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The Flesh of Painting: Caillebotte's Modern Olympia  
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The language of putrefaction, often applied through a culinary analogy, appeared consistently in the critical reception of modern-life and Impressionist painting. For example, two critics used the term *faisandé*, referring to well-hung meat, to describe Manet's nude figure of Olympia in 1865. The analogies that they posed between morgue bodies, female figures, meat, and fleshy paint material became central modes of denigrating Impressionist paintings of women in the ensuing decades. Gustave Caillebotte's *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* (c. 1882), depicting anthropomorphized, gendered, and sexualized animal flesh, can be considered in this context. In my reading, the painting enacts the critical responses to his colleagues' figures, foregrounding the violent operations through which bodies might be reduced to meat, whether literal or metaphorical. In their comparisons to rotting flesh, nineteenth-century critics expressed a visceral reaction to works of art that *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* demands.

Keywords: Gustave Caillebotte, Impressionism, Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, still life, meat, decomposition

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### The Flesh of Painting: Caillebotte's *Modern Olympia*

In a review of the Fourth Impressionist Exhibition, an anonymous author expressed tentative support for the 'groupe d'artistes dissidents':

[...] in this exhibition there are works of real value and exceptional flavour. If the fourteen artists in the catalogue had been willing to pick over and severely limit their output, instead of displaying their shipment of fresh and rotten merchandise, the exhibition on the avenue de l'Opéra would have been a success. (*La Petite République Français*, 1879, 2–3)<sup>i</sup>

The critic compared the painters to shopkeepers displaying merchandise of disparate quality to the viewer turned consumer. Selling art is here considered analogous to selling food. Some

paintings are fresh and flavourful. Others are rotten. Often applied through a culinary analogy, the language of putrefaction was widely used to describe modern-life and Impressionist painting. It most commonly referred to representations of women who, some said, appeared to be decomposing. Scholars have argued that when critics developed this trope in relation to paintings by Édouard Manet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Edgar Degas, they expressed twofold unease. They objected to the ways that these artists represented female flesh in paint, and suspected that the figures depicted were of dubious social status, sexualized bodies suffering moral as well as physical decay.<sup>ii</sup>

This article builds on those insights by exploring a related but distinct strand of this nineteenth-century criticism comparing female figures to rotting flesh. Commentators did not just designate figures as cadavers, but as carcasses. As often as they were described as splayed out in the morgue, women in paintings were compared to meat hanging in the cellar or on the *étal*, spread across the butcher's block or the market table. Nor was it just the figures in paintings that appeared to be decomposing. Paint material itself carried the possibility of deliquescence, and paintings as objects could be understood as 'rotten merchandise', as above. The meat metaphors that I trace in this article expressed the visceral reactions of nineteenth-century critics and appealed to the reader's senses of taste, smell, and touch. I will explore these themes in relation to two paintings: Édouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863, Figure 1) and Gustave Caillebotte's *Veal in a Butcher's Shop [Veau à l'étal]* (c. 1882, Figure 2).

### *L'Olympia faisandée*

*Olympia* met with a barrage of hostile commentary at the 1865 Paris Salon. Dirty, ugly, insolent, impossible to describe and an affront to public decency, the painting caused such a scandal that it was rehung mid-exhibition at the top of the Salon wall. The result ensured that

‘one can no longer tell whether it is a pack of nude flesh or of laundry’ (Claretie, 1865a). Much of the documented outcry focused on the pallor of the nude’s skin, perceived as tinged with yellow, green, and grey, and thus redolent of a dirty, diseased, or decomposing body.<sup>iii</sup> In his book-length study of the 1865 Salon, Victor de Jancovitz exclaimed that ‘the facial expression is of a prematurely aged, vicious creature; the body has the colour of aged meat [*une couleur faisandée*], reminiscent of the horror of the Morgue’ (1865, 67). Paul de Saint-Victor echoed in his review for *La Presse*: ‘The crowd gathers, as at the Morgue, before this gamey *Olympia* [*devant l’Olympia faisandée*] [...]’ (1865, 3). These negative assessments joined a host of other accusations that the skeletal nude was ‘dead of yellow fever... [in] an advanced state of decomposition’ (Geronte [Victor Fournel], 1865) and in dire need of ‘an exam by the public health inspectors!’ (Lorentz, 1865, 13). As is well known, these assertions of illness and death established the figure as a low-rung prostitute in a brothel setting. Fears of venereal disease leading to bodily decay centred around sex workers. Seen to be sickly, skinny, unwashed, and set in a painted context as well as an exhibition context where ‘she’ was presented for sale, the supine figure proved alarming. Disgruntled critics also took advantage of the painting’s notoriety to express their disapproval in heightened, and profitable, terms.

When the above commentary by Jancovitz and Saint-Victor has been translated from French into English, putrid has generally been chosen to stand for *faisandé*.<sup>iv</sup> Putrid is a term equally suited to describing the decomposition of human and animal bodies, and was likely selected because Jancovitz and Saint-Victor also referenced the morgue – a novel institution where anonymous dead bodies were displayed to the public, both so that the corpses might be identified, but also because this provided a form of modern spectacle for the many visitors who passed through the halls. But *faisandé* has a more specific meaning, closer to gamey. It refers to meat that has been hung to age in order to deepen its flavour, and as Frédérique

Desbuissons has shown in her survey of the theme of rotten painting in nineteenth-century Salon criticism, it was widely used to debase art and challenge its claims to temporal endurance and continuing value.<sup>v</sup> The concept drew the *abattoir* into Manet's atelier and the 1865 Salon. This distinction between putrid and gamey belongs to a wider and underappreciated trend in nineteenth-century art criticism whereby sexualized female figures in particular were compared to rotting animal flesh. Joining Jancovitz and Saint-Victor, another critic of the 1865 Salon likened Academician Paul Baudry's *Diana* to *Olympia* with mutual disdain:

The general tone of the goddess [Diana] is yellow, and her skin is that disagreeable yellow that one sees in the old chickens on market stands that are kept at bay by all knowing cooks. She seems to be in a state of decomposition almost as advanced as Manet's *Olympia* [...] (de Bullemont, 1865, 324)

