



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

This presentation uses AI tools including Anthropic's Claude, ElevenLabs, and HeyGen. The art-historical content and editorial judgement remain my own.

- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art but I had some lectures that I gave many years ago and I thought I could use AI systems to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice to give them.

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Claude, Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.



H. Meadows
Dolorida
1838

23-15 WOMEN IN VICTORIAN ART

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



This lecture examines how Victorian Britain defined, policed, and contested the image of women across painting, sculpture, poetry, and popular print culture. From the idealised faces of the Books of Beauty to the dangerous allure of Lilith, from Queen Victoria's secret portrait to the fallen woman cast into the snow, we trace the visual and moral frameworks that shaped femininity — and the artists, critics, and women who pushed back against them.



H. Meadows (Unknown)
Dolorida
1838
Steel plate engraving

H. Meadows (Unknown), *Dolorida*, 1838

We turn now to an early and revealing symptom of that male-defined ideal: the **Books of Beauty**. From **1823 to 1857**, British publishers issued lavish annuals filled with steel-plate engravings of idealised female faces and figures. At their peak, up to seventeen titles appeared in a single year. Women purchased them not merely as decorative objects but as guides to aspiration — templates for femininity itself. **Heath's Book of Beauty** was the most prominent; **The Keepsake** was another, and its title passed into common use as shorthand for the Victorian feminine ideal. The engravings were produced at industrial scale, and the images showed. **William Makepeace Thackeray**, writing in **Fraser's Magazine** in **1837**, dismissed the figures as "slovenly, ricketty, wooden imitation" of real women, tricked out in tawdry frippery and no more lifelike than the verses alongside them. He singled out **Robert Meadows's** engraving **Dolorida** as among the worst in the volume, calling it shameful — though his objection was less principled than it sounds, amounting to a preference for a "good honest fat woman." The technology that ended

the genre was **photogravure**, which replaced hand engravers entirely by the late Victorian period.

Notes

Books of Beauty and the Keepsake

The annual (also called books of beauty) was a fad from 1823 to 1857 and became so popular they were published up to 17 times a year. They were like today's fashion magazines and contained etchings of beautiful women. Mass produced using steel plate etchings (actually etching was mostly used). Used as colouring books. New photo techniques such as photogravure (uses gelatin and a mezzotint screen or aquatint rosin covering) ended the job of the etcher.

Early in the Victorian period there were annuals produced containing poetry and engravings of what were intended to be ideal forms of feminine beauty. These were called Books of Beauty and were purchased by woman as role models. The most famous was Heath's Book of Beauty. The Keepsake was another book of beauty and the term keepsake is sometimes used to refer to a Victorian ideal of beauty.

However, they were regarded with cynicism even in Victorian times. William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) wrote in Fraser's Magazine (1837):

'There is not one of these beauties, with her great eyes, and slim waist, that looks as if it had been painted from a human figure. It is but a slovenly, rickety, wooden imitation of it, tricked out in some tawdry feathers and frippery, and no more like a real woman than the verses which, accompany the plate are like real poetry.'

The same might be said about today's airbrushed, size 0 (30-22-32) models.

He added that Meadows's Dolorida was one of the three worst plates in the book as it depicted another of his 'Dolorida is neither more nor less than shameful—another of Mr. Meadow's fatties in a chemise', which Thackeray thought would be acceptable if it were a 'good honest fat woman'.

Alfred Edward Chalon (1780–1860)
Book of Beauty, 'Aisha'
1838
Engraving



Alfred Edward Chalon (1780–1860), *Book of Beauty*, 'Aisha', 1838

Alfred Edward Chalon sits at the centre of a revealing critical dispute. Writing in the **1840s**, **William Makepeace Thackeray** drew a sharp contrast between two of Chalon's engraved portraits. For Thackeray, the image of **Ayesha** was a caricature — a failure of feminine representation — whilst the portrait of **Mrs Lane Fox** provoked a response he struggled to articulate, describing it as voluptuous loveliness too dangerous to speak of plainly. That rhetorical stumble is itself significant: Thackeray's prose enacts the very power he attributes to the image. A second critic, writing in **Arnold's Magazine**, offered a cooler appraisal of the same work, calling it the portrait of a fine, fashionable, and handsome woman. The gap between those two responses tells us something essential about how Chalon's portraits functioned. His work did not simply record a likeness; it constructed femininity for a specific audience with specific expectations. The tension between Thackeray's near-speechless desire and Arnold's measured social approval reflects the contested role of **portraiture** in **Victorian visual culture** — simultaneously a document of status and a

site of charged, sometimes ungovernable, aesthetic response.

Notes

Thackeray makes an interesting comparison between these two engravings based on pictures by the same artist, Alfred Edward Chalon. He writes, 'Let the reader look, too, at the difference between Chalon's Ayesha , and Chalon's Mrs. Lane Fox; the former is a caricature of a woman, and the other—it is difficult to speak of the other—such a piece of voluptuous loveliness is dangerous to look at or describe.'

Another writer, in Arnold's Magazine, wrote, 'The portrait of a fine, a fashionable, and what many persons would call, a handsome woman.'



Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805–1873), *Family of Queen Victoria*, 1846, Royal Collection

Having established the broader landscape of Victorian ideals, we turn now to their living embodiment in royal portraiture. **Franz Xaver Winterhalter's** 1846 group portrait presents **Queen Victoria** not as a remote sovereign but as wife and mother, her hand resting firmly on the chair beside her chosen heir. **Prince Albert** is positioned above and closer to the viewer, signalling conventional domestic hierarchy, yet his tentative right hand drifting towards hers and his averted gaze reveal a man uncertain of his role beside a reigning monarch. The composition holds both truths simultaneously: Albert leads the household, Victoria leads the nation. The children arranged around them include the future **Edward VII**, aged five, and **Princess Alice**, aged three, who would later become mother to **Alexandra**, the last Empress of Russia. **Victoria, Princess Royal**, the eldest at six, stands to one side, destined to become German Empress and Queen of Prussia. Winterhalter died within months of **Edwin Landseer**, and together these two painters constructed the public image of a morally impeccable royal household.

That image carried enormous cultural weight, endorsing a strict domestic morality that shaped **Victorian** social expectations far beyond the palace walls.

Notes

Queen Victoria as Role Model

The other role model for Victorian women as a mother and Queen Victoria became the principal example.

She is seen here as wife and mother, surrounded by her happy family with her hand on the successor she has supplied and with her husband shown above her and nearer the viewer so in a dominant role but subject to her will as monarch.

He looks away and his hands signify that he is at a loss about what he should do. His right hand tentatively moves towards hers which is firmly resting on the chair.

Winterhalter died within months of Landseer and together they promoted a public image of unsullied domestic bliss, moral propriety and idealised the young couple and endorsed a strict morality that underpinned the Victorian period.

Another conversation piece, a group portrait showing from left to right:

Alfred (1844-1900, aged 2), Duke of Edinburgh later Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, not yet 'breeched'

Albert Edward (1841-1910, aged 5), The future Edward VII

Queen Victoria (24 May 1819-1901, aged 27) and Albert, Prince Consort (26 August 1819-1861, aged 27)

Princess Alice (1843-1878, aged 3), married Louis IV, Grand Duke of Hesse and by Rhine, mother of Alexandra, last Empress of Russia (Rasputin)

Princess Helena (1846-1923, aged 1), married Christian of Sonderburg-Augustenburg, lived in England

Victoria (1840-1901, aged 6, the eldest), Princess Royal later German Empress and Queen of Prussia

Her other children were:

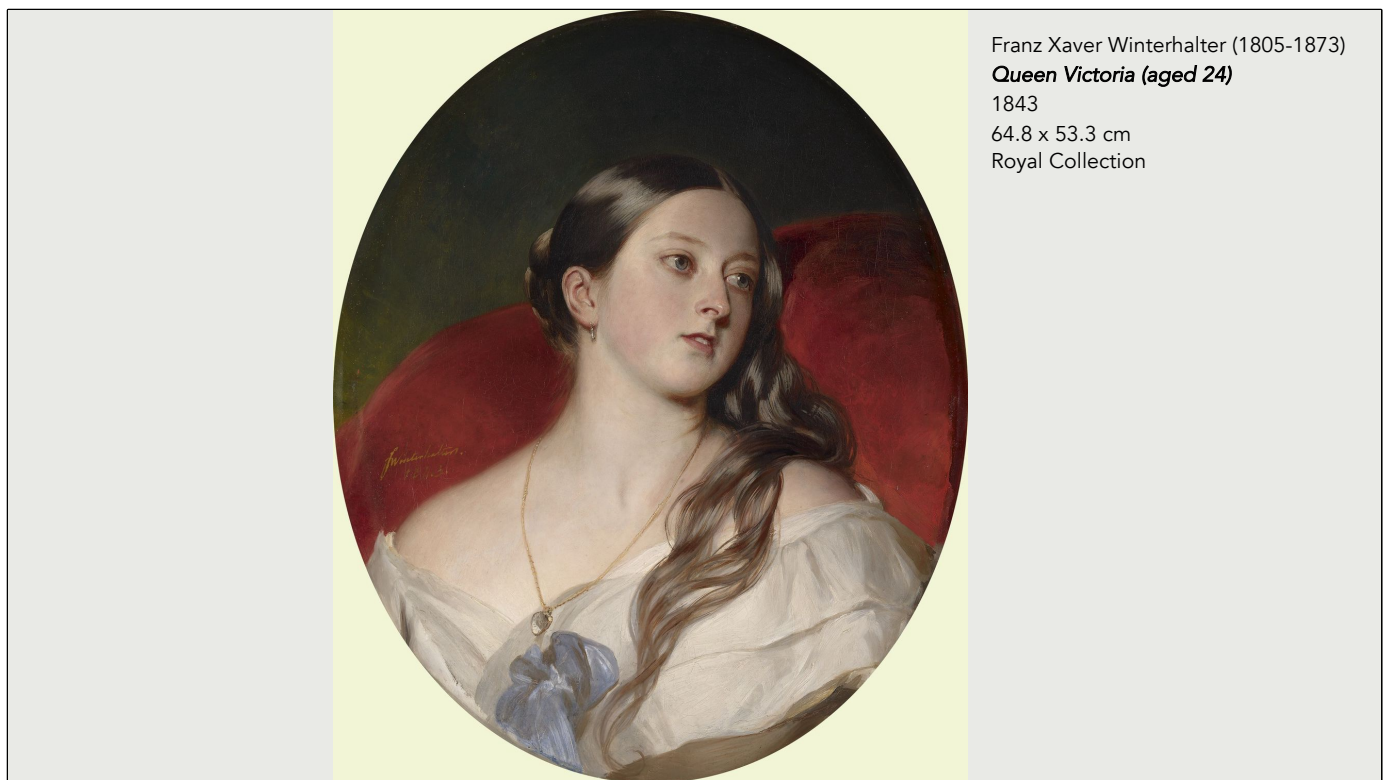
Princess Louise (1848-1939), later Duchess of Argyll

Prince Arthur (1850-1942), later Duke of Connaught and Strathearn

Prince Leopold (1853-1884), later Duke of Albany

Princess Beatrice (1857-1944), married Prince Henry of Battenburg, daughter

Victoria Eugenie became Queen of Spain



Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805-1873)
Queen Victoria (aged 24)
1843
64.8 x 53.3 cm
Royal Collection

Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1805-1873), Queen Victoria (aged 24), 1843, 64.8 x 53.3 cm, Royal Collection

This portrait exists at the opposite extreme from Victoria's public image. **Franz Xaver Winterhalter** painted it in **1843** as a private commission from the Queen herself, costing **£105**, and presented to **Prince Albert** as a surprise gift on his twenty-fourth birthday, the twenty-sixth of August. Victoria recorded its progress in her journal as "the secret picture," and noted with evident delight that Albert thought it both a good likeness and beautifully painted. He kept it in his private writing room at **Windsor Castle** and showed it to no one. The painting remained out of public view until **1977**. Where Winterhalter typically revelled in the exuberant rendering of fashionable dress, here the white gown is minimally painted and pushed to the margins. Attention falls instead on Victoria's loosened hair and her jewellery — drop earrings, and a heart-shaped pendant on a gold chain that Jonathan Marsden, writing in *Victoria and Albert: Art and Love*, identifies as a glass locket containing a lock of Albert's hair, which the Queen wore day and night before their **1840** marriage. The

image is not a statement of monarchy; it is a declaration of devotion, made for one viewer alone.

