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Gay, Peter. *The Pleasure Wars* (Vol. 5 of *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*). New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998.

In the fifth volume of professor Gay's celebration of the Victorian middle class, the author attempts to rescue the art-loving bourgeoisies of France, England, and Germany from their reputations for philistinism. He states correctly in the introduction that in the nineteenth century, "the name bourgeois was at once a term of reproach and a source of self-respect." While the well-to-do families of the post-industrial ruling class enjoyed a sense of moral superiority over the decadent aristocracy, as well as the emulation of the respectable working classes, they also suffered the barbs of a "bourgeoisophobe" intelligentsia intent on humiliating them.

The great bourgeoisophobe in France was Gustave Flaubert, who devoted his literary career to exposing the rottenness of the class to which he was born (his father was a surgeon and real estate investor). Writing to his sister from law school in the 1840s, he denounced "the spectacle of their vulgarity, their frock coats, their hats, what they said and the sound of their voices." In Germany Friedrich Nietzsche coined the term *Bildungsphilister* ("cultivated philistine") to describe the mediocrity of the literate public. Late Victorian England, too, had its share of intellectuals who consciously rejected the over-decorated interiors and moral platitudes of the upper classes.

Gay argues that the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the arts was not as antagonistic as the bourgeoisophobes made it appear. That in fact, middle-class patrons, gallery directors, consumers, scholars, and critics played a crucial role in the development of the avant-garde, or at least the dissemination of culture to the masses. The bourgeoisie's embrace of such mid-nineteenth century practices as photography, music concerts, and auctions helped popularize great art and nurtured entire industries.

Gay is most convincing when he discusses specific examples of bourgeois culture, such as Manchester's concert scene in the 1850s. His breezy gloss of the similarities and differences between the French, English, and German middle classes, though, appears superficial. Admittedly, the thematic arrangement of *The Pleasure Wars* makes a broader social history of Europe unfeasible. Gay focuses on art and artists' movements through social groups, rather than the linear development of modern art in the above nations.

In Gay's attempt to reach a broad audience, he has ignored the theoretical developments of the discipline over the past decade or so (issues of gender, for example, are absent). However, he admirably looks beyond the conventional socio-economic terms that have traditionally defined the so-called bourgeoisie, in favor of evaluating criteria of taste, leisure, and status. By problematizing the social dynamics at work in the development of modernism, and, in his larger project, exposing the complexities of a diverse Victorian society, Gay invites further investigation into the history of taste.