This language did not originate here. In 1789 the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* noted a vulgar use of *viande* as the genital region (734) and by the mid-nineteenth century the link to meat was commonplace in descriptions of the venal body. When Alfred Delvau published the first edition of his *Dictionnaire érotique moderne* in 1850 he defined *viande* as 'Femme publique' and a *boucherie* as a 'bordel, où abondent les gros morceaux de viande, – humaine' (66, 368). This vernacular also appeared liberally in brothel guides that referred to sex workers as 'meaty', 'juicy morsels', as 'fat as bacon' (Anonymous, 1883, 61, 100, 146–47, 168). One English guide to French brothels revelled in the butcher shop conceit:

The abbess has just put the kipehook on all other purveyors of the French flesh market. She does not keep her meat too long on the hooks, though she will have her price; but nothing to get stale here. You may have your meat dressed to your own liking, and there is no need of cutting twice from one joint; and if it suits your taste, you may kill your own lamb or mutton for her flock is in prime condition, and always ready for sticking [slitting of the throat]. When any of them are *fried* they are turned out to grass, and sent to the hammer, or disposed of by private contract, but never brought in again; consequently, the rots, bots, glanders, and other diseases incidental to cattle, are not generally known here. (*The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book*, c. 1850)

The sex workers may be expensive, admits *The Man of Pleasure's Pocket Book*, but they are young, plentiful, submissive, and cast out at the first sign of age or disease. Women and meat are linked through the twin fears of venereal and meat-borne illness. Through the metaphor of butchery, sexual intercourse is compared to penetration by the hook or knife. The consequence for the women is continuous attack and finally murder. Like other comparisons of prostitutes to 'old meaty whores' or 'dried-up, tough bits of meat that require a great deal of *chewing* before they can be digested' (Anonymous, 1883, 61, 107–08), the term *faisandé* was most likely to be applied to an undesirable woman, as Manet's reclining figure was classified. Sometimes the connection to aged meat was specifically used to denigrate black women. Another English guide to French brothels, ambitiously entitled *The Pretty Women of Paris: Their Names and Addresses, Qualities and Faults, Being a Complete Directory, or, Guide to Pleasure for Visitors to the Gay City*, described a 'sumptuous bagnio' on the rue Chabanais that included 'a stinking, sweaty negress, who is always retained on the establishment for those who like to take their game when it is "high"' (Anonymous, 1883, 160). The directory drew upon the rank odour and clammy surface of aging meat to evoke and debase female physicality. The figure of Olympia was twice called a 'Venus Hottentot' in Salon reviews that conflated the white nude with the black attendant by way of a reference to Saartjie Baartman, a woman from southern Africa who was exhibited in Paris as the 'Hottentot Venus' earlier in the century. References to the figure of Olympia as *faisandé* may in this context suggest a racialized, as well as a sexualized, identity.<sup>vi</sup>

Beyond subject matter, a closer translation of *faisandé* in Salon criticism is also important for reimagining the reactions implied by a term connected to the culinary and to the practices of butchery. The language conjures up the sickening and pungent smell, slimy texture, and nauseating taste of meat left hanging too long, as well as the experience of food poisoning. It was actually common for critics in the second half of the nineteenth century to

invoke alimentary consumption as a metaphor for viewing, especially relating to a painting's ability to produce nausea and adversely affect the viewer's health.<sup>vii</sup> Many argued that the 'unhealthy' works 'served' by Manet at the 1865 Salon provoked widespread 'indigestion' with their 'nauseating mixture' of spoiled colour.<sup>viii</sup> In *Manet and his Critics*, George Heard Hamilton notes that many of Manet's critics relied on language not typically found in pictorial criticism, including terms invoking taste such as acrid, savour, and pungency (1954, 153–54). Ingestion provided a compelling vocabulary for viewing potentially corrupting subjects. Unlike the sense of sight, which requires distance from objects in order to function, eating and tasting depend upon contact, a breakdown of boundaries between bodies with potentially disastrous outcomes. A painting's ability to appeal to the entire body and multiple senses granted it threatening, subversive power.

From the opposing camp and in support of Manet the following year, Émile Zola also seized upon the comparison of Manet's paintings to raw meat. He used the metaphor to stress the unadulterated power of Manet's paintings, which he considered as the 'raw' translation of the artist's personal perceptual experience and temperament into paint. He contrasted this with the superficial treats confectioned by Academicians who used formulaic recipes to flatter the vulgarized taste of the bourgeoisie:

All around [Manet's paintings] stretch the sweets of the fashionable artistic confectioners, sugar-candy trees and pastry houses, gingerbread gentlemen and ladies made of vanilla cream. The candy shop becomes pinker and sweeter, and the artist's living canvases take on a certain bitterness in the midst of this river of milk. Also, one must see the faces made by the grown-up children passing through the gallery. For two cents you will not make them swallow veritable raw meat [*viande crue*], but they stuff themselves like famished people with all the sickening sweetness served them. (1866, 46–47)

Instead of the nude Olympia, Zola compared Manet's paintings themselves to *viande crue* in a gendered dichotomy between the lightweight, feminized sweets of artistic confectioners and the substance of hearty red meat. This is not so far from Saint-Victor's use of the meat

metaphor to imply that *Olympia* itself, and not just the figure within it, was fleshy – though for Saint-Victor that flesh was deliquescent, while for Zola it was fresh and healthy. Saint-Victor italicized the title in his passage, thereby referring to the painting named *Olympia*, not the figure called Olympia: ‘La foule se presse, comme à la Morgue, devant l’*Olympia* faisandée’. In his review, Jules Claretie explained that such perceptions of Manet had become so widespread in 1865 that they migrated onto other ‘realist’ artists, and that ‘the public resists this bloody flesh, this raw, violent, bloody painting’ (1865b, 226). These reviews directed at Manet’s painting as a whole related to the artist’s technique, displayed across the entire canvas surface. The ‘raw, violent, bloody painting’ resulted from a style perceived as crude, direct, and harsh. The jarring colour contrasts of dazzling white sheets set off against a dark background, and the suppression of halftones, reportedly hurt the eyes. Victor Fournel complained: ‘its colouring of verjuice [an acidic juice made from unripe grapes, used like vinegar], sour and acidic, penetrates into the eye as does the surgeon’s saw into flesh’ (Geronte [Victor Fournel], 1865). He described embodied shock through the sense of taste and simultaneous destruction of the organ of vision, the critic’s most important instrument. Another critic called the painting a ‘mixture of raw tones, of colliding lines that shatter the eyes’ (Gille, 1865), once again uniting the sensual immediacy of the raw with the annihilation of vision. Rhetorically or not, the forms and colours of the painting seemed to threaten the viewer’s eye and body. Even Zola described the colouration of *Olympia* in similar terms: ‘At first glance, one only sees two violently opposing hues... if you wish to reconstruct reality, you must move back a few steps’ (1893 [1867], 357–58). As Zola walked toward the painting, representation broke down into its material elements. For other critics, that effect was akin to literal decomposition as the subject dissolved into the thick and variegated tones best appreciated in the sheets, the bouquet and its paper wrapper, and the attendant’s pink gown. These critics experienced Manet’s broad strokes as bursting free from