Notes

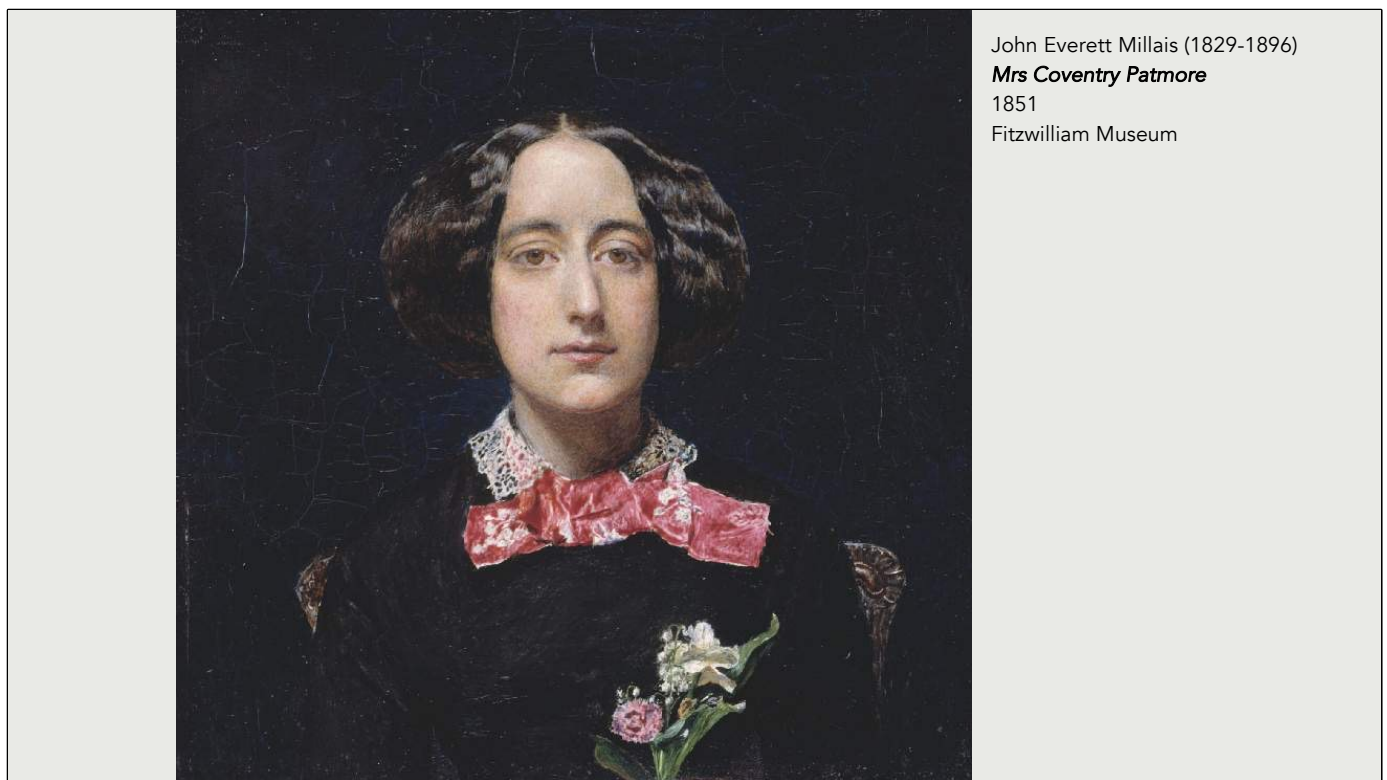
However, privately Queen Victoria presented herself as wife and lover. This personal and intimate portrait is also by Winterhalter. It was commissioned by Queen Victoria for £105 and presented to Prince Albert (1819-1861) on his 24th birthday 26 August 1843 (they were married in 1840).

The following is taken from *Victoria and Albert: Art & Love* by Jonathan Marsden (London, 2010):

‘While the Royal couple chose Winterhalter to paint their official portraits, they also entrusted him with more private images. Here Queen Victoria is seen in an intimate and alluring pose, leaning against a red cushion with her hair half unravelled from its fashionable knot. In her Journal (13 July 1843), the Queen recorded the progress of this, ‘the secret picture’ – prepared as a surprise for her husband’s twenty-fourth birthday. The plot was successful, as the Queen wrote: ‘he thought it so like, & so beautifully painted. I felt so happy & proud to have found something that gave him so much pleasure’ (Journal, 26 August, 1843). The painting was hung in Prince Albert’s Writing Room at Windsor. Several copies were made in miniature – a particularly suitable format for such an intimate image. The Queen later referred to it as ‘my darling Albert’s favourite picture’ (Journal, 2 January, 1873).

In many of his portraits Winterhalter delights in depicting costume with veracity and exuberance. Here, however, the focus is not on fashion and the white flounced gown is minimally painted. The only detail of ornament is the purple ribbon and the jewellery – a pair of simple drop earrings and a heart-shaped pendant on a gold chain. This pendant may be the glass heart-shaped locket containing a lock of Prince Albert’s hair which the Queen wore ‘day and night’ before her marriage (Journal, 12 November, 1839). Such a jewel would have been a touching symbol of the Queen’s devotion to her husband in a picture meant purely for his eyes.’

The picture is so intimate that it was not made public until 1977. prince Albert thought it so daring he kept it in his private room at Windsor Castle and did not let anyone else see it.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896)
Mrs Coventry Patmore
1851
Fitzwilliam Museum

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), Mrs Coventry Patmore, 1851,
Fitzwilliam Museum

The domestic ideal that dominated Victorian womanhood found its most influential poetic expression in **Coventry Patmore's** long poem **The Angel in the House**, published in four parts between **1854 and 1862**. Patmore spent eight years writing it as a celebration of his courtship and marriage to Emily Augusta Patmore, whom he regarded as the perfect woman. The title rapidly became a cultural shorthand for the Victorian feminine ideal — a wife and mother selflessly devoted to her children and submissive to her husband. **Julia Margaret Cameron** gave the phrase visual form in an **1871** portrait using the title directly. The ideal attracted fierce opposition. **Virginia Woolf** described the Angel as intensely sympathetic, immensely charming, utterly unselfish — and then declared she had killed her, because this phantom tormented and wasted her time. **Nel Noddings**, writing in 1989, dismissed the figure as infantile, weak, and mindless. As early as **1891**, the American feminist and novelist **Charlotte Perkins Gilman** pronounced the Angel extinct, arguing that the domestic environment

oppressed women through patriarchal structures, and that male aggressiveness and enforced maternal roles were artificial constructs with no relevance to post-prehistoric survival. In her **Women and Economics** she wrote plainly: there is no female mind — the brain is not an organ of sex.

Notes

The Angel in the House

The role of wife was described by the poet Coventry Patmore in *The Angel in the House* (1854-1862, about 200 pages in 4 parts). He wrote the poem over eight years and it describes his evolving relationship with his wife Emily Augusta Patmore. Millais painted her three years before the poem appeared and Julia Margaret Cameron did a fictional portrait entitled 'The Angel in the House' in 1871 by which time the title of the poem had become a catch phrase.

The poem is about Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore's (1823-1896) courtship of his wife Emily who he believed was the perfect woman. The term 'Angel in the House' came to be used as a reference to women who embodied the Victorian feminine ideal. A wife and mother who was selflessly devoted to her children and submissive to her husband.

Virginia Woolf satirized the angel in the house, writing that 'She [the perfect wife] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it ... Above all, she was pure.' (Woolf, 1966) She added that she 'bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her'.

Nel Noddings (b. 1929), American feminist and philosopher views her as 'infantile, weak and mindless' (1989).

As long ago as 1891, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), American feminist and novelist, wrote a short essay entitled *The Extinct Angel* in which she described the angel in the house as being as dead as the dodo. Gilman believed the domestic environment oppressed women through the patriarchal beliefs upheld by society. She embraced the theory of 'reform Darwinism' and argued that Darwin's theories of evolution presented only the male as the given in the process of human evolution, thus overlooking the

origins of the female brain in society that rationally chose the best suited mate that they could find. Gilman argued that male aggressiveness and maternal roles for women were artificial and no longer necessary for survival in post-prehistoric times. She wrote, 'There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. Might as well speak of a female liver.' from *Women and Economics* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898).

Excerpts

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure;

Daughter to her mother:
Mother, it's such a weary strain
The way he has of treating me
As if 'twas something fine to be
A woman; and appearing not
To notice any faults I've got!



William Powell Frith (1819-1909)
Many Happy Returns of the Day
 1856
 Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate

William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *Many Happy Returns of the Day*, 1856, Mercer Art Gallery, Harrogate

The prosperous domestic world of **William Powell Frith** brings Victorian masculinity into sharp focus — and here we see it already under quiet pressure. **Frith's** painting ***Many Happy Returns of the Day***, exhibited at the **Royal Academy in 1856**, stages a middle-class birthday celebration with precise social choreography. The little girl Alice, Frith's own daughter and later Lady Hastings, sits crowned with a wreath at the head of the table, yet every female gaze in the room redirects our attention to her father, who stands waiting to propose the toast. He is the social pivot: protector, patriarch, head of the household — the Victorian embodiment of the **pater familias**. John Tosh, in his 1999 study *A Man's Place*, argues that the most common Victorian fathering style was emotional distance, because the demands of breadwinning and moral guardianship made intimacy a liability. Frith's own biography complicates this image acutely. While painting this scene of domestic virtue, he was simultaneously supporting a mistress, **Mary Alford**, a former ward and nursemaid, who gave birth to their first child

on the very day this work went on public display. Manliness, as Frith's life demonstrates, was as much performance as principle — and by the century's second half, **Darwin's 1859 *On the Origin of Species*** would begin reshaping that performance entirely.

Notes

But we cannot talk about the ideal Victorian wife with mentioning the typical Victorian husband. Manliness was a virtue and a form of control over maleness which was regarded as brutish. Manliness incorporated spiritual belief and as husband and head of the family had extensive powers over all members of the family. The role has been associated with that of the Roman pater familias. His duty was not only to exert control but to protect his wife and children. Work was essential to achieve full masculine status and the aristocracy were regarded by middle-class men as idle and effeminate. Home and work were very different spheres and did not mix easily. Men who worked at home, such as writers and artists, therefore had their masculinity threatened. Men reinforced their manliness by engaging in social activities with other men, including secret societies such as the Freemasons, and clubs. In the second half of the nineteenth century the concept of masculinity shifted from a spiritual focus to a commitment to physical fitness. A healthy man was expected to have an educated mind and be physically fit. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was a mania for sports and game playing. The athlete became the new hero of society. In the second half of the nineteenth century masculinity also became associated with imperialism and the need to grow the Empire and subordinate non-western cultures. Military commitment and patriotism became a requirement of manliness and the ideal man was a hunter or explorer, self-sufficient and with a broad scientific knowledge. Toughness, hardiness and endurance became associated with a change from richly coloured clothes to dark colours, straight cuts and stiff materials. British public schools were there to produce the ideal 'son of the Empire'.

Many Happy Returns of the Day

The painting shows a typical prosperous middle-class scene showing the celebration of a child's birthday. Ceremonies such as this were introduced by the Victorians and show the milestones of childhood as important events to be recorded. Children and mothers took a greater part, the father is performing his role as head of the family and the grandfather has already

absented himself from the proceedings. Elaborate children's birthday parties started in Germany as 'kinderfeste', with entertainment and games.

Like the Pre-Raphaelites he always painted from actual people including his friends and family. In this painting in the place of honour sits the little girl, whose health is being drunk, with a large wreath fixed vertically to the back of her chair. The child 'Alice' in the painting is Frith's daughter, later Lady Hastings, celebrating her sixth birthday. Her father is a portrait of the artist, and the grandmother is a portrait of Mrs Frith Senior, who kept the Dragon Hotel in Harrogate, from 1826 to 1838. The grandfather was modelled from an old man Frith found in a workhouse. The woman at the far left standing is probably a servant who is holding the girl's presents and the table is waiting for the father to propose a toast to his daughter. The father is waiting in turn for the eldest male present to be given a glass of wine or sherry so that he can take part in the toast. The grandfather looks lost in a wistful remembrance, perhaps of similar happy times in his own childhood. Although the young girl is at the centre of the painting the gazes of the women direct our attention to the central pivot point of the social event, the father.

Frith led an unusual domestic life – he was married to Isabelle and had 12 children while a mile down the road he had a mistress called Mary Alford who had another 7 of his children. In marked contrast to the upright Victorian family shown in this scene. Alford was also a young ward and nurse maid to the family. This painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy the day Alford's first baby was born. He married her after his first wife died and the affair became public knowledge.

Masculinity

Masculinity was changing in a different way from 'The Angel in the House'. That is, while men redefined manliness to become more heroic and masculine, women redefined femininity to fundamentally change the male-dominated society. The 'New Woman' was a feminist ideal that emerged in the second half of the 19th century and which rejected all forms of domination by men. It was popularized by Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) and Henry James. The 19th-century suffragette movement was one aspect of the New Woman. Education and employment opportunities increased for women. Women won the right to attend university and to become lawyers, doctors and professors. New divorce laws meant a woman could survive a divorce.

