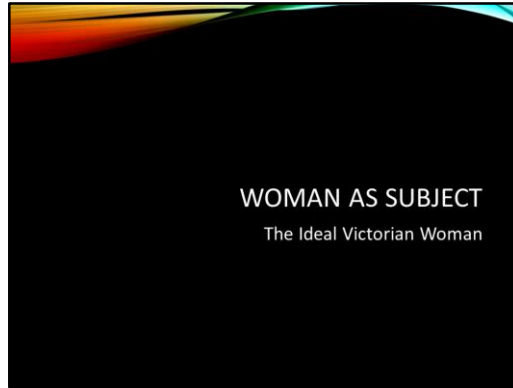
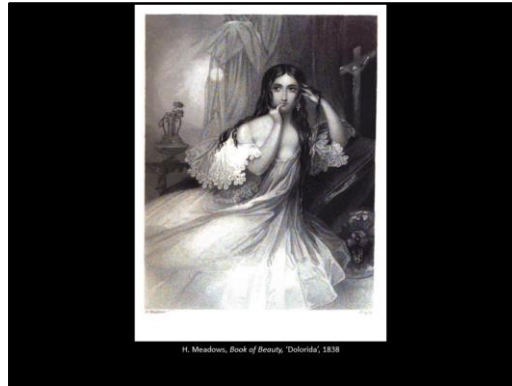




- This week I will be talking about women and the way they were represented in Victorian art. Next week I cover Victorian women artists.
- The title is 'women as subject' but it could be called 'women as object' as it is partly about women as defined by the male. The majority of artists and buyers were men and it was men who controlled society. Simplistically, men categorised women as either pure, such as wives and daughters, or fallen, that is women who had broken the social conventions.
- There was also a Victorian ideal of female beauty which was associated with the way women were represented in classical sculptures.
- Finally, there was the dark side of the *femme fatale*; powerful woman who used their sexual allure to entice men to disrepute or death.



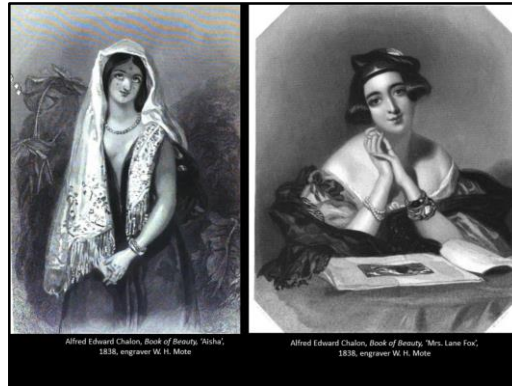
- I will start by talking about what was regarded as
 - the ideal Victorian woman,
 - then the ideal of classical beauty,
 - the fallen woman,
 - and the *femme fatale*.



H. Meadows, *Book of Beauty*, 'Dolorida', 1838, engraver Knight

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, ricketty, 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, *Book of Beauty*, 'Aisha', 1838, engraver W. H. Mote

Alfred Edward Chalon, *Book of Beauty*, 'Mrs. Lane Fox', 1838, engraver W. H. Mote

- 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

Queen Victoria as Role Model

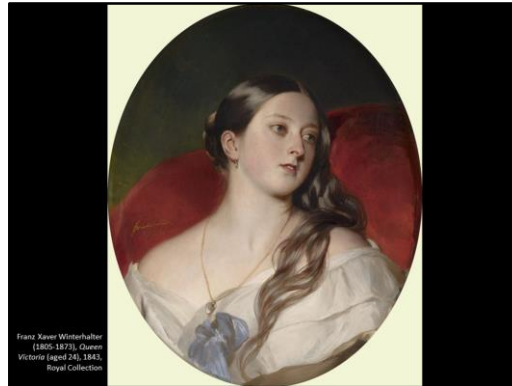
- The other **role model** for Victorian women as a mother and **Queen Victoria** became the principal example.
- She is seen here as **wife and mother**, surrounded by her **happy family** with her hand on the successor she has supplied and with her **husband** shown **above** her and **nearer** the 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

- 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
 Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Angel in the House*, 1873. Depicts Emily Peacock. Emily Peacock was either a visitor of the Cameron's or an Isle of Wight local. She posed frequently for Cameron.

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 **rationaly 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

- 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

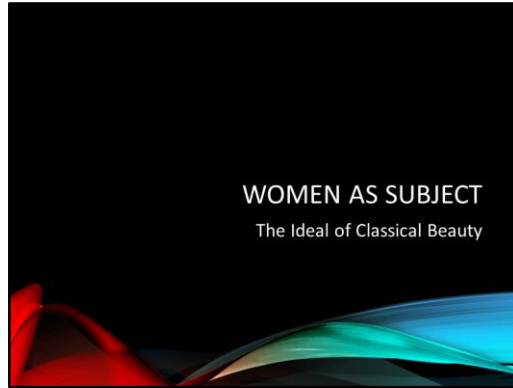
Phillip. His principal influence was David Wilkie and his domestic interiors. He had already been successful with **Ramsgate Sands** in **1854**. **Derby Day** followed in **1858**. When Frith's monumental canvas, **The Railway Station** went on show, at a gallery in the Haymarket, London, in April **1862**, 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



- We have seen one type of fashionable beauty in the popular books of beauty but many artists turned to the classical ideas of beauty as the epitome of **ideal beauty**. This ideal beauty was often represented by the **classical nude**.