their forms and the unified whole dispersing into morsels like an animal dismembered into component parts. Commentators also read this fragmentation across the nude body. Manet arranged the reclining figure's limbs in ways that segment them, such as the tip of the left breast that intersects the edge of the left arm, the left hand that hides the connection of left leg to torso, and the slipper that divides the toes of the right foot from the lower right leg. The prolific caricaturist Charles Albert d'Arnoux, known by his pseudonym Bertall, drew attention to these disconnections in his prints, which decapitate the figure in reference to the black choker and cut it in half with an oversized bouquet (Figure 3). In text, the nude was consistently called 'deformed' (Gille, 1865) and 'unformed' (Aubert, 1865, 3). To Félix Derière she 'd[id] not have human form'. Derière accused Manet and his ilk of over-eagerness to disarticulate the arms and dislocate the legs of their models (1865, 97–99). Among the imperfections cited by Marius Chaumelin were 'the flattened torso, the head pulled out of joint, the limbs [that] do not connect to the body' (1865, 177). Pale, skinny limbs twisted and dislocated, de Bullemont's comparison of Baudry's and Manet's nudes to plucked chickens in a market stall is close at hand.

#### Caillebotte's *Modern Olympia*

The connections posed in relation to *Olympia* between morgue bodies, female figures, meat, and fleshy paint material became central to how Impressionist painting was discussed in the ensuing decades. Female figures painted by Renoir, Degas, and Gauguin were compared to raw meat in an advanced state, *faisandé*, from the 1870s into the 1880s. At the second Impressionist Exhibition in 1876 Renoir displayed *Torso: Effect of Sunlight*, a painting that Caillebotte purchased shortly thereafter, and which shows a young female model nude to the waist and seated in a wooded landscape (Figure 4). Louis Énault described it in the following terms: '[...] a large study of a nude woman – to whom it certainly would have been better to

allow a dress – saddens us with the purplish tones of rotting meat [*ses tons violacés de chair faisandée*]’ (1876, 2). His commentary joined that of Albert Wolff who wrote: ‘Try to tell M. Renoir that a woman’s torso is not a heap of decomposing flesh with patches of purplish green that announce the state of complete putrefaction in a cadaver!’ (1876, 1). Both objected to the purple, green, and blue paint worked into the skin, through which Renoir approximated the appearance of dappled light falling upon the body through trees, reflecting the tones of the forest landscape. For Énault and Wolff this colouration made the nude appear as a decaying piece of flesh, human or animal, not a living, breathing young woman. This critique of Impressionist colouration became so established that the next year at the 1877 group exhibition, the caricaturist Cham dedicated an entire series of prints to the putrefaction theme. In *Le peintre impressionniste* (Figure 5) an unkempt male artist, unnamed so as to stand for any of the painters exhibiting except Berthe Morisot, explains to his model: ‘Madame, for your portrait there are certain tones missing from your face. Could you perhaps first spend a few days at the bottom of a river?’ – this so that the painter could work from life (*d’après nature*), without having to abandon the direct observation understood as critical to Impressionist practice. The cost is that if she acquiesced, of course, the painter would be working from death. In another depiction of *Le peintre impressionniste*, the model complains upon first glimpse of her portrait that she appears to have been painted at the morgue (Figure 6). Another of Cham’s caricatures shows the police commissioner visiting the show, who ‘demands the address of the models in order to bury them at once, considering their state of putrefaction’ (Figure 7). By the next exhibition in 1879 Degas’s paintings of dancers were nicknamed ‘morceaux de haute saveur’ (Fouquier, 1879, 3), and summing up the show as a whole, George Nazim wrote:

Visit to the *impressionists, alias independants*. Mixture of the excellent and grotesque. This *impression* gathers before a canvas representing a green woman, literally green, the green of rotten meat [*d’un vert de viandes corrompues*]:

- Hum! Extremely advanced [*avancée*], this particular woman!
- It must be the portrait of an oratrice for the women's congress.

No particular work has been identified as the subject of this imagined exchange, which functions as a more generalized evaluation. Nazim combined criticism of Impressionist colouration and the search for 'impressions' with social commentary about the contemporary feminist movement. In 1878 the International Congress for Women's Rights was held in Paris to coincide with the International Exhibition. Nazim chose the word *avancé* to suggest meat in an advanced state, *faisandé*, as well as that which was progressive, as a leader of the women's congress would have been considered by her feminist peers. The contemptuous joke judged feminists as corrupted, as *corrompu* means both corrupted and rotten, and it also underlines the gendered nature of the putrefaction theme, which was used in relation to female figures above all. This language continued into assessments of Gauguin's *Study of a Nude (Suzanne Sewing)* in 1881 as 'cagneuse et faisandée' (Havard, 1881, 2) and Degas's pastel female bathers in 1886 as 'la viande bouffé' (Fèvre, 1886, 48).

Even more than in the reception of *Olympia*, these metaphors related not just to the appearance of the depicted figures and their questionable social status, but also to the paint itself, an unstable material that could decay and carry infection in its organic materiality. Impressionist practice was known for broad strokes, generous handling, and projecting impasto that clotted across the canvas surface. Some argued that for these artists, displaying paint material was an end in itself, and that it was difficult even to discern the subjects of their paintings through it.<sup>ix</sup> Monet, Pissarro, Sisley, Cézanne, and Degas often left their works unvarnished, drawing attention to the sticky physicality of the paint. Without the slick layer of brittle surface coating, paint appeared pasty and soft, approximating the velvety finish of pastels. Unvarnished these surfaces were also 'unpreserved', for varnish sets the paint to protect it from the environment and the passage of time.<sup>x</sup> Instead, in certain works by these

artists, the oil-suspended medium announced itself as a substance that could decompose and accordingly, could be received with distaste. This implication lay behind another of Cham's caricatures of the quintessential Impressionist painter from his 1877 series (Figure 8). In it, the artist complains that he borrowed his colours from the morgue but, unfortunately, could not express their odour. The painter's eagerness to conjure smell suggests that he would have liked to literally appropriate rotting matter, that the substances used to depict decomposing subjects would best capture their effects if in a state of putrefaction themselves. In the desired slippage between paint and other organic material, Cham highlighted paint's potential to appeal not just the sense of sight, but to the viewer's entire body.