The concept of masculinity changed over the Victorian period from Christian duty to hardiness. Victorians saw manliness as good as it controlled maleness which was brutish. Men increasingly formed secret societies to reinforce their manliness by bonding with other men. Manliness was associated with Christian belief. He was paterfamilias, head of the household but had a duty to rule and protect those he regarded as weak, his wife and children.

John Tosh (British historian), *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (1999) argues that of the masculine father's options of being an absent father, tyrannical father, distant or intimate, the most common was distant because of the pressures men faced to be breadwinner and protect the family from the harsh realities of a corrupt world meant the need to create manly sons. This meant strict discipline and to avoid the personal distress this would cause upper middle class fathers sent boys away to public school be bullied and beaten with no mother to turn to, in order to harden them into men who could also fulfil this function and show no sign of emotion.

In the second half of the 19th century manliness shifted because of changes in society, partly influenced by Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and its implications and Friedrich Nietzsche's writing (including the famous saying 'God is dead!', 1882). One consequence was a change from a spiritual stance to a commitment to physical health and 'Muscular Christianity' was created. The education of the mind was thought to require the education of the body. A fascination with health led to sports and game playing mania. The athlete was the new hero of society. By the end of the 19th century the British Empire was seen to be in danger and athletic public school boys were needed to save the Empire. Manliness became defined by imperialism and became military as well as hunters, adventurers and pioneers. Self-sufficiency, independence and scientific knowledge were important. Hardiness and endurance required dark clothes, straight cuts and stiff materials.

Samuel Smiles's (1812-1904) *Self-Help* (1857) sold 250,000 copies and argued for character, thrift, perseverance, civility, independence and individuality. Men were active in the public sphere unlike women. Work was crucial to achieve full masculine status, particularly for the middle-class. Home and work were separate spheres that never mixed and so men that

worked at home, such as artists, feared their masculine status was threatened.

The paterfamilias was the head of the Roman family. The oldest living male in the household. Had complete control of all family members. The powers weakened in the late Roman period and the power over life and death abolished. Women often remained part of her birth family and could take legal action on her own behalf.

Notes

Frith is an artist best known for his large painting such as Ramsgate Sands (1851-4) and Derby Day (1858). Many Happy Returns of the Day is typical of his domestic interiors. He grew up in Harrogate and entered the Royal Academy School when he was 19. Frith was a member of the Clique which included Richard Dadd and John Phillip. His principal influence was David Wilkie and his domestic interiors. He had already been successful with Ramsgate Sands in 1854. Derby Day followed in 1858. When Frith's monumental canvas, The Railway Station went on show, at a gallery in the Haymarket, London, in April 1862, The Times reported that the artist had been paid the astonishing sum of £8,750 for it, while the Athenaeum put the total at 8,000 guineas, or £9,187 10s. He also used a photographer for this painting (Samuel Fry). His popularity faded in the 1880s and he blamed the new Impressionists and the Pre-Raphaelites.

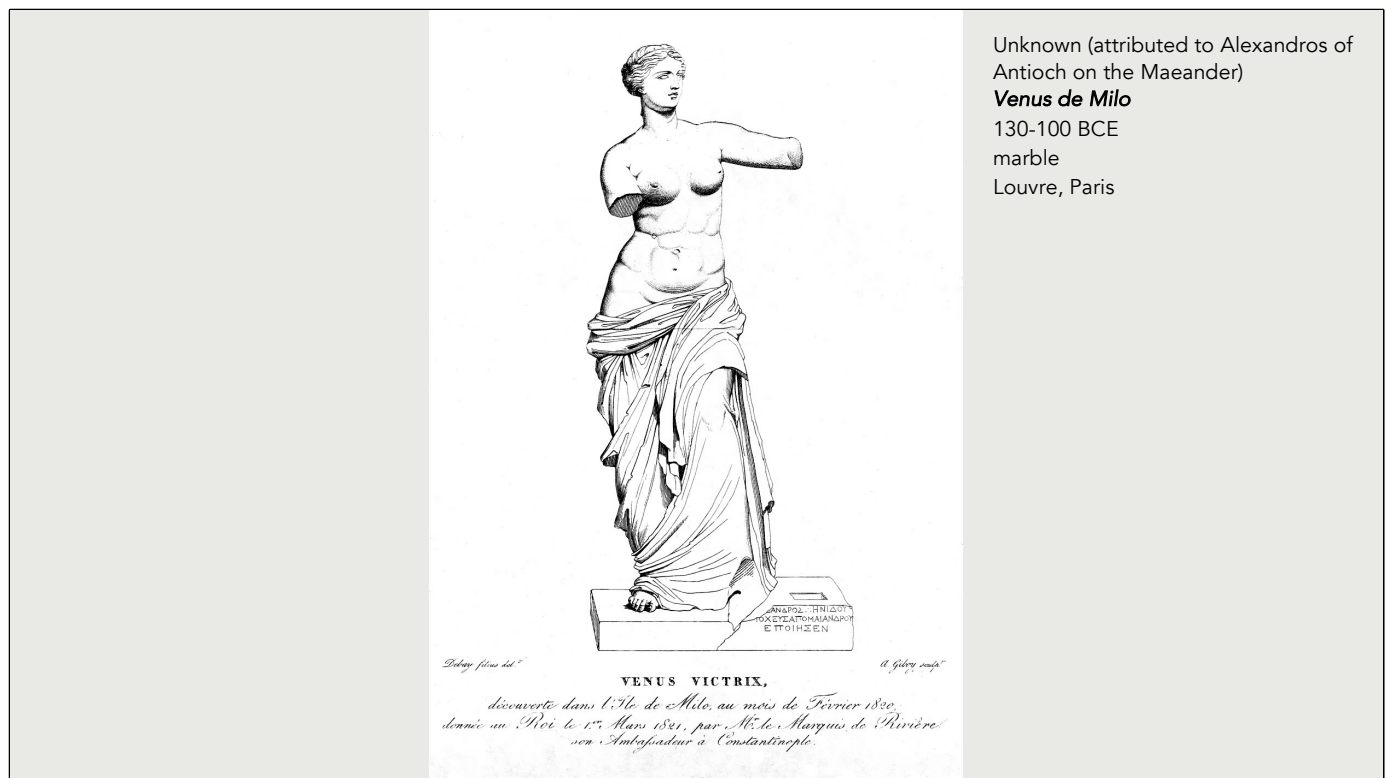
This painting was acquired in 1951 by the Art Fund for £300 (total £400)

The Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle wrote in 'Characteristics', The Edinburgh Review, 1831:

"The old ideal of Manhood has grown obsolete, and the new is still invisible to us, and we grope after it in darkness, one clutching this phantom, another that; Werterism, Byronism, even Brummelism, each has its day." (The Sorrows of Young Werter was a loosely autobiographical novel by Goethe, he falls in love with a girl who marries another and Werter shoots himself to resolve the love triangle). ' 'Mother Church has, to the most, become a superannuated Step-mother, whose lessons go disregarded'

References

Catherine Robson, Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentlemen, 2001



Unknown (attributed to Alexandros of Antioch on the Maeander),
 Venus de Milo, 130-100 BCE, Louvre, Paris

Building on that tradition of the classical nude as perfected humanity, two sculptures dominated how the nineteenth century defined ideal female beauty. The **Venus de Medici** held that position first. A marble copy, made by a Greek sculptor working under Roman rule, it follows the type of the **Aphrodite of Cnidos** by **Praxiteles**, whose original bronze Praxiteles reputedly modelled on the courtesan **Phryne**. The statue was known by 1559 and first documented in 1638, becoming the centrepiece of the Grand Tour in the **Uffizi**, Florence. Its slender, tapering fingers were added by **Ercole Ferrata** in the seventeenth century, and its inscription was forged and then deliberately cast into doubt to associate the work with more prestigious names. Napoleon removed it to Paris in 1803; it was returned in 1815. The **Venus de Milo**, discovered in 1820, was then aggressively promoted by French authorities who had been forced to relinquish the Medici Venus to Italy. The Louvre suppressed the original plinth, whose inscription identified the sculptor as Alexandros of Antioch on the Maeander,

placing the work firmly in the **Hellenistic period**, which was then considered a phase of decline. **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** dismissed the celebrated figure as a big gendarme. The Venus de Milo's prestige was, in large part, an act of institutional propaganda.

Notes

In the first half of the nineteenth century the Venus de Medici was regarded as the ideal classical beauty. The arms were added by Ercole Ferrata (1610-1686) in the 17th century and have long tapering Mannerist fingers. The inscription ('Cleomenes Son of Apollodorus of Athens') was forged in the 18th century to increase its value but doubt was then cast on its authenticity in order to associate it with the more valuable Praxiteles, Phidias or Scopas. It is a marble copy probably made by a Greek under Roman rule of a bronze original following the type of Aphrodite of Cnidos (pronounced nigh-dus'). We have a coin from Cnidus showing Aphrodite by Praxiteles and allegedly modelled by Phryne (a nickname meaning 'toad' given to courtesans). Its discovery is unknown but it was known in 1559 and first documented in 1638. It was the highpoint of the Grand Tour and was in the Uffizi in Florence until Napoleon sent it to Paris in 1803. It was returned in 1815.

It was widely copied and was measured to determine the ideal proportions of the most beautiful female figure.

The Venus de Milo was not discovered until 1820 and from then on was promoted by the French authorities as the greater treasure. They had been made to return the Venus de Medici to the Italians in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars. The Venus de Milo was dutifully praised by many artists and critics as the epitome of graceful female beauty although Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) described it as a 'big gendarme'.

The propaganda from the Louvre included losing the original plinth. We know from two surviving engravings that the plinth included the inscription '...(Alex)andros son of Menides, citizen of Antioch on the Maeander made this (statue)...'. The museum had been promoting the statue as by the much more famous Praxiteles from the Classical period (5th and 4th centuries BCE) but the inscription would make it later (as Antioch did not exist when Praxiteles lived) and move it into the Hellenistic period (323-31 BCE). At the time the Hellenistic period was considered as a period of decline and so the evidence was destroyed by the Louvre.

Notes

There have been many attempts to add the arms to the Venus de Milo. In many of these she is holding an apple as a hand holding an apple was found with the buried statue. It was found by a French naval officer and another officer arranged for the French ambassador to purchase it from Turkey as Milos in the Aegean was part of the Ottoman Empire.

The fame attached to the Venus de Milo in the 19thC is largely due to French propaganda efforts.

The golden apple was awarded by Paris, a Trojan mortal, to resolve a dispute between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite about which was the most fair (Eris, who was not invited to a party of the gods, got annoyed and threw a golden apple into the party inscribed 'for the fairest one'). Hera tried to bribe Paris by making him king of Europe and Asia, Athena offered wisdom and skill in war and Aphrodite offered the love of the world's most beautiful women Helen of Troy, wife of Greek king Menelaus leading to the Trojan Wars. Troy was defeated by the ruse of the Trojan Horse and Aeneas, a Trojan survivor after falling in love with Dido of Carthage founded Rome.

PUNCH'S ALMANACK FOR 1870.



THE VENUS OF MILO; OR, GIRLS OF TWO DIFFERENT PERIODS.

CADSW. "LOOK AT HER BIG FOOT! OH, WHAT A WAIST!—AND WHAT A RIDICULOUS LITTLE HEAD!—AND NO CHIGNON! SHE'S NO LADY! OH, WHAT A FRIGHT!"

Anonymous

The Venus of Milo; or Girls of Two Different Periods

1870

Punch, London

Anonymous, *The Venus of Milo; or Girls of Two Different Periods*, 1870, Punch, London

The chignon offers a sharp test case for this question. Victorian fashionable women wore the chignon — hair coiled at the nape of the neck — as a contemporary style statement, yet the same arrangement appears throughout **ancient Greek** sculpture and vase painting, where **Athenian women** adopted it as everyday dress. The satirical magazine **Punch** seized on this overlap to argue that the two ideals were not equivalent: Victorian fashion was driven by trend and novelty, whereas classical beauty, as artists from the **Renaissance** onwards understood it, was grounded in proportion, restraint, and the studied absence of ornament. Painters and sculptors in the Victorian period who aligned themselves with **classical antiquity** — including those associated with the **Aesthetic Movement** of the **1870s and 1880s** — deliberately distinguished their figures from fashionable contemporaries by stripping away the fussy drapery and corseted silhouettes of the age. The shared hairstyle, then, is superficial coincidence rather than evidence of genuine continuity. **Classical beauty**, as these artists

defined it, was a formal ideal built from anatomical harmony and simplicity, qualities that Victorian fashion culture, with its appetite for novelty, consistently worked against.

