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Linda Nochlin. *Misère: The Visual Representation of Misery in the 19th Century.* New York: Thames & Hudson, 2018. 176 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-500-23969-8.

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Reading the final work of a pioneering scholar like Linda Nochlin is bound to raise mixed feelings. On one hand, the reader might be tempted to savor every word, lingering on each point the revolutionary feminist art historian makes in her final monograph. Or one might be tempted to scrutinize, looking for signs of a faltering intellect at the end of a long career. In the case of Nochlin's final book, however, there is little to give one the sensation of the latter, and rich rewards in the former kind of close reading. In her last offering, Nochlin investigates how human misery has been represented in images ranging from illustrations in newspapers and popular books to high art paintings and prints. Her analysis focuses largely on case studies drawn from the nineteenth century, but she also frequently veers into the twentieth century to draw insightful conclusions about the documentary and proto-documentary realms. The question she is consistently trying to answer is stating succinctly in the introduction: "What styles and expressive strategies best served to capture the reality of misery and, at the same time, arouse sympathy for the *misérables* rather than disgust or rejection?" (p. 9). This line of inquiry leads Nochlin to continually assess "the moral and ethical dimension of documentary representation" (p. 25) in the five chapters that follow—an element which draws the book deeply into the realm of present-day issues in a way that few art historical books do. According to Nochlin, she first encountered the topic of misery by accident, when she happened across a volume on the subject written by Eugène Buret in 1840 while browsing in a Parisian bookshop in 2008. The confluence of this discovery with the economic crash in Europe and the United States that occurred in that same year led to her increased interest in "the devastation of lives worldwide" (p. 7) and what she perceived to be a similar "set of circumstances in nineteenth-century Europe" (p. 7).

From the very first chapter, Nochlin's book distinguishes itself by assessing *misère* across a range of media that is both refreshing in its breath and expansive in its worldview. Investigating depictions of the Great Irish Famine (c. 1846-51), often thought of as the *sine qua non* example of misery in the nineteenth century, Nochlin moves readers away from the hegemony of France and also away from what is so often the dominance of historical assessments of painting. By looking closely at prints made for newspapers like the *Illustrated London News* and recent memorials and commemorative monuments, Nochlin forces a reconsideration of printmaking as a tool for investigating "the meaning of document, documenting and documentary" (p. 30) and also probes the role of the aesthetic in documen-

tary projects. One only wishes that Nochlin had perhaps found a better way to transition from her discussion of contemporary prints to the monuments made in the 1990s and 2010s. As it stands, the chapter is sharply bifurcated into two distinctive deliberations on the meaning of the famine both in its own time and a century later.

The second chapter briefly assesses representations of *misère* from a gendered standpoint. Nochlin focuses on images of prostitutes by the likes of Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and Jean Beraud before turning to illustrations depicting Cosette from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* in the 1860s-80s. This chapter contains some of the lushest sections of visual analysis. Her assessment of Lautrec's oil-on-cardboard depictions of brothel workers strikes a particularly resonant note when she describes how "the erotic undertow pulls Lautrec's female bodies down into the bottomless sea of naturalized abjection" (p. 66). Her language is no less sophisticated and sparkling when it comes to describing print illustrations for novels like Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir*. In fact, Nochlin proves herself as adept at composing striking visual analysis of prints as she has been for paintings throughout her long career—a rare talent among *dix-neuviémistes* who are so often focused on painting to the detriment of other media.