Caillebotte's *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* takes up and should be understood in the context of these themes: the fact that like shopkeepers, Impressionists hung 'fresh and rotten merchandise' with the hope of its sale; the sexualization and gendering of meat as related to the carnal consumption of female flesh; and the resemblance of thickly-applied paint to other substances. Caillebotte produced some twenty-five still lifes of food and game in the early 1880s. Ranging from depictions of restaurant meals, to haut bourgeois side tables, to upmarket urban shop displays, these paintings are some of the most striking examples of Impressionist work in the genre. *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* is among the largest of these, surpassing even *Fruit Displayed on a Stand*, the latter of which Caillebotte included in the group exhibition in 1882. Its size alone indicates that *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* was an ambitious project, even though like most of his still lifes, it was never exhibited in his lifetime. The painting shows the underside of a life-sized slaughtered calf suspended by its legs from a wooden hanger. The body is placed in front of a freshly painted wall panel half covered by a starched and pleated white cloth. Such expensive décor would have belonged to an elite establishment boasting the hygiene practices within. With limbs stretching from corner to corner, the flattened calf dominates the close up view, from which any further social

or spatial context has been eschewed. For the viewer this produces a startling confrontation. The palette is defined by strident red, which departs dramatically from the muted colours of the artist's better-known street scenes of the previous decade, in which critics consistently complained of monotonous grey compositions (for example, Mantz, 1877). Even the pale flesh of the calf's skin, with only a very thin varnish to reveal the rough application of pasty paint, is infused with patches of yellow, blue, green, and violet.

As Douglas Druick (2002) and Paula Young Lee (2008) have observed, the window dressing feminizes the calf's body. The carcass is thoroughly cleaned and thoughtfully adorned for display. A garland of flowers and leaves, sculpted with impasto, hangs from the legs down to the severed neck like a necklace attracting the passer-by's attention. A single, thickly painted pink rose projects outward from the flesh of the animal's belly, a sort of corsage inserted into skin that hangs down like breasts. In these ways the preparation creates a visual pun on the *toilette* that turns the animal's lower body into a grotesque *décolletage*. Responding to the feminization of the calf, Lee notes that *veau* was common slang for a youthful prostitute who was thought particularly likely to carry venereal disease, and argues that this calf would have signified in terms of that other flesh market, the sex trade (2008, 273–75). Lee connects *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* to *Olympia* insofar as both represent bodies for sale. There are other aspects that make the comparison compelling. Both paintings offer pale flesh set off against a white sheet, while a curtain and wall block the eye from moving back into space. The pink flower in the figure of Olympia's hair can be seen to parallel the pink rose decorating the calf, among other flowers in the gifted bouquet or the animal's garland. But if Caillebotte looked back to *Olympia* and its scandal while he was planning and painting *Veal in a Butcher's Shop*, it would have been more in the spirit of Paul Cézanne's *A Modern Olympia* (Figure 9, 1873–74), a painting that exposed and interrupted the rituals of paid sex that were implicitly staged in Manet's original. Cézanne clarified the brothel context

by including a clothed male customer watching as the transposed attendant unveils a naked woman who seems to be an unwilling participant in the activity. The overwrought setting and theatrical presentation denaturalize the practices of prostitution and implicate the viewer who, like the male client (and artist, for this figure is a self-portrait of Cézanne), watches as the woman is exposed. A pet dog looks past the client in our direction, further invoking the viewer's presence, and complicity, in the scene.

In *Veal in a Butcher's Shop*, the conventions for gendered display, the practices of butchery, and even the practices of painting are made to seem strange. In my reading, the painting enacts the critical reception of Olympia, the verbal butchery through which the nude was broken into pieces for public scrutiny by critics who claimed merely to be commenting upon Manet's violence. Olympia's flexed hand covering the genitalia, which was subject to irony and outrage by critics who found the pose crude and even 'immodest' (Pierrot, 1865, 11), can be seen as satirized in the calf's limp tail hanging sadly between its legs. Olympia's outward gaze, perceived as impertinent, becomes obliterated by the decapitation that Bertall imposed on Manet's figure in 1865 (Figure 3). Instead of the nude's closed legs and shielding hand that deny access to the genital 'scar' or 'wound', as contemporary literature sometimes called the vagina (Delvau, 185, 92; Choux, 1881, 46, 249), in Caillebotte's painting the limbs are pried apart and painfully flattened to expose the gaping underbelly and genital region, evoking not just a carcass splayed out on the butcher's block, but also a corpse on the anatomy table. Ligaments torn, skin pulled back tightly to reveal the interior, the calf resembles a human *écorché*, calling to mind one critic's assertion that Manet flayed the nude Olympia with his brushes:

After all, I care little about Mlle Impéria [he mistakes or mocks the title *Olympia*] and the other hussies who are just as bad. Manet is free to paint them or flay them according to the whims of his brushes: it's a matter for him and for her. (Flavio, 1865, 57)

In order to emphasize the brutality inherent in Manet's act of painting, the pseudonymous critic suggested parallels between the artist and the butcher or anatomist peeling off skin. The paintbrush becomes a knife, the figure and canvas (here conflated) a flesh.<sup>xi</sup> Caillebotte's painting suggests this conflation in paint, outside of explicit critical attention. The fleshiness of his thickly applied strokes allows for slippage between real and painted bodies, reinforced by the fusion of human and animal initiated by the window dressing and the sagging, breast-like belly flesh. Broad swaths of opaque red pigment resemble coagulated blood, a crusty wound. The brushstrokes criss-cross like sutures, building up the surface of the canvas at the same time as they cut into the depicted calf – as in the rose which both projects outward as well as appears buried within the body like its now-excavated heart. The viscous paint comes across as an organic substance, the stuff of animal and human bodies, both prone to decomposition.