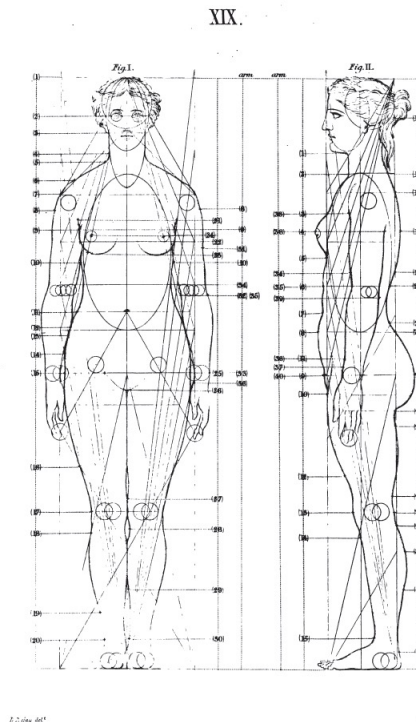
Notes

Was classical beauty the same as Victorian beauty? Punch thinks not but classical beauty was revered by artists as a form of timeless beauty outside of changing fashions.

Notes

A chignon is a hairstyle where the hair is tied up at the nape of the neck or the back of the head. The chignon can be traced back to Ancient Greece where Athenian women commonly wore the style.

David Ramsay Hay (1798–1866)
Science of Beauty, Plate 29
 1856



David Ramsay Hay (1798–1866), *Science of Beauty*, Plate 29, 1856

David Ramsay Hay, Scottish artist, interior decorator, and colour theorist, approached beauty as a problem demanding systematic measurement rather than subjective feeling. In 1850 he decorated Holyrood House for Queen Victoria, but his deeper ambition was to recover what he believed the ancient Greeks had known: that beautiful forms obey precise angular ratios linked to the **musical scale**. Hay argued that angular ratios, unlike simple measurements of length and breadth, remain constant across bodies of different sizes, making them the true underlying principle of beauty. Working with anatomist **John Goodsir** and mathematician **P. Kelland**, he held weekly measurement sessions from June to October **1851**, pressing wooden rods against casts of the **Venus de Medici** and the **Venus de Milo** and then fitting living models to the same apparatus to extract precise angles. His findings, published in **The Natural Principles of Beauty**, claimed these measurements confirmed his theory, and he pushed the argument far enough to notate specific buildings, including the **Parthenon**, as musical chords. Hay was working at a moment when beauty had

become a genuinely contested scientific problem. **Charles Darwin** acknowledged in **On the Origin of Species** in 1859 that apparently dysfunctional beauty, such as the peacock's tail, challenged natural selection, and only resolved the difficulty in 1871 with his theory of sexual selection.

Notes

David Ramsay Hay

Beauty was studied scientifically in the nineteenth century like all other subjects.

David Ramsay Hay was a Scottish artist who studied the subject of beauty and believed that certain ratios were known to and used by the ancient Greeks.

He carried out many measurements and he believed he had recreated this lost theory of beautiful forms. His theory was based on the ratio between angles and he related these ratios to the musical scales and harmonies.

Many books were published in the 1850s and 60s attempting to describe or explain beauty. It was thought that beauty proved that Darwin's theory of natural selection in *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) was false. Darwin admitted that he had a problem explaining such apparently dysfunctional things as the peacock's tail but in 1871 he published *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* in which he described his theory of sexual selection as a way of explaining beauty.

Hay measured the ratios of famous classical nudes such as the Venus de Medici and the Venus de Milo. See 'The Natural Principles of Beauty', p. 30. He worked with Prof. of Anatomy John Goodsir and Rev. P. Kelland, Prof. of Mathematics. They met every week from June to October 1851 in order to measure naked models. Hay made a machine with a vertical column of 1" wood rods that were pushed against a cast of the Venus de Medici (selected by Hay as 'one of the finest specimens of ancient Greek art in existence', p.36). He then clamped the rods and removed the cast and found a model that fitted into the pushed rods. The model then stood upright and they measured the ratios. This was repeated for the front of the cast and model. The model was 1" shorter but this only caused a change of an eighth of an inch in the calculated height and so was ignored. They also took measurements from a cast of the Venus de Milo in a public museum using a step ladder. Hay

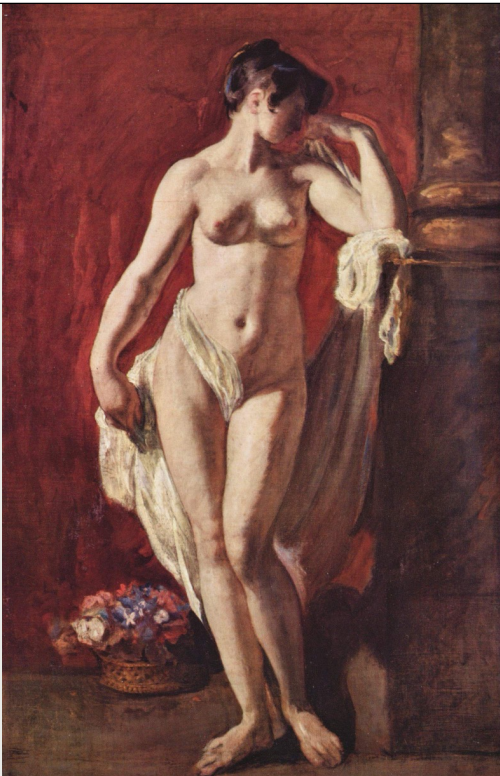
published their findings in 'The Natural Principles of Beauty' where he showed the ratios they had measured confirmed his theory of beauty based on ratios that were indirectly related to the musical scale.

Notes

Hay was Scottish artist, interior decorator and colour theorist who, in 1850, decorated Holyrood house for Queen Victoria.

Hay wrote a number of books concerning beauty which were based on his theory that the beauty of all forms is based on certain ratios related to the musical scale. He believed this had been discovered by the ancient Greeks but lost. His work attempts to recreate the lost ratios by careful measurement of classical temples and classical nudes. He relates the physical ratios of the forms to musical ratios and is even able to write musical chords that represent certain buildings, such as the Parthenon.

This plate shows some of the measurements he made of the angles he found in female forms we find beautiful. He measured angles rather than ratios of length and breadth as he found that stayed constant for larger and smaller bodies. He found the same angular ratios in beautiful male bodies as in beautiful female bodies even though other ratios changed.



William Etty (1787-1849)
Standing Female Nude
c. 1825
Tate Britain, London

William Etty (1787-1849), *Standing Female Nude*, c. 1825, Tate Britain, London

These contradictions within the **Royal Academy** find vivid expression in the career of **William Etty**, for decades the only painter of the female nude working in Britain. Born in York in 1787, Etty looked to **Venetian painting** and to **Rubens** and **Delacroix** — both of whom admired his work — to supply the precedent that British art could not offer him. The study shown here was likely preparatory for a larger mythological composition. The pillar, the flowers, and the figure's inward pose carry faint echoes of **Botticelli's Birth of Venus**, yet Etty's real subject is the vibrancy of flesh against a rich red ground, rendered through dramatic contrasts of light and shadow. Feet and hands are barely sketched; the head recedes into darkness. The priorities are unmistakably his own. Those priorities provoked fierce resistance. **The Times** declared his works entirely too luscious for the public eye. **Thackeray** wrote of their intoxicating effect — eyes on fire, senses overwhelmed. Even his fellow Academician **Charles Leslie**, Professor of Painting, denounced one work as an objectionable painting his exquisite pencil should never

have attempted. Etty's own defence was simple: he quoted Titus, that to the pure in heart, all things are pure.

Notes

Up to the late 1860s very few artists exhibited the female nude. One important exception was William Etty.

As there was no precedence in British art he looked to Venetian art and to Rubens (1577-1640) and Delacroix (1798-1863) who greatly admired his work.

Tate,

This picture was probably intended as a study for a larger painting on a mythological or historical subject. The pillar, the flowers in the background and the woman's pose - absorbed in her own thoughts, but reminiscent of Botticelli's (1446-1510) Birth of Venus, c.1485-6 - hint at some kind of narrative or classical allusion, but Etty is interested primarily in the model's torso and the vibrancy of her flesh, set against a rich red background. He also uses dramatic contrasts of light and dark to enliven what is essentially a conventional pose. Since details of extremities such as feet and hands were less important to him, Etty's nudes often have rather unusual proportions; with the result that, as here, the feet are merely sketched in and the head is in shadow. The model has large, muscular arms and enormous feet, and as some commentators have remarked, 'Etty never altogether converted the model into a complete work of poetry...his Aphrodite remains a barmaid' (Gaunt and Roe, p.64).

Some critics regarded Etty's belief in the importance of colour over design as unwholesome and his works were frequently attacked for their indecency and lack of finish. The Times considered them 'entirely too luscious for the public eye' (quoted in Lambourne, p.281) and Thackeray warned of their intoxicating effect: 'Look for a while at Mr Etty's pictures, and away you rush, your "eyes on fire", drunken with the luscious colours that are poured out for you on the liberal canvas, and warm with the sight of the beautiful sirens that appear on it' (quoted in Lambourne p.282).

Etty's advice to students was to copy flowers from nature starting with the leaves. He often included flowers and one reviewer in 1855 describes 'the fruit and flowers he was so fond of introducing into his pictures' as excellent

and put in with a few strokes of the brush. There is a painting by Etty called 'Wood Nymphs Sleeping, Satyr Bringing Flowers', which was criticized by one critic as 'exceeding indelicacy, quite unfit for public exhibition' but which his biographer regarded as innocent as the satyr was paying a tribute to their beauty and innocence by offering them flowers. Maybe a similar connection applies here. I think Etty was emphasising beauty with innocence, like the flower.

Tate: 'The rich backdrop suggests his admiration for Venetian masters including Titian. Etty uses dramatic lighting of the model's skin, contrasting warm flesh tones and areas of shadow to enliven a somewhat conventional pose.'

Notes

Etty was the only painter of the female nude in the early Victorian period. Etty divided opinion more deeply than any other artist of the period except perhaps Turner.

"No decent family can hang such sights on their walls," said the London Examiner, lamenting "another indulgence of what we had hoped was a classical, but are now convinced is a lascivious mind".

The Morning Chronicle in 1833 demanded that the distinguished Royal Academy should choose "a purer channel, and not persist, with an unhallowed fancy, to pursue Nature to her holy recesses".

Etty wrote 'the simple undisguised naked figure is innocent' and applied the biblical sentiment "To the pure in heart, all things are pure."

(Autobiography in Art Journal, vol.11, February 1849, p. 40, 'Unto the pure all things are pure', Titus1:15, King James Bible).

In 1828 Etty was elected an Academician and so was allowed to exhibit what he chose at the annual exhibition.

He was a modest man which helped to give him strength in the face of the criticism.

He was criticized, even by his fellow Academicians, The Professor of Painting Charles Leslie, denounced a naked Pandora as "an objectionable painting which his exquisite pencil should never have attempted".

Etty retired to York where his family's gingerbread and confectionery business was thriving and became a major benefactor of the city. He was one of the

most important figures in preventing York city walls from being demolished. He also got life drawing classes started in York which assisted later artists such as Albert Moore.



William Etty (1787-1849)
Youth at the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm
1830-1832
Tate Britain, London

William Etty (1787-1849), *Youth at the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm*, 1830-1832, Tate Britain, London

Having established Etty's reputation for the nude, we can now see how he used the figure to carry explicit moral weight. **William Etty's** painting confronts the viewer with a stark argument: earthly pleasures are fleeting, and death and turbulence press in on every side. The composition is not titillation — it is a visual sermon on human vulnerability. Yet many of Etty's contemporaries, and even fellow artists, refused to engage with that reading. **John Constable**, one of Etty's friends, reduced the work to a crude pun, calling it a "**bumboat**" — a term for the small vessels that ferried provisions to ships moored offshore — smuggling a joke about the naked figures into an apparently nautical observation. Constable's quip reveals how resistant audiences were to accepting the moral seriousness Etty intended. **T.S.R. Boase** later argued that this persistent misreading haunted Etty's critical reception throughout his career, stripping his work of its ethical ambition and reducing him to a painter of flesh. Understanding what Etty actually put into these canvases — mortality, desire, the fragility of

joy — restores the full force of his artistic project.

Notes

Many of Etty's paintings had a moral message. This painting shows that the pleasures of life are transient and all around us are storms and death.

However, many could not see beyond the naked figures including artists. His friend John Constable joked that it was a 'bumboat', a pun on the name of a small boat used to ferry supplies to ships moored away from the shore.



