

Georgia State University

## ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

---

Art and Design Faculty Publications

Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design

---

2006

### Review of Daumier and Exoticism: Satirizing the French and the Foreign, by Elizabeth C. Childs

Maria Gindhart

*Georgia State University*, [mgindhart@gsu.edu](mailto:mgindhart@gsu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art\\_design\\_facpub](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_facpub)



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Maria Gindhart. Review of Daumier and Exoticism: Satirizing the French and the Foreign, by Elizabeth C. Childs. *caa.reviews* (6 February 2006). DOI: 10.3202/caa.reviews.2006.15

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Design Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@gsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@gsu.edu).

February 6, 2006

Elizabeth C. Childs *Daumier and Exoticism: Satirizing the French and the Foreign* New York: Peter Lang, 2004. 252 pp.; 72 b/w ills. Cloth \$68.95 (0820469459)

[Maria P. Gindhart](#)

[CrossRef DOI: 10.3202/caa.reviews.2006.15](#)



Elizabeth Childs's *Daumier and Exoticism: Satirizing the French and the Foreign* should appeal to a wide variety of readers, from the Honoré Daumier specialist to the undergraduate student of nineteenth-century art. Supplementing previous scholarly work on Daumier and on mid-nineteenth-century caricature and press censorship, including Judith Wechsler's consideration of the significance and interpretation of physical characteristics in *A Human Comedy: Physiognomy and Caricature in 19th Century Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and Childs's own case study of the suppression of freedom of expression in "Big Trouble: Daumier, *Gargantua*, and the Censorship of Political Caricature" (*Art Journal* 51, 1992: 26–37), the present study focuses on a facet of Daumier's oeuvre that has previously received little attention. In her examination of Daumier's caricatures of non-Europeans, Childs reveals the ways in which Daumier utilized "the Other" to comment on the French.

The introduction and first two chapters set the stage for the remainder of the book. The introduction discusses three models of exoticism and two types of the *comique*, concepts whose obvious relevance should then have been reinforced more frequently throughout the text. The introduction also situates Daumier vis-à-vis contemporary caricaturists, as does chapter 1, which is dedicated to the context of *Le Charivari*, the journal in which the majority of the Daumier caricatures that Childs discusses were published. Her consideration of *Le Charivari* as a "system of communication" (15) in which any given caricature was in dialogue with other caricatures as well as with articles published in various issues of the journal—in addition to being influenced by editors, caption writers, press censors, and others—is extremely useful and should give pause to those who would study individual caricatures in a vacuum.

Chapter 2 considers stereotypes, especially racially based physical stereotypes, in relationship to caricature. Much of the information provided here is available elsewhere, including in the excellent secondary sources on which Childs heavily relies, such as William B. Cohen's *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530–1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), which traces the roots of French racism towards blacks, and Sander L. Gilman's *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), which considers prevalent presuppositions about marginal groups at various points in history. Nevertheless, Childs's summary covers a great deal of ground in a succinct fashion with regular references to Daumier and his works. The chapter thus serves as a useful reminder to those knowledgeable about issues of race in the nineteenth century and provides crucial background for those unfamiliar with the ways, including physiognomy and phrenology, in which physical appearance was then interpreted.

The heart of Childs's argument lies in chapters 3 through 6. Chapter 3 begins with an analysis of seven lithographs focusing on the Turcos, riflemen from Algeria who were part of the French Army but who were kept apart from the other soldiers and given no opportunity to advance. In August of 1859, the army camp in the Bois de Vincennes became an excursion destination for Parisians wanting to celebrate the troops responsible for the successful Italian Campaign and, more specifically, to have

direct contact with the exotic Turcos. Four of Daumier's caricatures show Parisians visiting the camp; the other three depict Turcos exploring Paris. Childs provides a thorough context for Daumier's images by discussing military photographs, a battle painting, newspaper articles, a fictional account of two Turcos in Paris, and the etiquette of 1850s public transportation, among other things. While Childs may be going a bit far when she states that "Daumier stages the encounters of Parisians with Algerian soldiers to denounce racism and ethnocentrism," she convincingly defends her assertion that these caricatures "illustrate the parochialism of the bourgeois" (82). These lithographs tell us less about Turcos and more about those Parisians who, for instance, feared that looking at a Turco would cause a pregnant French woman to have a black baby. The rest of the chapter then focuses on zoo, circus, and universal exhibition scenes in which French observers become the observed. This section is intriguing but rather short, and might have benefited from reference to recent scholarship on so-called "human zoos" in this time period.