Existing interpretations of *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* depend upon the concept of *flânerie*, strolls through urban space taken by a sophisticated male aesthete who surveys the city with interest as well as detachment. Capable of disappearing into his surroundings, this figure is characterized above all by a disembodied gaze.<sup>xii</sup> The *flâneur* has been central to art historical orthodoxy since Baudelaire equated the ideal modern artist with this figuration of optical connoisseurship in 1863. As an affluent bachelor relatively free to spend his time traversing and representing the Paris streets, Caillebotte has sometimes come to embody the *flâneur* par excellence in nineteenth-century studies. Art historians have suggested that this orientation toward the city characterizes Caillebotte's entire oeuvre, from large 1870s street scenes to 1880s still lifes. For example, the identification of Caillebotte as a quintessential *flâneur* is central to Michael Marrinan's recent monograph on the artist. When Marrinan analyzes *Veal in a Butcher's Shop*, he argues that that perspective implied by the painting is one of 'cool detachment' (2016, 309). This assessment, which responds to the matter of fact

presentation of gruesome subject matter, has been well established in relation to this painting. In one of the earliest discussions of *Veal in a Butcher's Shop*, Douglas Druick argues that it 'suggests the ironic detachment of the Baudelairian *flâneur*' as well as a certain empathy with the shopkeeper who, like the artist, produced the veal for visual consumption (2002, 220). Ruth Iskin also relies on the concept of detached optical experience when she interprets the painting as a 'cool visual analys[is]' and claims that '[t]he detached viewpoint connotes the anonymity of the metropolis' (2007, 177). Reprising this language to emphasize the violence of the scene, Stephen Eisenman contends that *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* manifests 'detachment from the lives of animals and circumstances of their deaths... the painting is lacking in irony' (2013, 168–70). Also presenting Caillebotte as a coolheaded observer, the curators of his most recent retrospective (*Gustave Caillebotte: The Painter's Eye, 2015–2016*) cast the artist as 'recording his amusement at the fastidious adornment of the dead meat...respond[ing] to the humor of the found scene' (2015, 188). Finally, in the most sustained analysis of the painting to date, Paula Young Lee makes the case that 'Caillebotte has not painted meat but the conventions of public display, conventions that neutralized these raw parts of all meaning except their viability inside a capitalist economy' (2008, 287). Conventions for display are indeed intended to mask the disturbing realities of butchery and carnivorousness, but when translated into oil paint, do they really have the effect of reducing the calf to an interchangeable commodity, or else redirecting attention to broader questions of the regulation of prostituted human bodies, as Lee goes on to argue? All of these accounts place *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* in the context of the modern city, and debate Caillebotte's perspective on it. They ask whether the painting's tone is ironic or playful, whether it celebrates or critiques modern commerce and modern life. Without agreeing on the answers, all basically depend on the idea that Caillebotte painted a 'found' scene, relatively free from artistic intervention. That assumption is hard to sustain upon close study of the painting, with



its dense interweave of multicoloured strokes and projecting impasto that are insistently painterly, and everywhere provide evidence of the artist's labouring hand over an extended period rather than his analytic eye. Grounding the work instead in the context of painting, considering it not just as a reaction to contemporary Paris but also as a reaction to contemporary art, directs us back to its material qualities and, in fact, reveals the limits of this established interpretation. My line of inquiry points to the breakdown of a detached aesthetic gaze.

Caillebotte painted the large composition at a uniform resolution, which implies an extended look that moves slowly across the canvas, taking everything equally into account. He rejected conventional pictorial solutions that would make hierarchies within the scene apparent, including varying degrees of focus and a deeper space arranged according to the standards of linear perspective. Those strategies would give the eye a clear path through the painting, help allow for the subject to be quickly understood, and provide the narrative relief of background scene. Instead, there is nowhere for the eye to rest beyond the foregrounded body that immobilizes the viewer. This is not the 'unstable, fleeting, momentary' perspective of the ambling *flâneur* who cavalierly glimpses curiosities, as one exhibition catalogue characterizes Caillebotte's work in the still life genre (Shackelford, 2001, 26). Instead, *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* implies prolonged looking, which is important because it takes time to decipher the identity of the subject matter when it is wrested from its context in the shop and (re)presented in an art exhibition, studio, or home. The body depicted oscillates between animal and human, male and female. While the flowers and sagging underbelly suggest a woman's body and its ornamentation, the tail is penile. The orientation is equally difficult to fix, for the calf appears as an upright crucified corpse as well as an upended carcass. The result is destabilizing and dizzying, an effect amplified by the thick, multicoloured strokes of paint in all directions that cause the entire composition to vibrate. The impasto endows the

painting with heightened presence as a material object and not as a window onto another, more distant world. Because of the hook's placement at the top edge of the canvas, the carcass appears to hang from the painting frame itself and extend into our space. The white curtain contributes to this effect. Warm colours, like the pink and red of the body, advance, while cool colours recede. Set against the white cloth with its icy blue and purple shadows, the body projects outward strikingly. Together with the matte finish, this does not suggest that a shop window creates a comforting barrier separating the viewer from this carcass that we see at close range. Sometimes regarded as the ultimate nineteenth-century surface, *vitrines* became common subject matter in modern-life painting, including in the work of James Tissot, Jean Béraud, and Degas. In paintings by Tissot and Béraud, the shop window was also signified at the level of the paint by fused strokes covered in a thick layer of glassy varnish that could be seen to substitute the canvas surface itself for the shop window. Caillebotte offered no such filter dividing the viewer from the physicality of his tacky paint or depicted veal. He did, however, mimic the conventions through which raw meat or mannequins might be constructed as appetizing in a display, clothed in contemporary fashion. In this, the painting raises the embodied aspects of erotic, desirous looking that are captured in the French term for window shopping, *lèche-vitrine*.<sup>xiii</sup> The concept of licking the window defies any sense of vision as cerebral or detached. It connects looking with tasting, distanced assessment with intimate possession. Through the butcher shop display, a site intended to awaken the appetite, *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* raises the analogous hunger for other kinds of bodily contact.

