of psychoanalysis. Commenting on art historical methods as they developed in the late 19th century with their emphasis on the look, she maintains that art history's history ties it to Freud's methods, from the use of Freudian terms—projection, inferiority complex—to Freud's own comparisons between his methods and the connoisseurship techniques of Morelli (36). According to Pointon, "it seems reasonable to propose that art history in its institutional processes perpetually replays the narrative of castration" (36). Commenting on the combined emphasis on class and repression of gender in recent art historical literature, Pointon raises issues of the nature of signifying processes and the construction of the gendered subjects, whether the subject refers to image, or spectator, or artist. Synthesizing the processes of signification at points of production and consumption, Pointon's study stresses the communicative processes of gendered looking as political and sexual. Psychoanalysis is a useful tool for addressing contradictions and resisting the "magisterial iconographic reading,. . .the unassailable provenance, the normative mode of a sealed system of inherited convention, the historicist goal of a plenitude of recorded reception and function in the public domain" (42). She criticizes Fried for failing to address gender or to interrogate realism and for his conventional art historical discourse in which he authoritatively closes down possible readings and ambiguities. Drawing on studies of the Lacanian gaze and the lack, Pointon argues that Eakins' two paintings of medical operations, *The Gross Clinic* and *The Agnew Clinic*, "can be understood as works that address for a male audience the crisis of sexual difference and the crisis of Realism by assigning to woman the specific role of lack" (58).

Examining Delacroix's *Liberty on the Barricades*, Pointon addresses the subject of allegory which she also takes up in the book's final chapter on Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*. Comparing Delacroix's painting with other representations of woman in revolutionary acts, Pointon argues that through an allegorical representation women are "valorized in discourse not for who they are but as aspects of womanhood culturally constructed" (64). Liberty is simultaneously real and allegorical. The Salon nude image is disrupted in Delacroix's painting by the dirty female and the suggestion of hair under her arm; dirt signifies a system (Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 1966) in which it has meaning. Furthermore, the conventions of the allegorical female image, in official post-revolutionary France or in Daumier's work (See Elizabeth Childs and Kirsten Powell eds. *Femmes d'esprit: Women in Daumier's Caricature*, 1990), do not signal sexual equality (Daumier vehemently attacked suffragists), any more than men's raptures about motherhood have ever endorsed women's equality, or faith in the Virgin Mary has ever promoted women's power. Pointon subtly argues that Delacroix's Liberty is nude like truth but also naked like sexuality; women are depicted as witnessing history, but never making it, except symbolically. Pointon cites Delacroix's deviance from his predecessors to demonstrate the image's ambiguity as truth, as woman, and as prostitute/working class. Reading the painting metonymically, Pointon convincingly demonstrates that through the images of Liberty, the dead naked corpse in front of her, the sansculotte's phallically placed gun, and biographical in-

formation about Delacroix, the subtext of this painting which allies politics and eroticism, sexuality and power, is the power of female sexuality and the disturbing "ambiguities of images which simultaneously heroicise and demonise woman" (82).

In Chapter 4, Pointon examines the female nude in relation to the image of the male artist, in this case Renoir. The photographic image of Renoir aged and crippled, placed between one of his late nude paintings and his young model is the impetus for Pointon's examination of how the representation of woman is a cypher for the act of representation itself, "the site of the struggle for mastery over the process of mimesis" (83). Citing Luce Irigaray's assertion that woman's sex is that "nothing to be seen" (87), Pointon shows that the conventions of female nudity (e.g., lack of pubic hair, passive posture) convey both the presence and the absence. Drawing on Renoir's interest in the figure of Jocasta and in the Tannhauser myth, she argues convincingly that Renoir's *The Judgment of Paris* is a pre-oedipal drama.

Chapter 6, "Interior Portraits," examines the 19th-century discovery of the internal organs of the female, the mysteries of her sex and of birth, and scrutinizes Gauguin's *The Vision after the Sermon* and Ford Madox Brown's *Take Your Son, Sir!* Here Pointon begins with a misconception by scholars, in this case the ahistorical assumption that all representations of women imply the presence of male sexual appetites. Both Gauguin's and Brown's paintings represent the theme of fertility, among other themes. Again complex and contradictory issues, in this case the male fear of union with the mother and the desire for paternal authority, create an ambiguity of reading and of artistic intentionality, irreducible to simple political or gendered polarities.

In her final chapter, "Guess Who's Coming to Lunch? Allegory and the Body in Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*," Pointon again brings up the issue of allegory, this time in a painting usually not interpreted as allegorical, as Delacroix's *Liberty* usually is. She argues that Manet's painting "interrogates the symbolic function of women in the organisation of the world through pictorial representation and in so doing renders allegory problematic" (113). She claims that the painting represents a crisis in nudity as well, since nudity is the allegorical representation of women. However, nudity also exists in relation to the clothed body and to the partially clothed body; clothes remind us that the allegory is shaky, that the nude can also be naked, that the allegory can be real, that the ideal can be erotic. The nude female in Manet's painting does not erase the signifiers of the real around this nude, or erase the social meanings of her body; her discarded clothes link the biological and the social, so her social identity is never eliminated and her timelessness is threatened by timely fashion. Manet's painting, furthermore, problematizes narrative: there is none in the work, no story, no closure, and thus "the condition of the pictorial militates against narrative" in a painting in which "no one is listening to the speaker" who gestures while speaking (127). The imagery rejects iconographic decoding; the speech gesture rejects narrative. Thus meaning in the painting is indeterminate, unclear, incomplete, circular, prophesied by Zola who concluded that Manet's painting was devoid of meaning (126). Pointon argues that in the painting man has the power of speech and woman the power of the body, but which dominates is unclear.

Ranging across French, American and British painting, Pointon offers intriguing interpretations of the power of the female nude. Her suggestions about the depiction of the body promise much for the reading of Pre-Raphaelite painting (like Brown's which she examines) which is so obsessed with the female body and themes of desire and the intersection of the natural, the mythic, and the social.

Julie F. Codell
Arizona State University