William Dyce (1806-1864)
Neptune Resigning To Britannia The Empire Of the Sea
 1847
 fresco
 Osborne House, Isle of Wight

William Dyce (1806-1864), Neptune Resigning To Britannia The Empire Of the Sea, 1847, Osborne House, Isle of Wight

Building on that Renaissance inheritance, **William Dyce** brings it directly into the Victorian period. In **1847**, the female nude was virtually absent from British painting, with the notable exception of **William Etty**, who worked prolifically from life. Dyce approached the subject very differently, producing idealised figures rooted in Raphael's compositional language, most directly in **Raphael's The Triumph of Galatea**, painted around 1514 for the Villa Farnesina in Rome. That fresco shows Galatea, the beautiful sea-nymph of Greek mythology, raised in apotheosis across the waves. Raphael himself wrote that the figure was drawn not from a single model but from a certain idea formed in his own mind — a definition of ideal beauty the Renaissance passed directly to academic painters three centuries later. Dyce's **Neptune Resigning to Britannia the Empire of the Sea** was a royal commission: **Queen Victoria** and **Prince Albert** were actively sponsoring artists to revive fresco as a prestigious medium, first at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, then at the **Palace of Westminster**. Albert

reportedly thought the work rather nude. Victoria had no such reservations. She consistently supported nudity in art and went out of her way to encourage it, purchasing male nude studies by **William Mulready** with visible enthusiasm.

Notes

The other type of ideal beauty came from the Renaissance, and, for example, the work of Raphael.

Renaissance Beauty

The female nude as a subject in painting was virtually unknown in 1847 apart from the prolific work of William Etty. One artist who did use the nude in this single painting was William Dyce because he had been commissioned by Queen Victoria to create Neptune Resigning to Britannia the Empire of the Sea. This fresco was for the staircase of their new Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. It was part of a project she was engaged with Prince Albert to sponsor artists to revive this prestigious mode of Renaissance painting. It recalls Raphael's (1483-1520, died aged 37) *The Triumph of Galatea* (c. 1514, Villa Farnesina in Trastevere, Rome). At the time, Dyce wrote that Prince Albert 'thought it rather nude' but the Queen had no issue with it although nurserymaids and French governesses were said to be scandalized. Queen Victoria was never prudent concerning nudity in art and went out of her way to support and encourage it.

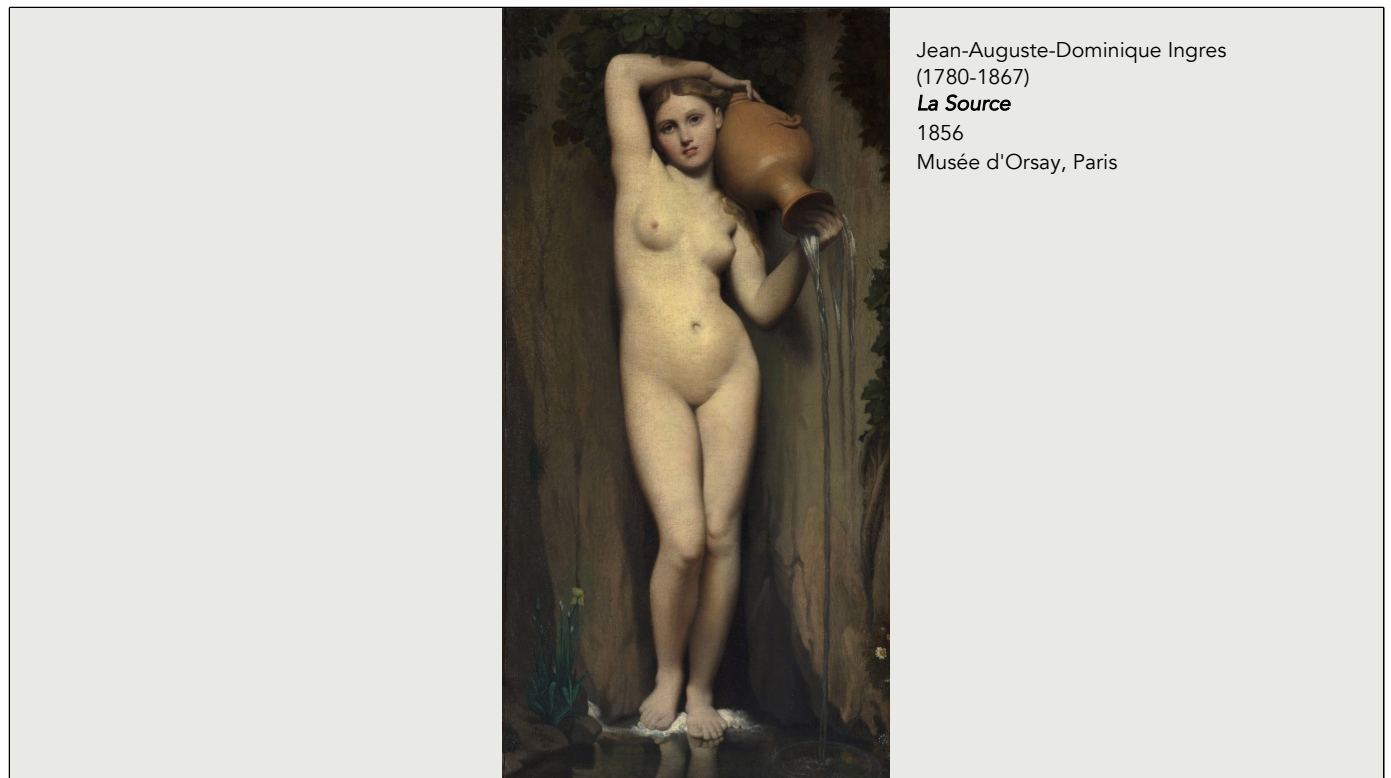
Notes

Etty painted from life but Dyce's nudes are idealised and based on Raphael's *The Triumph of Galatea*. Raphael shows the apotheosis of Galatea (i.e. being raised to a god). He said it was not based on one beautiful model but based on a 'certain idea' he had formed in his mind.

In Greek mythology, the beautiful Nereid Galatea had fallen in love with the peasant shepherd Acis. Her consort, one-eyed giant Polyphemus, after chancing upon the two lovers together, lobbed an enormous pillar and killed Acis. Nereids were 50 sister sea nymphs who were distinct from the sirens. Nereids were friendly and helpful to sailors.

On another occasion, a male nude study by the Irish painter William Mulready was specifically picked out and enthusiastically purchased by the Queen in a London gallery that had sought to conceal a set of such pictures from her presumed sensibilities. Victoria is said to have found it inconvenient that her love life was continually interrupted by pregnancies. In their 21 years she had nine children and she found babies universally unappealing. Sadly, Prince Albert (1819-1861) died of typhoid fever aged only 42.

William Dyce studied in Rome (1825) and met the Nazarene painter Friedrich Overbeck. Settled in Edinburgh and painted portraits and religious subjects. He was given charge of the Edinburgh School of Design and invited to London to head the new Government School of Design (Royal College of Art). He visited France and Germany to study how they taught design. His ideas became the 'South Kensington' system which was the basis of English art education for the rest of the century. He was selected to execute a series of murals at the Palace of Westminster. He chose the Arthurian legends in 1847 but this was years before they become popular and so it was regarded as an obscure subject. It became a problem as it is about an unfaithful queen that causes a kingdom to fall. He collapsed working on the frescos and died in Streatham and is buried at St. Leonards Church.



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), *La Source*, 1856, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

William Etty, elected to the Royal Academy in 1828, painted the nude decades before it became broadly acceptable there. Outside Etty and his student **William Edward Frost**, the nude was largely absent from Royal Academy exhibitions until the 1860s, when **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres** showed **La Source** at the 1862 International Exhibition in London and shifted what critics and audiences were prepared to accept. Ingres had begun the painting around 1820 and completed it in 1856, aged 76, with two students assisting on the background and jar. The figure reimagines the **Aphrodite of Cnidus** as a sacred spring, source of poetic inspiration in classical literature. She stands between flowers — which Michael Ferber, in his *Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, associates with vulnerability to those who would pluck them — framed by ivy, plant of **Dionysus**, and separated from the viewer by the water she pours, a boundary whose crossing carries symbolic weight. **Frederic Leighton** brought this newly permissible territory to the Royal Academy in 1867 with **Venus Disrobing for the**

Bath. The Art Journal called it "eminently chaste," while The London Review condemned its flesh tints as a "perversion of nature" — a term critics routinely levelled at works that failed to represent nature faithfully.

Notes

William Etty (1787-1849, RA 1828) was a very early and enthusiastic painter of the nude but apart from Etty (and his student William Edward Frost) the nude was not shown in the RA until the 1860s. Some think this is because Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) *La Source* (1862, based on a torso painted in 1823) was exhibited at the 1862 International Exhibition in London. Although it caused a stir it did start to change views of what was acceptable in art.

One of the first was in 1867 when Frederic Leighton caused a sensation at the Royal Academy with *Venus Disrobing for the Bath*.

The Art Journal 1867 said a life-size undressed Venus is 'a little startling now-a-days ... His picture is eminently chaste ... the colour ... is absolutely naturalistic ... more to commend than censure'.

the critic of The London Review described the painting as 'positively sickly' and wrote, 'the smirk of the goddess is intolerable...while the flesh tints of the figure are idealized after a fashion which perverts instead of representing or even suggesting the colour of nature.' The accusation here appears to be that the flesh is not accurate enough and the painting therefore a perversion of nature. The terms 'pervert' and 'perversion' were often used to describe Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic works that failed to represent nature.

The key word regarding acceptable nudes was 'purity', if the figure was thought to be chaste and pure then it was acceptable. One way to achieve this was by the use of classical props such as columns.

In 1872 it was sold for the relatively low sum of 175 guineas.

La Source was begun by Ingres in 1820 and not completed until 1856 when he was 76 and already famous. It is a re-imagination of the Aphrodite of Cnidus. Two of his students helped create the background and the jar. The figure represents a water source or spring which, in classical literature, is sacred to the Muses and a source of poetic inspiration. She stands between two flowers, with their "vulnerability to males who wish to pluck them" (Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, 2007), and is framed by ivy,

plant of Dionysus the god of disorder, regeneration, and ecstasy. The water she pours out separates her from the viewer, as rivers mark boundaries of which the crossing is symbolically important. It was received enthusiastically when first displayed in France. Kenneth Clark in his book *Feminine Beauty* observed how *The Source* has been described as "the most beautiful figure in French painting." The model for the painting was the young daughter of Ingres' concierge



Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912)
A Sculptor's Model
1877
Private collection

Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1912), *A Sculptor's Model*, 1877, Private collection

This painting sits squarely in that fraught 1870s moment when the nude was both more visible at the Royal Academy and more contested than ever before. **Lawrence Alma-Tadema** settled in England in 1870, bringing with him a Continental training and a fascination with Roman antiquity that shaped every canvas he produced. This work was commissioned by his father as a direct response to the **Esquiline Venus**, a Roman statue excavated from the **Esquiline Hill** in **1874** and seen by Alma-Tadema in Rome the following year. The statue stands just visible behind the palm frond, anchoring the painting in classical precedent — the very quality that made a nude socially permissible. The rules were clear: the female nude was acceptable only when it invoked the classical or biblical, signalling purity rather than sensuality. Yet acceptability had limits. When the work toured to Liverpool, the **Bishop of Carlisle** wrote directly that exhibiting a, quote, life-size, life-like, almost photographic representation of a beautiful naked woman struck him as, quote, very mischievous. **Charlotte Brontë** had already

mapped the gendered politics of looking in **Villette**, published in 1853, where Lucy Snowe is steered away from a Cleopatra and made to study paintings of modest, improving women instead. The gaze, Brontë understood, was never neutral.

Notes

This is a nude from the 1870s when it was still shocking but much more common at the RA exhibition.

The Woman's Gaze

Men were allowed to look at the female nude but only if the painting or sculpture was classical or biblical and therefore pure and ennobling. Purity was key. Although we might think anything goes, any sign of impurity or sensuality was strictly forbidden. However, almost any reference to the classical made the nude acceptable. Men were more concerned about the affect on their wives and particularly their daughters.

This painting was commissioned by John Collier's father as an attempt to recreate the posture of the Esquiline Venus that had been excavated in 1874 from the Esquiline Hill and seen by the artist on a visit to Rome the following year. (The statue is hidden behind the palm frond.) However, it went too far for many people. When Alma Tadema's *A Sculptor's Model* was exhibited in Liverpool the Bishop of Carlisle wrote 'My mind has been considerably exercised this season by the exhibition of Alma-Tadema's nude Venus ... for a living artist to exhibit a life-size, life-like, almost photographic representation of a beautiful naked woman strikes my inartistic mind as somewhat, if not very, mischievous.'

The woman's view: in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), Lucy Snowe visits an art gallery in Brussels but her male companion thinks a painting of a black semi-nude Cleopatra not suitable. Lucy's view is "she had no business to lounge away the day on a sofa...strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks". For men she was the epitome of sensuality. Lucy was made to sit in a corner looking at paintings of improving modest women. She saw women looking at Cleopatra but was told they were married women which was permitted.

Lawrence Alma-Tadema

Born in Dronrijp, the Netherlands, and trained at the Royal Academy of Antwerp, Belgium, he settled in England in 1870 and spent the rest of his life there. A classical-subject painter, he became famous for his depictions of the luxury and decadence of the Roman Empire, with languorous figures set in fabulous marbled interiors or against a backdrop of dazzling blue Mediterranean Sea and sky. Though admired during his lifetime for his draftsmanship and depictions of Classical antiquity, his work fell into disrepute after his death, and only since the 1960s has it been re-evaluated for its importance within nineteenth-century English art.