In *Veal in a Butcher's Shop*, the progression of those critics who denigrated Manet's, Renoir's, Degas's, and Gauguin's female figures is reversed. Rather than the conversion of sexually-coded female flesh into an animal carcass, a carcass comes to resemble human form. Through this manoeuvre the painting displays the violence of the operations through which

bodies might be reduced to meat, whether literal or metaphorical. The work is best read alongside the connection between female bodies and meat so commonly used to denigrate Impressionist paintings of women – not because Caillebotte necessarily responded to that criticism with this painting, but instead because in those comparisons to rotting flesh, critics expressed a visceral reaction to works of art that *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* demands.<sup>xiv</sup> Meat metaphors described brushstrokes perceived as too visible but also more than just visible, strokes that festered, congealed, and crusted over, causing nausea and disgust. Caillebotte's viscous paint insists upon the material facticity of the carcass as well as of the paint itself. The bloated strokes turn the heavily worked canvas surface into a kind of flesh, and the painting takes on its own assertive embodiment.<sup>xv</sup> It asks not for the nonchalance of a *flâneur's* roving eye, but for a viewer (an inadequate term here) who feels a connection to the painted body,<sup>xvi</sup> a connection staged across a carcass that will become food in a more literal merging of human and animal form. As the subject matter and meaty materiality of paint raise eating as a theme it also becomes a metaphor for viewing. Spectatorship is refigured as ocular ingestion modelled off of alimentary consumption, and sexual consumption is never far away, as confirmed by the depiction of a penetrated body haunted by signs of male and female sex organs. In this context of ambiguity and reversibility – between bodies, across sexes and species, all represented by paint material that shifts identities – we might use *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* to rethink the enduring connection between Impressionism and detached optical experience that has informed existing interpretations of the painting.<sup>xvii</sup> The meat metaphors that emerged to describe *Olympia* and crystallized as common strategies for denigrating Impressionist practice remind us that these works caused visceral, multi-sensory reactions in their early publics. Attending to the disturbing qualities of Caillebotte's painting of anthropomorphized raw meat can help us to recover some of the reasons why.

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<sup>i</sup> All translations my own. See the list of original quotations in French at the end of the article.

<sup>ii</sup> T. J. Clark has most thoroughly addressed the critical response to *Olympia* (2008 [1985]: 79–146). Many of the reviews that I discuss are reproduced there in full. Regarding Renoir, see especially Tamar Garb, ‘Painterly Plenitude: Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s Fantasy of the Feminine’ (1998: 145–177); and in relation to Degas, Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method, and Meaning in the Work of Degas* (1995), especially pp. 29–31.

<sup>iii</sup> Examples include: Bataille, 1865: 423; Bertall, 1865: 2; Claretie, 1865b: 226; Ego, 1865: 291; Fillonneau, 1865: 2; Gautier, 1865; de Laincel, 1865: 3. For a discussion of references to the morgue in Manet’s critical reception, see Emily Beeny, ‘*Christ and the Angels: Manet, the Morgue, and the Death of History Painting?*’ (2013).

<sup>iv</sup> For example, in Beeny, 2013: 51; Lee, 2008: 278; Clark, 2008 [1985]: 96–97; Bernheimer, 1989: 256.

<sup>v</sup> Desbuissons 2013a. Desbuissons connects these terms to rhetoric of the ugly, dirty, and scatological. It is important to note, following Desbuissons, that the theme of decomposing painting was not just applied to self-consciously modern art, even though that is my focus here. It is also my intention to gender the concept of *la peinture faisandée*, for when this theme emerged in relation to Impressionist painting, it was targeted almost exclusively at paintings of female figures. This was not the case in the majority of the criticism that Desbuissons analyses, although she does raise two examples that are important for my account: Saint-Victor’s assessment of *Olympia*, and Wolff’s criticism of Renoir’s *Study: Nude in Sunlight*.

<sup>vi</sup> Bouniol, 1865: 401; Geronte [Victor Fournel], 1865. The literature debating how the figure of Olympia’s perceived sexuality may have been inflected by the maid figure is large and contested. Crucial contributions have been made by Sander Gilman (1985), Lorraine O’Grady (1992), Griselda Pollock (1999), Zine Magubane (2001), and Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby (2015).

<sup>vii</sup> Frédérique Desbuissons has published most widely on culinary metaphors in Salon criticism. See especially 2008; 2012; 2013a/b; 2014.

<sup>viii</sup> Respectively: M. de Lescure, 1865: 535; de Montifaud, 1865: 224; Drak, 1865: 3; Cantaloube, 1865: 2.

<sup>ix</sup> See, for example, the caricature by PIF [Henri Maigrot] in the 12 March 1882 issue of *Le Charivari*, in which two visitors debate whether a painting shows a landscape or a portrait.

<sup>x</sup> Anthea Callen has described the varnishing practices of the Impressionists (1994; 2000). Frédérique Desbuissons has discussed the fear that the paint medium could rot (2013; 2014).

<sup>xi</sup> A connection between female flesh and canvas surface, in this period and more broadly, has been a central theme of feminist art history. My thinking has been especially informed by Jacqueline Lichtenstein, ‘Making Up Representation: The Risks of Femininity’ (1987); Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity: Figure and Flesh in Fin-de-Siècle France* (1998: 114–143) and *The Painted Face: Portraits of Women in France, 1814–1914* (2007: 1–17).

<sup>xii</sup> For example, Griselda Pollock writes: ‘The flâneur embodies the gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic’ (1988: 67). Following Janet Wolff, ‘The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity’ (1985), Pollock was among the first to expose the gendered structure underlying the mythology and practice of *flânerie*. Her description of the gaze as erotic points to a central tension in the construction of this figure, who supposedly signifies detached, dispassionate witness, but is also described (most notably by Baudelaire in ‘Le peintre de la vie moderne’ in 1863) as passionately invested in his surroundings, into which he desires complete immersion. Recently, scholars in this journal have challenged the conventional alignment of the flâneur with opticality. The papers in the July 2012 special issue edited by Aimée Boutin, *Rethinking the Flâneur: Flânerie and the Senses* (*Dix-Neuf* 16.2) flesh out the flâneur by restoring other sensory modalities to ‘him’. The need for this intervention highlights how the flâneur has functioned as an avatar of visual experience in nineteenth-century studies.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Tamar Garb’s discussion of this term and its implications for eroticized looking in relation to James Tissot’s *The Shop Girl* (1883–85). Garb argues that the griffon carved into the wooden table in the shop, with its long curled tongue hanging out of its mouth, symbolizes the pleasure of looking at objects of desire, whether commercial goods, packaged femininity, or a glass-covered painting itself (1998: 105–9). On the productive parallels between *vitrine* and picture plane, see also Adrian Rifkin, *Ingres Then, and Now* (2000: 43–86).

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<sup>xiv</sup> If one were inclined to argue that Caillebotte was responding to criticism when he painted *Veal in a Butcher's Shop*, it seems more likely that he would have had in mind the scorn and amusement that greeted his own painting of a living calf shown in the 1879 Impressionist Exhibition. Caillebotte probably destroyed that painting as a result.

