

## Response by Phoebe Lloyd

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Misrepresentation in combination with hyperbole is an odd tactical approach for a scholar, but it is the choice of Sidney Hart and David C. Ward. I shall counter point by point, first concerning our divergent assessments of the character of Charles Willson Peale. Accomplished people can be deeply flawed and consequently act in ways ranging from the questionable to the reprehensible. Therein lies the complexity and tension in life. History can capture this ambiguity, but not if it is written as hagiography. To address and assess a person's political practice and allegiance is hardly "idiosyncratic." To date the Peale literature has not squarely faced Peale's flaws. Consider his method of manumitting his slave, Philis. In 1787, six years after the victory at Yorktown, Peale sent Philis into the streets of Philadelphia to solicit fifty pounds in order to buy her freedom from her master. Peale confided in his letterbook that she could not raise the sum because some people were still angered by his politics, while others said he was rich enough to free her himself, a reference to the monies he reaped as a confiscatory agent during the late war. At age eighty-four, when Peale began his autobiography with the aid of his letterbooks, this undignified episode was omitted. This is the sort of instance that prompted me to deem his *Autobiography* a "cunning attempt at self-creation." "Self promotion" is another matter and the two are not interchangeable.

Quite often an accomplished person's greatest failings are acted out closest to home, as was the case with Thomas Jefferson. The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation now concedes that he very likely sired all six of the children of Sally Hemings, his mistress and slave. This is the same man who wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia* about how to improve "stock," that is slaves, whom he relegated to a subset of his views on animal husbandry. The analogue in Charles Willson Peale's life is the way he treated his oldest son, Raphaëlle. This is not the forum for a demonstration and analysis of his conduct. But one part of the argument turns on the cause of Raphaëlle's death.

Here is where "censorious grasp" comes into play. In April of 1988 I delivered a lecture on Raphaëlle Peale at the Brooklyn Museum in a forum where Laura Meixner also participated. Meixner, as it turned

out, was a friend of Lois Fink who at the time held the position of Research Curator at The National Museum of American Art. What follows is a paraphrase of Fink's correspondence with Lillian B. Miller, the late editor of *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*. Fink to Miller, May 9, 1988, relates a garbled version of the Brooklyn lecture. She understands from Meixner that I maintained Peale deliberately poisoned his son. Miller's reply to Fink eight days later is written in the royal "we." She is aware of the lecture and that Abrams is considering my manuscript for publication in a series brought out under the aegis of The National Museum of American Art. She advises that the manuscript (which she supposedly had no access to) be refereed because it carries "distortions." That same fall an editor at Abrams, having enthusiastically accepted my manuscript, returned it without explanation. For my part, I did not come across this correspondence until after Miller's death when I visited the Washington office of The Peale Family Papers. There, in the Raphaëlle Peale rolling file, tucked in a folder labeled "Rap[hælle] Hospital Records," I found my smoking gun.

This turn of events represented a short-term victory for Miller, no doubt, but it had an unintended consequence. Gordon Bendersky, M.D., and I determined to co-author an article, "Arsenic, An Old Case: The Chronic Heavy Metal Poisoning of Raphaëlle Peale (1774-1825)," and place it in a juried scientific publication. We implicated Raphaëlle's father because he had invented the heavy metal solution for taxidermy, had taught Raphaëlle to use it by age fourteen, and had assigned him taxidermal chores at the Peale family museum. But in this regard it should be emphasized that we couched our argument in the legal language used to define manslaughter, not "murder"—and manslaughter and murder are not interchangeable either.

That the Peale Papers project was "fundamentally dishonest" has never occurred to me, although the late Editor was not above intellectual dishonesty. In "Invisible Killers: Heavy Metals, Saturnine Envy, and the Tragic Death of Raphaëlle Peale," published in 1994, I instanced Miller's interpolating the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition for gout, which reads "it often spreads to the larger joints and the internal organs," to read instead: "It often spreads to the larger joints and internal organs, *especially the stomach* [emphasis mine]." Gout, as the medical community knows, never attacks a systemic organ, like the stomach (the kidney excepted), but presumably Miller calculated that her readership was not going to be the medical community. Miller altered the

*O.E.D.*'s definition so that she could attribute Raphaëlle's attack of 1815, when he suffered from abdominal pain and obstipation, to gout, and thus refute our diagnosis of heavy metal poisoning.

I do think a tactical error was made in failing to include the letters of Escol Sellers in the microfiche edition and I have called attention to this omission for a reason. In this technological age we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we have everything we need via mechanical reproduction when we don't. I am fully aware of the parameters of the project. My position is that they were wrongly drawn by the late editor whose visits to the archival repository of the American Philosophical Society were noticeably infrequent.

As to Escol's memories being self serving, this observation misses the point. His memories were set down as answers to questions from younger family members who wanted to know what he still remembered about the Peale Museum as well as the Peale and Sellers families before it was too late. Escol probably never imagined that excerpts would enter the public discourse, whereas his grandfather's purpose was to rewrite history while he was still in a position of control.

What rankles, I suspect, is that which goes unstated by Hart and Ward: my review contained on-the-spot information. During the roughly three-and-a-half solid years spent working with the archival material at the American Philosophical Society (APS), I observed the actions of a model scholar, Gary E. Moulton, who has been editing the papers of Lewis and Clark. What struck me most was his respect for this country's august scientific archive. Every June, Moulton came to the APS to check the original manuscripts against his transcriptions produced the preceding winter. So assiduous was Moulton that the librarians opened the manuscripts room half-an-hour early so that he could best utilize his time. I also got to know those librarians quite well. Not surprisingly, in the process, I picked up anecdotal information, like the fact that the Society's former manuscripts librarian, Murphy Smith, could not recall ever meeting Miller until the party in Washington held to celebrate the production of the microfiche edition. It is important to emphasize that all the editorial blunders that were made, such as failing to check galleys against the original manuscripts in volume one, were made by Lillian Miller. Death does not provide protection against revelations of a faulty performance and factually detailing that performance is not "libel."

None of the above reflects upon the editorial work of Ward and Hart, whose publications I respect even when I do not agree with all their

assertions: to wit, in this instance, that Peale produced a "magnificent body of portraiture." If his portraiture is "magnificent," what adjective should the art historian reserve for Rembrandt, for Van Dyck, for Frans Hals? Too much puffery has been directed at the person of Charles Willson Peale.

With Lillian Miller off the scene, the playing field is more level. A new generation of scholars can now proceed, hopefully unimpeded, to write their revisionist histories. The material is too rich to ignore.