Notes

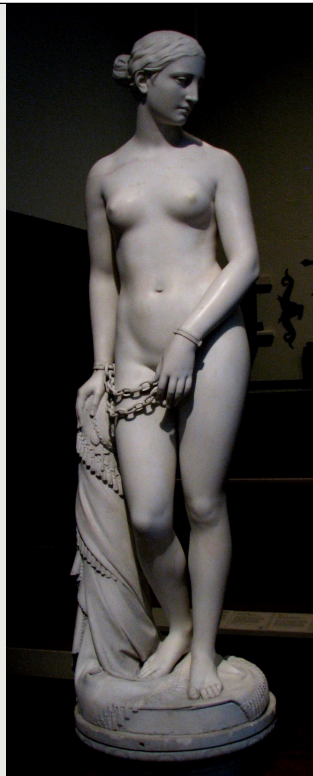
The proportions of the Esquiline Venus were possibly modelled on a real person as the head to height is 1:7 rather than the more elegant 1:8. Kenneth Clerk describes it as 'a stocky little peasant such as might be found still in any Mediterranean village'.

We know the left arm was raised and the left hand was on her head as a fragment of her left little finger remains on the back of the head.

Opinions are divided but one school of thought is that this was a sculpture of Cleopatra.

Waist-to-hip ratios: the notional ideal is 70%, the figure in the painting is 75% and the statue is 75%. That is, the figure and statue have narrower hips than what research has found to be the most attractive.

Hiram Powers (1805-1873)
The Greek Slave
1847
marble
165.7 × 53.3 × 46.4 cm
Yale University Art Gallery, New
Haven, Connecticut



Hiram Powers (1805-1873), *The Greek Slave*, 1847, 165.7 × 53.3 × 46.4 cm, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut

Hiram Powers exhibited *The Greek Slave* at the **Great Exhibition of 1851**, where it drew enormous acclaim. Powers designed his nude figure to represent a chaste Christian girl awaiting sale to a Turkish harem, contemplating her fate with dignity. He wrote that she was intended to awaken the highest emotions of the soul for the pure and beautiful. **Elizabeth Barrett Browning** described the statue's passionless perfection, and the white marble itself carried meaning — equated by Victorian audiences with coldness, completeness, and moral purity. That equation becomes sharper when set against **John Gibson's Tinted Venus**, also shown at the Great Exhibition. Gibson painted his sculpture, as ancient Greek artists had done, giving the goddess the colour of living flesh. Victorian critics recoiled. Barrett Browning called it rather a grisette than a goddess — a grisette being a French working-class woman, with clear sexual overtones. The irony is considerable: Gibson's statue was truer to the original **ancient Greek** practice that both sculptors claimed to emulate. **Walter Benjamin**,

writing in 1936, observed that even the most perfect reproduction lacks one element — its unique existence in time and space. The Victorians were already sensing that their ideal of pristine white marble was itself a reproduction of something misunderstood.

Notes

Two statues that illustrate the point about purity. The American artist Hiram Powers exhibited *The Greek Slave* at the Great Exhibition of 1851 to great acclaim. Powers intended his nude to represent a chaste Christian girl awaiting her fate with dignity. She was meant to represent the triumph of purity over adversity as Powers made clear in the narrative he wrote for the exhibition. Powers explained that the Greek slave is depicted in a moment of contemplation as she is about to be sold to a Turkish harem. It was, he wrote, intended to 'awaken the highest emotions of the soul for the pure and beautiful.' It was praised as much as it had been when it was exhibited in 12 cities in America in the late 1840s. Many critics hailed it as the pinnacle of female purity. Elizabeth Barrett Browning described its 'passionless perfection'. Its white marble was equated with purity, coldness, completeness and perfection.

The association of whiteness with purity is highlighted by examining another sculpture that was also shown at the Great Exhibition, John Gibson's *Tinted Venus*. As ancient Greek sculptures had been, Gibson's statue was painted and so appeared as the colour of white flesh. The painted surface was read by Victorians as vulgar and vile. Elizabeth Barrett Browning described it as 'rather a grisette than a goddess'. A grisette was a French working-class woman and the word had sexual overtones suggesting a coquettish and flirtatious woman or a part-time prostitute. Most commentators thought the statue was indecent, ironic if purity is concerned with truth, as Gibson's statue was more true to the original Greek sculptures than both Powers and Gibson sought to emulate. The tradition of using plain, unpainted marble was based on the assumption that this was the form used in ancient Greece but the Victorians were already becoming aware that it was mistaken.

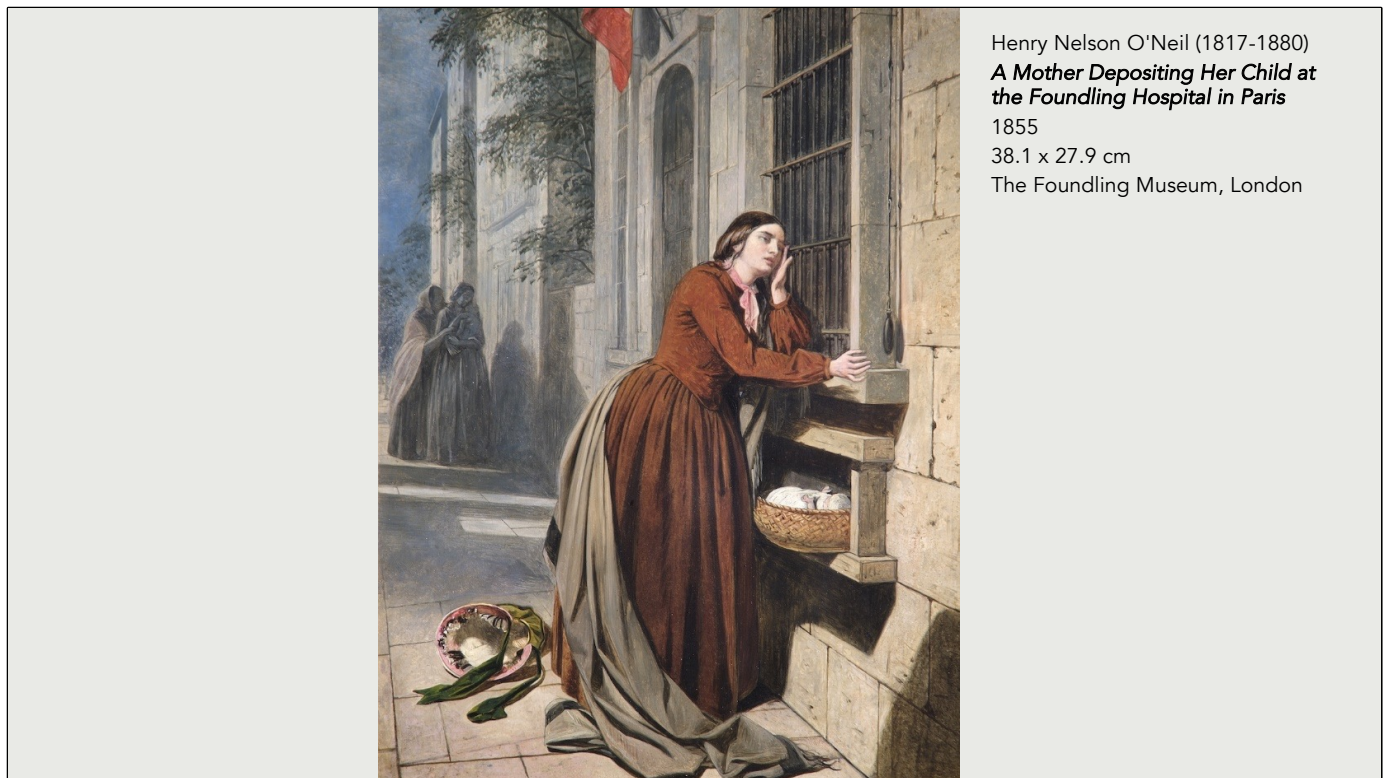
However, as Walter Benjamin points out in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) 'even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.'

Notes

Powers sculpted six versions of The Greek Slave.

References

Jennifer Devere Brody, 'Shading meaning', *Performing the Body / Performing the Text*, 1999



Henry Nelson O'Neil (1817-1880), *A Mother Depositing Her Child at the Foundling Hospital in Paris*, 1855, 38.1 x 27.9 cm, The Foundling Museum, London

That preoccupation with female virtue as the cornerstone of national identity gave the **Fallen Woman** a precise social definition — she was not a woman born into poverty and prostitution, but one of previously good character who had transgressed, and therefore retained the possibility of redemption. The **Foundling Hospital**, established in London in **1741**, embodied exactly this moral calculus. By the mid-nineteenth century, admission of an illegitimate child depended on the mother demonstrating her former respectability through a written petition — she needed to be literate and articulate enough to argue her own case for virtue. This reflected a broader transformation in how Victorian society understood childhood itself. Earlier centuries treated children, particularly poor ones, with indifference — wet-nursed, then dressed as miniature adults from age seven. The nineteenth-century bourgeois family changed that entirely, surrounding children with toys, dedicated clothing, and a distinct social identity. The contrast this

created with orphaned and vagrant children became urgent moral territory for novelists and social reformers alike. **Henry Nelson O'Neil**, painting in this climate, belonged to the **Clique**, a group explicitly hostile to the **Pre-Raphaelites**. His work engaged directly with the social anxieties of mid-Victorian Britain, from imperial crisis to abandoned motherhood — the Foundling Hospital gate becoming a threshold between respectability and disgrace.

Notes

There is an exhibition called 'The Fallen Woman' at the foundling Museum at the moment (25 September 2015 – 3 January 2016).

The fallen woman was a common topic for Victorian literature and painting and it was a social concern.

A fallen woman was one who had engaged in sexual relations outside marriage and the implication of 'fallen' is that she had previously been of good character. A common prostitute from a poor background would not be regarded as fallen.

When the Foundling Hospital was founded in 1741 it gave no preference to any person but it was quickly overwhelmed by applicants and a ballot system was introduced. By 1768 mothers were required to complete a petition and by the mid-nineteenth century preference was given to women of previously good character as it was thought they had the potential to live a virtuous life from that point onwards. This became a condition for the acceptance of an illegitimate child so a mother needed to be literate and articulate and be able to argue her case.

The structure of the family remained loose up to and through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in England. Babies were frequently cared for by wet nurses and by the age of seven they were dressed and treated like adults. Neglect and ill treatment of the young was common and childhood was not a stage of life that was honoured. In poor districts the orphan was treated little differently from the child with parents. In the nineteenth century with the development of the respectable bourgeois family children were treated as newer before with toys, special clothes and their own role in society. This exaggerated the distinction between poor and middle-class children and drew attention to the problem of the orphan which was written

about in novels and dealt with by social reformers. Vagrant children were rounded up by agents and exported to America to provide inexpensive labour.

Henry Nelson O'Neil (1817-1880) was a Victorian historical genre painter and minor writer. His best known painting dealt with the troops leaving to quell the Indian mutiny in 1857 (Eastward Ho!). He was a member of the Clique, a group of artists that opposed the Pre-Raphaelite movement but O'Neil was the most virulent. He wrote a futuristic fantasy called 2000 years hence which portrayed Britain as a frozen wasteland excavated by an archaeologist from New Zealand who traces the decline of British culture to the nineteenth century.

The Foundling Hospital in Paris was established in 1670 and had a different admission system to London. Mothers could abandon their babies in a public place or, as shown here, leave them at the Hospital gate.



Richard Redgrave (1804-1888)
The Outcast
1851
Royal Academy, London

Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), *The Outcast*, 1851, Royal Academy, London

Having established how women fought to preserve their respectability through labour, we now confront what happened when that respectability was lost. **Richard Redgrave** painted **The Outcast** in **1851** as a direct indictment of Victorian moral rigidity. A father expels his daughter into a snowbound night, her illegitimate infant's arm raised in unwitting echo of the pleading sister behind them. Every detail is loaded: on the floor lie a purse and an incriminating letter, whilst on the wall hangs a biblical scene depicting **Abraham** casting out **Hagar** and her child **Ishmael** into the wilderness. The parallel is precise — divine mercy eventually saves Hagar, but Victorian society offers no such reprieve. From the 1840s onward, Redgrave turned decisively away from literary subjects to expose, in his own words from the **1850 Art Journal**, that his best efforts in art aimed at calling attention to "the trials and struggles of the poor and oppressed." **The Governess** of 1844 and **The Sempstress** of 1846 belong to this same urgent project. For a fallen woman, the routes forward were brutally narrow: factory

work, seamstressing, prostitution, or suicide. The **Victorian moral code** made shame not a personal matter but a social sentence with no appeal.