Chapter 4 is divided into two interesting parts that are only loosely linked. The first provides an overview of the place of the American Indian in French culture in the first half of the nineteenth century and calls for a reappraisal, based on the scholarship of Arthur Lovejoy, of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's influential writings on the "noble savage" from the previous century. But Childs's analysis of Daumier's caricatures related to the topic is relatively brief, and the section somewhat incongruously ends with a consideration of his images of abolitionists. The second part of this chapter, which is devoted to caricatures of the Haitian emperor Faustin Soulouque, is fascinating and in keeping with the book's recurring theme of press censorship and the means by which such censorship was circumvented. Legally barred from criticizing Louis Napoléon/Napoléon III, various caricaturists blatantly mocked the despotism of Soulouque in order to comment on the French leader, with Soulouque's failed attempt to reconquer the Dominican Republic serving as thinly disguised criticism of France's involvement in the Crimean War. However, after referencing one of Daumier's caricatures of Soulouque as a general in chapter 2 while discussing parallels made between apes and blacks, Childs does not treat this racialized aspect of the Soulouque caricatures here. Later, in addressing the racism of a series depicting the deposed Haitian on an imagined trip to Paris, she notes that connections made between Soulouque and monkeys, which were associated with mimesis, are meant to underscore the fact that Soulouque and Napoléon III both emulated Napoléon Bonaparte. Soulouque's simian appearance in various caricatures by Daumier clearly serves to malign both the Haitian and his French surrogate, yet Childs seems too willing to view Daumier's use of racial stereotypes as purely political in purpose. Moreover, she misses an opportunity to address how such stereotyping, irrespective of its intentions, affects those stereotyped.

Chapter 5 examines the variety of ways in which Daumier referenced China and the Chinese in his caricatural work, ranging from his image of Louis-Philippe as an ample Chinese porcelain figure, which appears on the cover of the book, to his two series on China. The figures in Daumier's *Voyage en Chine* are identifiable as Chinese, but the behavior and mores being lampooned are French. Meanwhile, his *En Chine* reflects on the presence and effects of the English and French in Asia. As is also the case elsewhere in the book, the strongest sections of this chapter are those in which Childs develops her analysis of a given caricature. One good example is her treatment of "Le Code Pénal" of 1845, in which she considers the print's commentary on both the Chinese and French legal systems, the relationship of this caricature to an earlier version and to Daumier's images of French lawyers, and the relevance of the picture that appears within the picture.

A consideration of Daumier's images of North Africa and the Middle East, chapter 6 is a pertinent contribution to analysis of the phenomenon of "armchair Orientalism," as Daumier never voyaged outside of Europe. Although some might question Childs's reliance on the groundbreaking yet controversial work of Edward Said, this chapter will be a welcome addition to assigned readings for classes on Orientalism and related subjects. After discussing Daumier's treatment of standard

Orientalist tropes, such as laziness and despotism, in the context of the works of his contemporaries, Childs devotes several pages to the artist's caricatures of the construction of the Suez Canal, which brought East and West into direct contact.

Throughout this study, Childs is better at contextualizing the production of Daumier's images than she is at elucidating the reception of these caricatures, other than by press censors. While Childs asserts that the Daumier "who emerges from these caricatures is, among other things, a humanitarian" (189), she does not prove that this is how he was perceived in his own day. Did Daumier's contemporaries see the racial stereotypes in his works as ultimately undermining racism, or did they accept them as givens? Recently, as Michelle Meagher has discussed in her "Would the Real Cindy Sherman Please Stand Up? Encounters between Cindy Sherman and Feminist Art Theory" (*Women: A Cultural Review* 13, 2002: 18-36), scholars and critics have questioned whether Cindy Sherman's use of female stereotypes in her *Untitled Film Stills* of the late 1970s serves to counteract or perpetuate traditional gender roles, and similar queries need to be made in regard to Daumier's utilization of racial stereotypes.

Beyond content, a few comments should be made about format. First of all, there were a number of distracting typographical errors. One might also question the decision not to translate French quotes into English. The original quotations should certainly be included for those who read French, but the lack of English translations would be a major impediment were some or all of this book to be assigned to undergraduates. This decision is made more unfortunate by the otherwise marvelously clear and accessible writing style, something one might not expect from a work in a series entitled "Hermeneutics of Art." Finally, it is a shame that several of the caricatures discussed are not illustrated, for, while Childs notes that these works are available in other sources, it is difficult to evaluate interpretations of images in their absence.

Minor complaints aside, Childs's book is a rich addition to Daumier and exoticism studies that should cause Daumier's caricatures of non-Europeans to be more readily associated, in both scholarly research and in the classroom, with works such as Jean-Léon Gérôme's Orientalist paintings and Paul Gauguin's depictions of the South Seas. Just as Gérôme and Gauguin's canvases ultimately tell us more about Western fantasies of exotic places than about those places themselves, Daumier's caricatures, as Childs so aptly argues, convey more about the French than the foreign.

[Maria P. Gindhart](#)

Assistant Professor, Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design, Georgia State University  
Please send comments about this review to [editor.caareviews@collegeart.org](mailto:editor.caareviews@collegeart.org).