<sup>xv</sup> My thinking here is indebted to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of painting and the 'flesh' of the world. In the posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty developed the concept of flesh to describe the material density of space as a tactile tissue in which all objects are enmeshed. He argued that no firm distinction could be drawn between the subject and the environment, as for example between a painting and its viewer, because people and things are caught up in the same flesh and open out on to each other (1960: 125). Any painting approximates such an understanding of space by using thick paint material to stand for air and atmosphere. The world in painting can only be such a tactile world, where all objects depicted are made of the same 'flesh', oil paint. But a painting like *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* that depicts actual flesh in its viscous objecthood, its materiality shared with the fleshy background and its identification deferred, devoid of overt narrative that would project the picture into the symbolic rather than the phenomenological realm, is particularly suited to Merleau-Ponty's discussions.

<sup>xvi</sup> This is finally the place to signal Michael Fried's essay 'Caillebotte's Impressionism' (1999), in which Fried contends that Caillebotte looked back to the bodily realism of Gustave Courbet and initiated a corporeal, materialist Impressionism through which he wanted to represent bodily sensation. Fried's understanding of Caillebotte as a painter dedicated to representing the effects of embodiment leads him to a similar conclusion as the one I am arguing, but in relation to another of Caillebotte's butcher shop still lifes, *Calf's Head and Ox Tongue*: 'In fact the artist's point would seem to be that the viewer cannot *not* make the connection with his or her own body' (34).

<sup>xvii</sup> I am responding here to the long history, influentially articulated by Clement Greenberg in 'Modernist Painting' (1961), of French modern-life painting being couched as a form of optical science, with artists who celebrated vision in isolation from other senses. Caroline Jones has discussed the ocularcentrism of Greenberg's modernism (2005), and Rosalind Krauss has provided a crucial exposure of modernism's privileging of pure opticality (1993). But despite these and other interventions, Impressionist practice is still framed in terms of a search to capture the appearance of specific optical effects rather than a range of somatic experience. Michael Fried discusses the equation of Impressionism with 'purely optical experience', with which he basically agrees: 'As a generalization about Impressionism or rather about the contemporary response to the work of the landscape Impressionists Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, and Alfred Sisley, this ['notion of opticality, of a mode of painting addressed exclusively to the sense of sight'] is incontestable' (1996: 18–19). Fried does not understand Caillebotte in these terms, as noted above. Instead, he argues that a paradigm shift occurred from the 'corporeal realism' associated with Courbet to the 'ocular realism' associated with the Impressionists, and that Caillebotte attempted to synthesize the two (1999). Fried's interpretations of Caillebotte in these terms have been enabling for me, but his categories of 'corporeal' and 'ocular' seem too neat. I propose that what Fried sees as the eccentricity of Caillebotte's work – his dedication to embodiment – can actually allow us to reassess the extent to which Impressionism, even as practiced by Monet, Pissarro, or Sisley, was ever committed to exclusively optical experience and its representation.

## FIGURES

FIGURE 1 Édouard Manet. *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas. 130.5 x 190 cm. Musée D'Orsay, Paris. Offert à l'Etat par souscription publique sur l'initiative de Claude Monet. *By Permission of the Agence photographique, Réunion des Musées nationaux.*



FIGURE 2 Gustave Caillebotte. *Veal in a Butcher's Shop* [*Veau à l'étal*], c. 1882. Oil on canvas. 144 x 74 cm. Private collection©Comité Caillebotte, Paris. By Permission of the Comité Caillebotte.



FIGURE 3 Bertall (pseudonym of Charles Albert d'Arnoix). 'Manette, ou la femme de l'ébéniste', 1865. Caricature from *Le Journal Amusant*, 27 May 1865, p. 2. By permission of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.



MANETTE, ou LA FEMME DE L'ÉBÉNISTE, par MANET.

22158

Que c'est comme un bouquet de fleurs.  
(Air connu.)

Ce tableau de M. Manet est le bouquet de l'Exposition. — M. Courbet est distancé de toute la longueur du célèbre chat noir. — Le moment choisi par le grand coloriste est celui où cette dame va prendre un bain qui nous semble impérieusement réclamé.



FIGURE 4 Pierre-Auguste Renoir. *Study: Nude in Sunlight*, 1876. Oil on canvas. 81 x 65 cm. Musée D'Orsay, Paris, legs de Gustave Caillebotte en 1894. *By Permission of the Agence photographique, Réunion des Musées nationaux.*



FIGURE 5 Cham (pseudonym of Charles Amédée de Noé). 'Le Peintre impressionniste', 1877. Caricature from *Le Charivari*, 22 April 1877. By permission of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.



FIGURE 6 Cham (pseudonym of Charles Amédée de Noé). 'Le Peintre impressionniste', 1877. Caricature from *Le Monde illustré*, 5 May 1877. By permission of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.

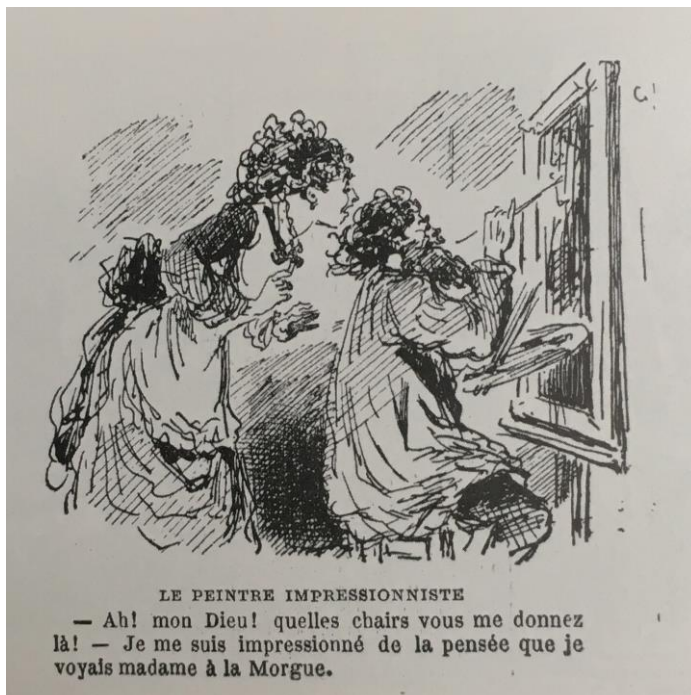


FIGURE 7 Cham (pseudonym of Charles Amédée de Noé). 'Exposition des peintres impressionnistes', 1877. Caricature from *Le Charivari*, 15 April 1877. By permission of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.