Notes

Key point: the 'fallen women' was based on a strict Victorian code

The Outcast

We have already seen *The Sempstress* (1846, sketch 1844, based on Thomas Hood, *The Song of the Shirt*, 1843), the image not of a fallen woman but the lengths a woman would go to retain her purity in the face of all odds.

This is *The Outcast* by Richard Redgrave. The head of the household forces his daughter out of the family home with her illegitimate baby. In the foreground on the floor is what may be an incriminating letter, possibly naming the father of the child. The scene is made more pathetic by the snowy wastes outside the door and the innocent child's hand raised in echo of the hand of the pleading sister.

On the floor is a purse and an incriminating letter. On the wall is a biblical scene of Abraham casting out Hagar and her illegitimate child Ishmael into Wilderness of Beersheba (Genesis 21:10). God shows Hagar a well and save Ishmael's life and his descendants become the Arabic nations.

She is a fallen woman and so no forgiveness is possible. She has brought shame on the household and so must fend for herself. This means becoming a sempstress or working in a factory. If these are not possible the only options left are prostitution or suicide.

Originally Redgrave produced works of historical and literary subjects but from the 1840's he painted themes which exposed the cruelty of Victorian society, especially to women, with works such as *The Governess* (1844, Victoria & Albert Museum) and *The Sempstress* (1846, private collection). In 1850 in the *Art Journal* he wrote that 'my best efforts in art have aimed at calling attention to the trials and struggles of the poor and oppressed.'

The Sempstress

Thomas Hood (1799-1845) a British humourist and poet, son of a well-known playwright Tom Hood. He was not a political radical and loved playing

practical jokes on his family and he loved puns.

Based on a real case of Mrs Biddell a seamstress who pawned the clothes she had been given to sew to feed her children and thus incurred a debt she could not repay. She was sent to a workhouse and her fate is unknown. The poem was published anonymously in Punch Christmas edition 1843 and quickly became a phenomenon.



James Tissot (1836-1902)
The Thames
1876

James Tissot (1836-1902), *The Thames*, 1876

James Tissot, born in 1836 in France, arrived in London in 1871 having fought in the Franco-Prussian War and navigated the turbulent politics of the **Paris Commune**. He came with real advantages: an existing relationship with **Thomas Gibson Bowles**, owner of **Vanity Fair**, who offered him lodgings and illustration work, and a prior presence at the **Royal Academy**. Within three years, Tissot had purchased a house in **St John's Wood**, the artist-favoured quarter of north London, and his studio became famously well-appointed — **Edmond de Goncourt** noted in 1874, with undisguised sarcasm, that iced champagne awaited visitors at all times. That prosperity shaped how critics read his work. When Tissot exhibited this painting at the Royal Academy in **1876**, the response was hostile. Reviewers branded the women depicted as vulgar and low-bred. The lounging poses implied an ease between the figures that polite society found deeply unsettling, pointing too openly toward what might follow. Polluted river water, grimy chimneys, and conspicuous alcohol compounded the offence. Tissot was not painting fashionable life approvingly — he was exposing

its moral looseness, and his audience was not grateful for the clarity.

Notes

James Tissot

James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1836–1902) was a French painter and illustrator. He was a successful painter of Paris society before moving to London in 1871 (aged 35).

Tissot fought in the Franco-Prussian War as part of the improvised defence of Paris, joining two companies of the Garde Nationale and later as part Paris Commune. Either because of the political associations caused by the latter (which he was believed to have joined to protect his own belongings), or simply because of better opportunities, he left Paris for London in 1871.

Having already worked as a caricaturist for Thomas Gibson Bowles, the owner of the magazine *Vanity Fair*, as well as exhibited at the Royal Academy, Tissot arrived with established social and artistic connections in London. Bowles gave Tissot both a place to stay as well as a cartooning job for *Vanity Fair*.

He quickly developed his reputation as a painter of elegantly dressed women shown in scenes of fashionable life. By 1872, Tissot was able to purchase his own home in St John's Wood, an area of London very popular with artists at the time. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, 'in 1874 Edmond de Goncourt wrote sarcastically that he had 'a studio with a waiting room where, at all times, there is iced champagne at the disposal of visitors'.

James Tissot shocked many critics when he exhibited this painting at the Royal Academy in 1876. The morals of the characters were questionable which was made worse by the lavish supply of alcohol and the questionable location with its filthy chimneys and polluted waters. The ladies were described as 'vulgar' and 'low-bred' and the lounging bodies suggest too great a degree of familiarity and suggest too clearly what might follow.



James Tissot (1836-1902)
Portsmouth Dockyard
1877
Tate Britain

James Tissot (1836-1902), *Portsmouth Dockyard*, 1877, Tate Britain

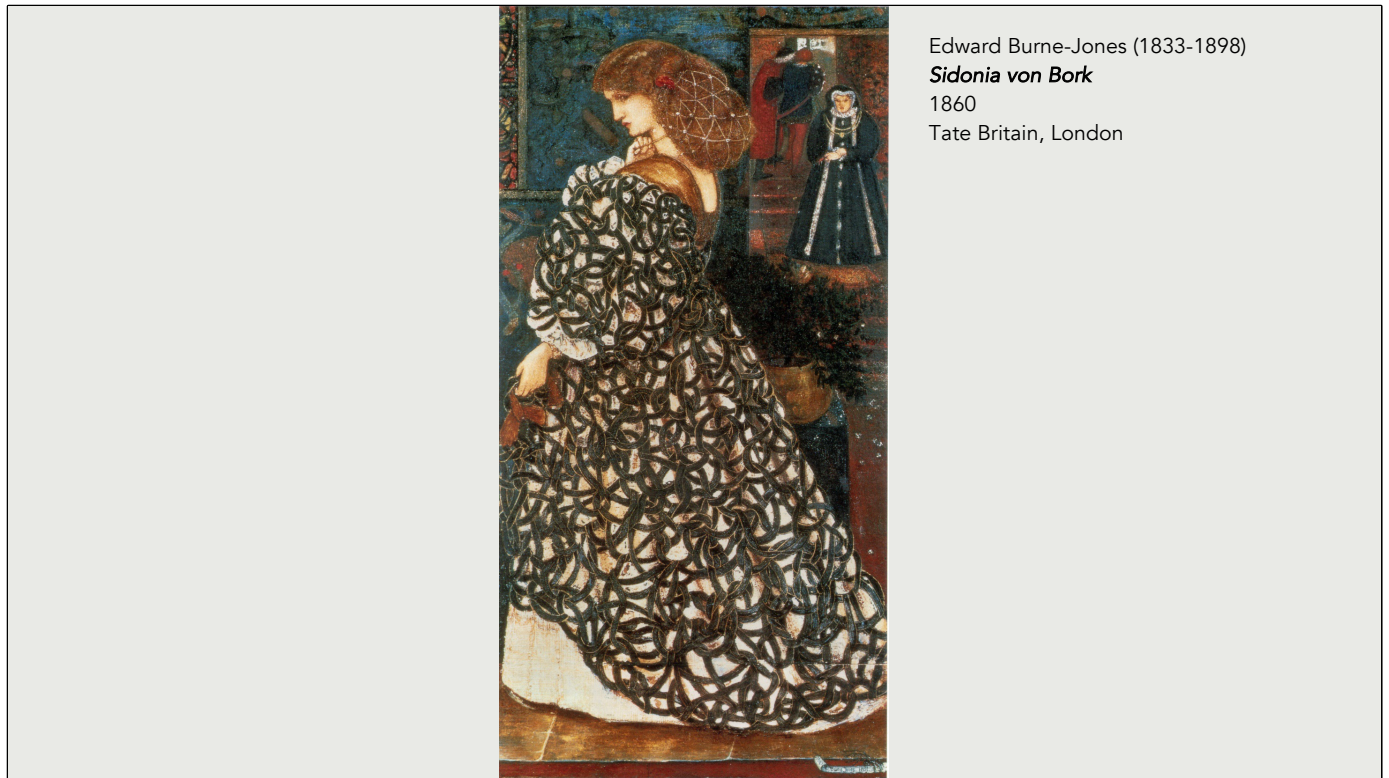
Building on the social tensions we saw in Tissot's earlier work, this painting from the following year deepens that reading considerably. **James Tissot** exhibited this revised composition at a moment when Victorian moral codes still held firm but were beginning to show their first fractures. The scene depicts a familiar triangular drama: a man turning to address one woman, whose expression radiates quiet triumph, while her rival is closed off behind a tilted parasol, her sullen face signalling defeat without a word spoken. Tissot handles the social arithmetic with precision — nothing is stated, everything is legible. The setting at **Portsmouth Docks** is deliberate. Sailors row into the middle distance, figures of honest labour and imperial purpose, anchoring the private drama within a broader national confidence. This is Britain at the height of its empire, and Tissot's picture reflects a society that still believed it knew the difference between right conduct and wrong. That confidence eroded sharply in the final decades of the **nineteenth century**. Scientific discoveries — **Darwin's** findings chief among them — and a gathering sense that prosperity could not hold

indefinitely began dissolving the moral certainties that give a painting like this its entire dramatic charge. The parasol shuts, and an era quietly starts to close.

Notes

The following year Tissot exhibited this revised and perfectly acceptable painting of a traditional story of a man trying to choose between two women. It looks as if the man has just made his choice as he turns to speak to the woman with a look of victory on her face. The other woman has a sullen look and her parasol isolates her. It is a respectable location, Portsmouth Docks and some healthy sailors are just rowing into view.

I think this shows the sensitivity with which social nuances were treated in the Victorian period. There was a very clear feeling for what was right and wrong and our responsibilities as running the biggest empire that world had seen. This started to be eroded in the last decades of the nineteenth century when fears and uncertainties arose from scientific findings and a general foreboding that the good times could not last forever.



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Sidonia von Bork*, 1860, Tate Britain, London

The **femme fatale** — the woman who bewitches and destroys — runs through nineteenth-century art as a persistent obsession, and **Edward Burne-Jones** engages it directly here. **Sidonia von Bork**, painted in **1860**, depicts the heroine of Wilhelm Meinhold's gothic novel of 1847, translated as *Sidonia the Sorceress* by Lady Jane Wilde, Oscar Wilde's mother. Meinhold's *Sidonia* entraps every man she encounters, bewitches the entire ruling house of Pomerania, and is eventually burned as a witch at the age of eighty. Burne-Jones draws the painting's details from the novel, but the extraordinary braided costume derives from a portrait of Margherita Paleologo by **Giulio Romano**, Raphael's pupil and a defining figure of **Mannerism**, which hung at Hampton Court and which Burne-Jones visited together with **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**. That visit shaped both painters. Rossetti was simultaneously working on his *Lucretia Borgia*, and both figures echo the blatant sensuality of their shared model **Fanny Cornforth**. Burne-Jones and Rossetti shared a fascination with witchcraft and the

esoteric, encouraged by **Algernon Swinburne** and **Simeon Solomon**. This is among the earliest watercolours Burne-Jones completed, marking the start of a career that would prove internationally influential, particularly on the Continental **Symbolists**.

Notes

The femme fatale is a powerful woman who entices, bewitches and destroys men.

