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Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2001. 254 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 US (cl). ISBN 0-8014-3811-X.

Review by Barbara Day-Hickman, Temple University.

Joan Landes offers a challenging and provocative interpretation of how gender issues influenced political representations of the French nation in her study of iconography, etchings, illustrated newspapers, and broadsides from the revolutionary period (1789-1795). The author addresses a rich and varied collection of feminine allegories and metaphors that inspire, vilify, or reinforce gender characteristics and behaviors that would have been familiar to late eighteenth-century viewers. She emphasizes how such visual media could evoke feelings as well as convey meanings, arguing that "the feminine iconography of the nation encouraged citizens in their private passions, that its body worked to consolidate passionate attachments to home and homeland" (p. 2). In other words, sexual innuendo or the visual erotica found in representations of Liberty can provide some explanation for the affective transfer of popular allegiance from the king to the new republican nation.

In contrast to Maurice Agulhon and Lynn Hunt, who highlight the more nondescript, ritualized celebration of liberty and the republic, Landes emphasizes the affective relationship between the viewer and visual representations of women.^[1] She thereby not only endeavors to explain the meanings of revolutionary and republican imagery but also attempts to unlock the so-called "agency" of the material image as site for both unconscious and conscious political identification. That is, the author tries to locate the reconstitution of the political state in the "subjectivities" of both men and women (pp. 173-74). By pointing out the implicit sexual or familial appeal of female iconography, she demonstrates how a (most likely) urban, male audience shifted its political allegiance to the new French republic. In addition, Landes traces women's historical position in revolutionary political society, noting the proverbial contrast between the public and universal meanings associated with female allegories and the very limited political options available to women in late eighteenth-century France (p. 4). While Landes does not claim to resolve this paradox, she does effectively decipher gender-laden meanings apparent in the prints.

To do so, she incorporates the theoretical perspectives of scholarly pioneers and contemporaries who have developed interdisciplinary work in political and visual history, such as Maurice Agulhon, Lynn Hunt, Marina Warner, Madelyn Gutwirth, James Leith, Michel Vovelle, Claude Langlois, and Antoine de Baecque. She also follows the innovations of contemporary art historians who provide important interpretive avenues for "reading" the prints with theoretical perspicacity. Furthermore, she reinforces her interpretation with commentaries from such contemporaneous eighteenth-century writers as Rousseau, Condorcet, Abbé Grégoire, Saleville, and Condillac. Unfortunately, because of the profusion of credits, comments, and theoretical perspectives, the reader may have difficulty discerning the author's own perspectives or principal thesis.

Landes organizes a tightly packed argument into four discrete chapters. In chapter one she documents the importance of visual media for conveying personal, political, and universal meanings during the

revolutionary epoch. In chapter two, she points out the lessening importance of symbols from the old regime (such as the king's body) and their replacement with allegorical iconography of the female republic. According to Landes, "She [the Republic] is an emblem of the revolutionaries' desire to bypass their own national history, to institute an ideal, non-despotic Republic wherein personal liberty and communal togetherness would be reconciled joyously" (p. 76). As a symbol of compassion, virtue, and selfless love, Liberty required the filial allegiance of her constituents. For this reason, the female icon became a viable embodiment of the nation that was "material and ideal, conscious and unconscious, voluntary and involuntary" (p. 79). In chapter three, Landes identifies different representational themes where women were portrayed as chaste or promiscuous wife, sister, lover, and whore. By incorporating Mikhail Bakhtin's bifurcation of images and metaphors into classical and grotesque forms, Landes sustains in this section a convincing stylistic analysis of her prints. She demonstrates how the classical goddess stood for "the regeneration of the tainted female body" associated with the old regime and how transgressive women "belonged to the world of revolutionary caricature—a universe populated by abusive, ridiculous, highly partisan images" (pp. 130-31). That is, the author contrasts the smooth, closed, and refined representations of a virtuous republic with individual women, groups, and classes who defied an acceptable sexual and political order.

In the final chapter, "Possessing la Patrie," Landes addresses the erotic relationship between republican citizens and the female nation: "I contend that the circuit of heterosexual desire between the seductive feminized object of the nation-state and the male patriotic subject offers a useful point of departure for considering what Doris Somner has termed 'the mutual incitement of love and country'" (p. 140). The author develops a complex argument to demonstrate how the erotic life becomes "school for patriotism." In contrast to Lynn Hunt, who discusses the fragile rebirthing of the Republic (after the death of the king) based on male fraternity without an important female component, Landes sees the attraction of a beautiful, chaste, and anonymous female body in revolutionary art as essential—a point at which "the nation, as potential partner is a fantastical projection with erotic overtones" (pp. 168-69). Whether represented as a goddess or nurturing mother, she elicited desire as well as compassionate protection from her son/husband. In this fashion, the (male) citizen became "interpolated" as both lover and father to the new nation.

Though Landes' final argument seems the most compelling, the multivalent nature of feminine metaphors and allegories would suggest the danger of any definitive interpretation. While many illustrations from Landes' collection are clearly suggestive and some mildly salacious, can we say that most representations of the republic displayed a fundamentally erotic appeal? As Madelyn Gutwirth points out, in addition to offering erotic representations of women in semi-attire, female iconography conveyed many other images of angelic maidens, virtuous mothers, virile warriors, judicious rulers, and coolly abstract goddesses.^[2] Furthermore, both Gutwirth and Agulhon indicate how, after the initial heat of the revolutionary epoch, (post-Directory) female allegories either became decorative asides (having been replaced by Hercules and subsequently Napoleon) or were rendered distant, abstract, and formalized representations that might not likely arouse the senses.^[3]

It is also important to note that many broadsides and popular prints from the pre-revolutionary period were produced, purchased, and "read" as a form of religious talisman or devotional object. To interpret all revolutionary imagery and its reception within the sexual grid, as Landes does, neglects the complexity of such iconography or the diversity of its audience. Moreover, by emphasizing the theoretical connections between viewer and text, the author circumvents the more difficult task of "reading" the material object in terms of its provenance, cost, and distribution as well as its reception by a particular audience. Beyond these few concerns, *Visualizing the Nation* offers a refreshing return to revolutionary iconography—one that explains the vitality of republican allegories and symbols during a hiatus in political power and a threatening interlude in the reconstruction of gender relations during the revolutionary epoch.

NOTES

[1] Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); see also Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 52-86.

[2] Madelyn Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 252-284.

[3] Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses*, pp. 279-280; and Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, p. 35.

Barbara Day-Hickman □
Temple University
Barbday@temple.edu

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