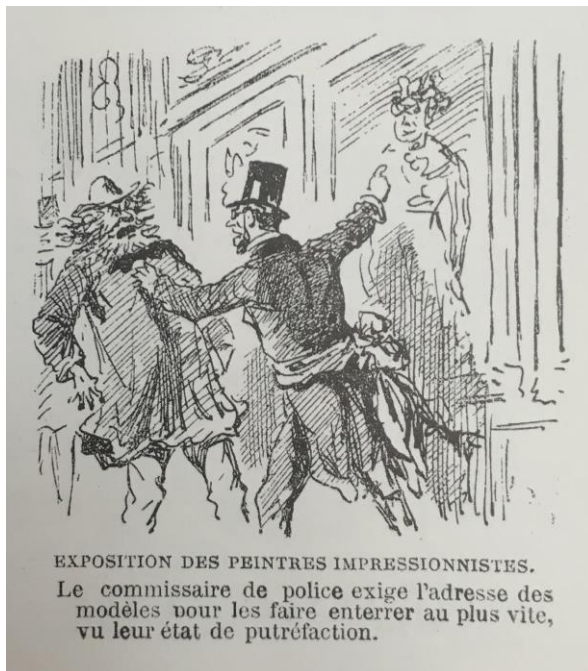


FIGURE 8. Cham (pseudonym of Charles Amédée de Noé). 'Le Peintre impressionniste', 1877. Caricature from *Le Charivari*, 26 April 1877. By permission of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.



FIGURE 9 Paul Cézanne. *A Modern Olympia*, 1873–74. Oil on canvas. 46 x 65 cm. Musée D'Orsay, Paris, don de Paul Gachet, fils du Dr Paul Gachet, aux Musées nationaux pour le Musée du Jeu de Paume en 1951. *By Permission of the Agence photographique, Réunion des Musées nationaux.*



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#### TRANSLATIONS (in order of appearance):

Anonymous, *La Petite République Français*, 1879: 2–3: ‘... il y a dans cette exhibition des oeuvres d’une réelle valeur et d’une saveur exceptionnelle. Si les quatorze artistes qui figurent dans le catalogue, au lieu d’étaler aux yeux du public toute leur cargaison de marchandises fraîches et avariées, avait été bien inspirés pour faire un triage sévère dans leurs productions, l’exposition de l’avenue de l’Opéra obtenait un success...’.

Jancovitz, 1865: 67: ‘L’expression du visage est celle d’un être prématuré et vicieux; le corps, d’une couleur faisandée, rappelle l’horreur de la Morgue’.

Saint-Victor, 1865: 3: ‘La foule se presse, comme à la Morgue, devant l’*Olympia* faisandée...’.

Bullemont, 1865: 324: ‘Le ton général de la déesse est jaune, et sa peau est de ce jaune désagréable qu’on voit aux vieux poulets sur les étals des marchés et qui éloigne les cuisinières un peu habiles. Elle semble dans un état de décomposition presque aussi avancé que l’*Olympia* de M. Manet...’.

Montifaud, 1865: 224: ‘Nous savons reconnaître la touche de M. Manet au milieu des excentricités qu’il a voulu nous servir, comme son Christ insulté et sa composition d’*Olympia*, et cette touche denote une vigueur qui, employée par un esprit plus sain, pourrait produire des oeuvres’.

Drak, 1865: 3: ‘Une main d’artiste guidée par une cervelle bourrée de paradoxes jusqu’à l’indigestion. L’indigestion a eu lieu cette année’.

Cantaloube, 1865: 2: ‘Constatons, en effet, des tons dérobés aux Espagnols, surtout à Goya, mais délayés dans je ne sais quelle mixture nauséabonde...’.

Zola, 1866: 46–47: ‘Tout autour d’elles s’étalent les douceurs des confiseurs artistiques à la mode, les arbres en sucre candi et les maisons en croûte de pâté, les bons hommes en pain d’épices et les bonnes femmes faites de crème à la vanille. La boutique de bonbons devient plus rose et plus douce, et les toiles vivantes de l’artiste semblent prendre une certaine amertume au milieu de ce fleuve de lait. Aussi, faut-il voir les grimaces des grands enfants qui passent dans la salle. Jamais vous ne leur ferez avaler pour deux sous de véritable viande crue, ayant la réalité de la vie; mais ils se gorgent comme des malheureux de toutes les sucreries écœurantes qu’on leur sert’.

Claretie, 1865b: 226: ‘La foule fait justice de ces *transports du pinceau* [referring to Manet and Whistler], mais le malheur est qu’elle paraît confondre dans sa n’importe réprobation les tableaux de M. Ribot et ceux de ses parodistes. Il y a bien sur les cadres de M. Ribot cet avis au lecteur qui arrête les critiques: *médaille*; n’importe, le public résiste à ces chairs sanglantes, à cette peinture crue, violente et saignante’.

Geronte [Victor Fournel], 1865: ‘Son coloris au verjus, aigre et acide, pentre dans l’oeil comme la scie d’un chirurgien dans les chairs’.

Gille, 1865: ‘M. Manet s’est jeté, tête perdue, dans son sujet; de cette détermination, est résulté un affreux et indécent assemblage de tons crus, de lignes heurtées qui brisent les yeux...’.

Zola, 1893 [1867]: 357–58: ‘Au premier regard, on ne distingue ainsi que deux teintes dans le tableau, deux teintes violentes, s’enlevant l’une sur l’autre... si vous voulez reconstruire la réalité, il faut que vous vous reculiez de quelques pas’.

Énault, 1876: 2: ‘... une grande étude de femme nue, et à laquelle certes, on aurait mieux fait de laisser passer une robe, nous attriste par ses tons violacés de chair faisandée’.

Wolff, 1876: 1: ‘Essayez-donc d’expliquer à M. Renoir que le torse d’une femme n’est pas un amas de chairs en décomposition avec des taches vertes violacées qui dénotent l’état de complète putréfaction dans un cadavre!’

Nazim, 1879: 2: ‘Visite aux *impressionnistes, alias indépendants*. Mélange d’excellentes et de grotesques choses. Recueilli cette *impression* devant une toile représentant une femme verte, littéralement verte, d’un vert de viandes corrompues:—Hum! rudement avancée, cette particulière!—C’est sans doute le portrait d’une oratrice du congrès féminin’.

Flavio, 1865: 57: ‘Après tout, peu m’importent Mlle Impéria et les autres drôlesses de la même farine. Libre à M. Manet de les peindre ou de les écorcher au gré de ses pinceaux: c’est affaire à lui et à elle’.