This chapter also stands out for the kind of scathing assessments that made Nochlin's writing so powerful (and famous) over the years. She turns her critical eye first to what she refers to as an "all-pervasive misogyny" (p. 63) in the period, one that "so-called 'high art' and the productions of great vanguard artists were no more immune to ... than the (now) laughable concoctions of third-rate hacks" (p. 63). But she saves her most acerbic comments for a sweeping condemnation of the *Splendeurs et misères: images de la prostitution, 1850-1910* (Spendours and Miseries: Images of Prostitution, 1850-1910) exhibition held at the Musée d'Orsay in 2015-16. In one swift sentence, she eviscerates the entire premise of the show: "The pretense that one can exhibit and discuss the representation of prostitution and the considerable production of outright pornography associated with it ... under the aegis of objective scholarship, is farcical, to say the least" (p. 68). One only wishes that Nochlin had continued with some of the evaluations she began to make in this chapter. A brief description of the "enormous difference" (p. 69) between Degas's *The Client* (c. 1879) and the same subject as handled by Jean-Louis Forain in 1878 proves salient but would have been even more impactful if followed by additional analysis. Likewise, the chapter ends abruptly after discussing all too fleetingly representations of Cosette. One wonders if perhaps there were comparable illustrations of Nana as a child made by Alfred Richard Kemplen for the 1878 edition of Zola's *L'Assommoir* or illustrations of children made for novels by Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, or Stendhal.

The remaining three chapters of the book represent a slight shift in focus in that they are all case studies devoted to individual artists. Chapter 3 assesses three lithographs made by Théodore Géricault 1821 as part of the series "Various Subjects Drawn from Life and on Stone by J. Géricault [*sic*]." It quickly becomes clear that Géricault represents the highest attainment in the portrayal of *misère*; for Nochlin there is "nothing like these prints in the entire visual repertory of misery ... ever" (p. 87). She continues by quoting Régis Michel on the artist, stating that Géricault alone was able to "criticize by means of the image the social cost of the Industrial Revolution" (p. 87).[1] This is, in many ways, the true theme at the heart of the book. While Nochlin is consistently careful not to characterize the premodern period "as a happy alternative to the evils of modern alienation and rootlessness" (p. 24), the ties between the capitalist economic changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution and the rise in images of abject deprivation, bitter poverty, and utter disillusionment become abundantly clear. The subtlety

with which this theme is gradually presented is one of the great strengths of the book and is sure to be remembered as one, among many, of Nochlin's formidable contributions to the social history of art.

The representation of *misère* as directly linked to political concerns about the rise of capitalism is perhaps most strongly presented in the fourth chapter, on Gustave Courbet. Nochlin traces figures of misery through Courbet's oeuvre —from the Irish beggar woman in the ***Painter's Studio*** (1854-55) to the grouping in ***Charity of a Beggar at Ornans*** (1868) and the two laborers in ***The Stonebreakers*** (1849), among many others. For Nochlin, all of these figures, but especially the woman in the ***Painter's Studio***, embody "the manifest injustice of the existing social order" (p. 119). This theme continues into the book's final chapter, on Fernand Pelez, a French painter of Spanish origin whom Nochlin calls "a specialist in the representation of ***misère***" (p. 137). The chapter covers a lot of ground—from introducing readers to the largely understudied works of Pelez to discussing the artist called "the Meissonier of misery" (p. 149), Jean-François Raffaëlli, to the representations of ***misérables*** made by Charles Paul Renouard and their influence on Vincent Van Gogh. But tucked away in the notes to this chapter at the end of the volume is a mysterious revelation that "the remainder of the text is adapted" (p. 170n6) from an essay Nochlin wrote on Van Gogh and Renouard in 1981. It is unclear whether this text was appended by Nochlin herself or by the publisher. If the latter, then this raises certain ethical issues about the publication of unfinished work. In this regard it should also be noted that the book was published a mere five months after Nochlin's passing, a fact that might, at least partially, explain the abruptness with which many of the chapters end and what Jason Farago, writing for the ***New York Times***, described as the book's tendency to feel "rushed in places."[2] These issues aside, Nochlin's final work is a significant contribution to the study of nineteenth-century art, one that will surely have a lasting impact on how scholars assess both realism and the documentary in the modern period. In seems fitting, too, that the final lines of her last book are a nod to the printmaker Käthe Kollwitz, a woman, among so many, whose work Nochlin championed to the very end.

Notes

[1]. Régis Michel, ***Géricault***, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1991), 202.

[2]. Jason Farago, "When Misery Becomes a Subject for Art," ***The New York Times***, May 18, 2018, accessed July 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/books/review/linda-nochlin-misere.html.

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