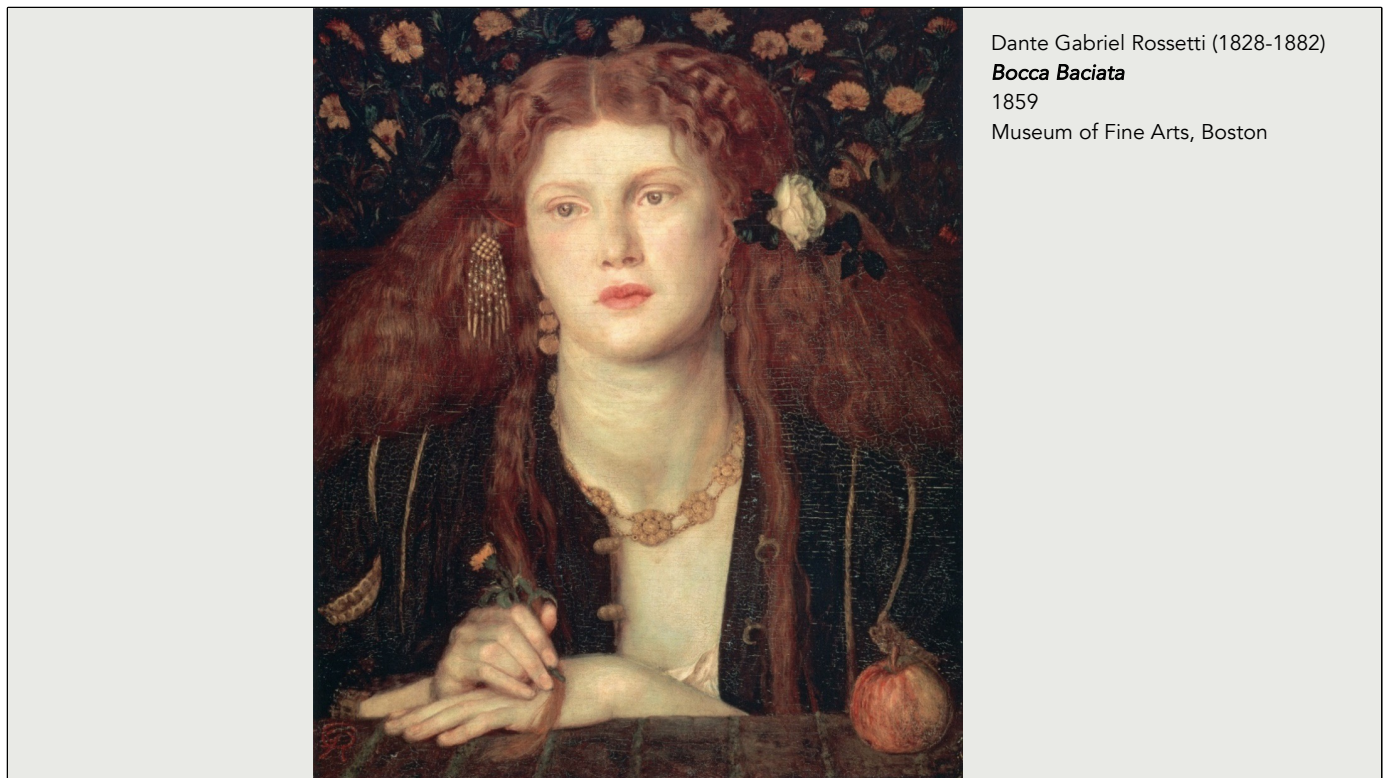
Sidonia von Bork is the main character in Wilhelm Meinhold's gothic romance *Sidonia von Bork* (1847) and translated as 'Sidonia the Sorceress' by Oscar Wilde's mother Lady Jane Wilde and published in 1849. The novel tells of the evil crimes of Sidonia whose beauty entraps everyone she sees. She bewitches the whole of the ruling house of Pomerania either killing her victims or rendering them impotent and the story ends when she is burned as a witch at the age of 80.

The details in this painting are taken from the novel but the costume is based on that of Isabella d'Este daughter-in-law in 1531 (her daughter-in-law Margherita Paleologo at the time of her marriage to Federico Gonzaga, 1st Duke of Mantua). It is by Giulio Romano and is in the Royal Collection. Romano was a painter and architect and pupil of Raphael who helped define Mannerism. The painting was on view at Hampton Court and was seen by Burne-Joneses and Rossettis when they visited together.

The painting is part of their interest in the femme fatale and both Burne-Jones and Rossetti were interested in witches and the shocking, encouraged by the esoteric tastes of their friends Swinburne and Simeon Solomon. Rossetti was working on his painting of Lucretia Borgia at the same time and both figures resemble Fanny Cornforth in their blatant sensuality.

This is one of three figure studies, which were the earliest watercolours Burne-Jones completed. He was a few years younger than the other Pre-Raphaelites and is associated with the later stages of the movement. He was a friend of William Morris and they founded the Arts & Crafts Movement but Burne-Jones was a painter who became famous internationally. His medieval scenes went out of fashion after his death and he dropped into obscurity but his reputation has grown since a major exhibition was held at the Barbican in

1989. He is now seen to have been very influential on later artists including the Symbolists on the Continent.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Bocca Baciata*, 1859, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Rossetti titled the painting **Bocca Baciata**, a phrase drawn directly from **Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron**, written in the mid-fourteenth century. The phrase translates as "mouth that has been kissed," and it closes the tale of **Alatiel**, a Saracen princess who sleeps with eight lovers over four years yet presents herself as a virgin to the King of the Algarve. Boccaccio's final line reads: "The mouth that has been kissed does not lose its savour, indeed it renews itself just as the moon does." The woman in Rossetti's painting may appear serene and self-contained, but that title charges her image with a very different current. Alatiel is no passive victim — she survives every catastrophe her beauty provokes, while the men around her destroy one another: a brother kills his brother, a servant kills his master. Rossetti scholar **Elizabeth Prettejohn** has shown that Victorian viewers literate in Boccaccio would have recognised this charged subtext immediately, reading the painting's lush surface as erotically knowing rather than innocently decorative. The work does not depict virtue; it depicts the

enduring, self-renewing power of female sexuality, framed with deliberate and provocative calm.

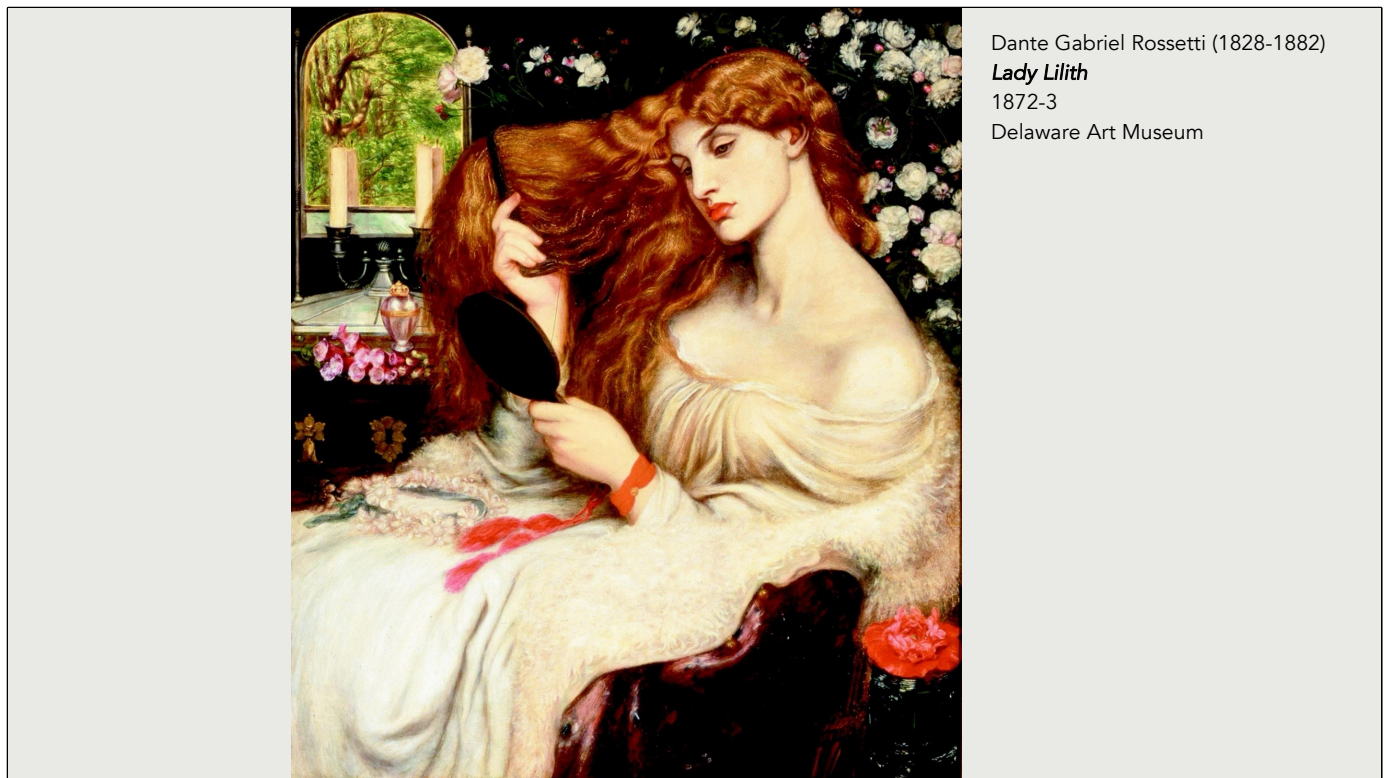
Notes

Although the woman appears innocent the reference to 'Bocca Baciata' is telling.

Bocca Baciata means 'mouth that has been kissed' and it is taken from the last line of a story by Giovanni Boccaccio (131-1375) called Decameron (Day 2, Story 7) where it is used as the culmination of the tale of Alatiel: a beautiful Saracen (i.e. Muslim) princess who, despite having had sex on perhaps ten thousand occasions with eight separate lovers in the space of four years, successfully presents herself to the King of the Algarve (Southern Portugal) as his virgin bride. The last line translated reads,

'The mouth that has been kissed does not lose its savour, indeed it renews itself just as the moon does.'

In Boccaccio's story Alatiel is shipwrecked and her beauty leads her into situations where she survives but the men around her all die. She leaves a trail of suitors who have killed each other including a man who kills his brother and a servant who kills his master.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)
Lady Lilith
 1872-3
 Delaware Art Museum

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Lady Lilith, 1872-3, Delaware Art Museum

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's Lady Lilith, painted between 1864 and 1868, draws on a figure from Judaic tradition older and more unsettling than Eve. Lilith, according to legend, was formed from the same dust as Adam, not from his rib, making her his equal. She refused subordination, left Eden, and became a predatory spirit who visits men in dreams and preys on infants. Rossetti almost certainly encountered her through **Goethe's Faust**, where Mephistopheles warns: * "Her beauty's one boast is her dangerous hair." * That ensnaring hair became Rossetti's central obsession across many works. He began the painting using **Fanny Cornforth** as model, then repainted the face at patron **Frederick Leyland's** request, substituting **Alexa Wilding's** red-gold colouring. A visit to Paris exposed him to **Titian's** Woman with a Mirror, which he privately called his "Toilette picture," and its influence on composition is direct. The symbolism is dense and deliberate. Roses signal Venus; poppies invoke opium-laced sleep — the same laudanum that killed **Elizabeth Siddal** in 1862. Foxglove at the rear

mirror yields digitalis, a deadly poison. Two candles flank the mirror like altar lights: to Love, Vanity, or Death.

Notes

Lady Lilith

Lilith, the subject of this painting, is described in Judaic literature as the first wife of Adam. She is associated with the seduction of men and the murder of children. The depiction of women as powerful and evil temptresses was prevalent in 19th-century painting, particularly among the Pre-Raphaelites. The artist depicts Lilith as an iconic, Amazon-like female with long, flowing hair. Her languid nature is reiterated in the inclusion of the poppy in the lower right corner—the flower of opium-induced slumber.

Lilith is a type of woman known as a femme fatale, another Victorian stereotype. She combs her sensuous red hair, long hair was a sexual symbol in Victorian times and looks in a mirror, a sign of self-absorption. The power of women was regarded by Victorian men as 'perilous' and she represents the New Women, free of male control, scourge of the patriarchal Victorian family. The legend is that Lilith was created at the same time as Adam not from his rib but from the same handful of dust, she was his equal. She refused to be subordinate and left and folk law says that she preys on babies and visits men in their dreams to bewitch them.

Lilith is an unusual subject for Rossetti to choose as she does not figure highly in serious literature and Rossetti could have chosen Salome or Judith. Her first appearance is in Goethe's *Faust* when Faust catches a glimpse of a golden-haired beauty in the distance and it is likely that Goethe's introduction of Lilith as Adam's first wife and a seductress rather than a child-slaying witch influenced Rossetti. The ensnaring hair was certainly a theme that Rossetti responded to in many paintings. In Goethe's *Faust*, Mephistopheles warns Faust:

Adam's wife, his first. Beware of her. Her beauty's one boast is her dangerous hair. When Lilith winds it tight around young men She doesn't soon let go of them again.

We know that Rossetti visited Paris at this time and saw Titian's *Lady at her Toilette* (1515, also called *Woman with a Mirror*) which is clearly an influence.

In fact, in one letter Rossetti refers to it as his 'Toilette picture'.

The painting was begun in 1864 with Fanny Cornforth as the model with her golden hair, and this was completed in 1868. At the request of his patron Leyland he removed Cornforth's face and replaced it with that of Alexa Wilding and her red-gold hair.

The roses are the flowers of Venus and love, the poppy sleep and dreams and a source of laudanum, the drug that killed Rossetti's wife Elizabeth Siddal. Foxglove lying under the boudoir mirror at the rear produces digitalis a deadly poison. Two candles flank the mirror suggesting an altar to Love, to Lilith, to Vanity or even to Death.

References

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady_Lilith



23-15 WOMEN IN VICTORIAN ART

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



Dante Gabriel
Rossetti (1828-1882)
Lady Lilith
1872-3

This talk traced the construction of femininity in Victorian art from the Books of Beauty annuals through royal portraiture, the classical nude, and the moral theatre of the fallen woman. We examined how painters, sculptors, critics, and poets colluded in defining ideal womanhood — and how artists from Etty and Rossetti to Tissot and Burne-Jones simultaneously reinforced and subverted those definitions, revealing the tensions beneath Victorian culture's carefully maintained surface.



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