Venus de Medici, 1st century BCE marble copy of a bronze Greek original, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, first example of unrivalled beauty
 Alexander of Milos, *Venus de Milo*, 130-100 BCE, Louvre, right, found by French, became prime example of beauty. Formerly thought to be by Praxiteles.

- 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 (323-31BCE). 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**.



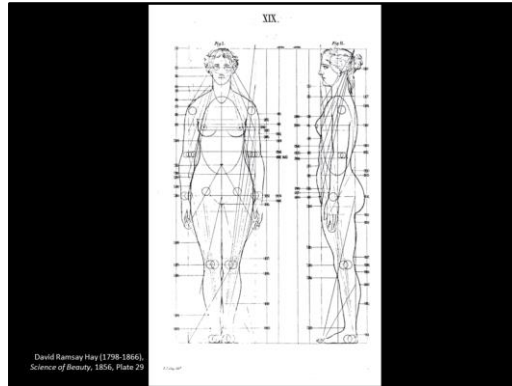
Punch 1870, 'The Venus of Milo; or Girls of Two Different periods.

Chorus. "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!"

- 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* (1856), Plate 29

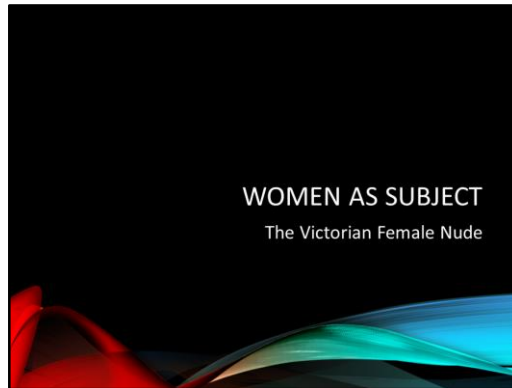
David Ramsay Hay

- **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 peacocks 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

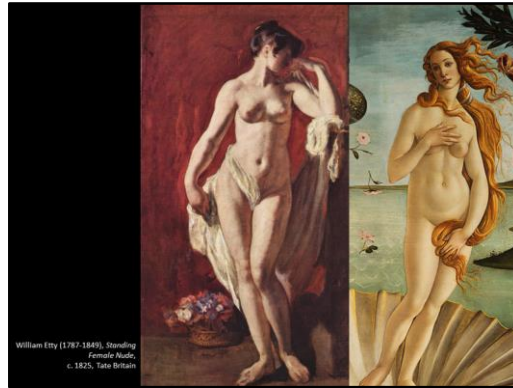
ladder. Hay published their findings in 'The Natural Principles of Beauty' where he showed the ratios they had measured confirmed his theory of beauty based on ratios that were indirectly related to the musical scale.

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.



- We have seen one type of fashionable beauty in the popular books of beauty but many artists turned to the classical ideas of beauty as the epitome of **ideal beauty**. This ideal beauty was often represented by the **classical nude**.
- I should point out that men were also categorized and represented in certain ways. The male nude was a common subject and more life drawing classes at the Royal Academy were devoted to the male nude than the female nude. However, society was run by men and women were regarded as passive and governed by emotion. They were excluded from the RA even though Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman were two founding members. It was not until 1860 that Laura Herford was admitted and that was by mistake as she had submitted her drawings using only the initials 'L.H.' Her admittance was followed by 34 other women being admitted to the RA School but there were not allowed to attend life drawing classes. Women could not attend life classes to draw the partially draped male nude until 1893, twenty years after the first petition. By this time, life classes for women were widely available across the country and the RA was perceived as old-fashioned.
- Women were not used as life drawing models in Europe until the nineteenth century but the RA was an exception and female nude models were introduced in 1769, a year after its foundation. Four male and one female model was employed three times a week. Men under 20 who were unmarried were not allowed to draw the female nude. Male models were chosen for their physique and were often porters at the RA or soldiers. Female models were more difficult to find and were often prostitutes, and they were paid much more than the male models, sometimes two or three times more.



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

- 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*, 1830-2, Tate Britain

- 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**

Raphael Sanzio da Urbino (1483-1520, died aged 37), *The Triumph of Galatea* (c. 1514), fresco, Villa Farnesina, Rome

- 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.



Frederick Leighton, *Venus Disrobing for the Bath*, 1867

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *La Source*, 1862, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

- **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, *A Sculptor's Model*, 1877, private collection

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_Alma-Tadema

- 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, New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Art Gallery

John Gibson, *The Tinted Venus*, c.1851-6, Walker Art Gallery

- Two statues that illustrate the point about purity. The American artist Hiram Power 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 write, 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 Barratt 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 that 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

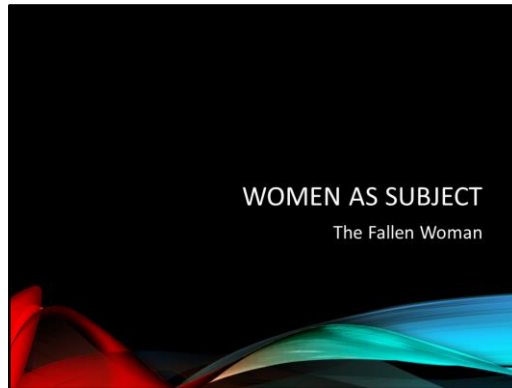
Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) 'even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.'

Notes

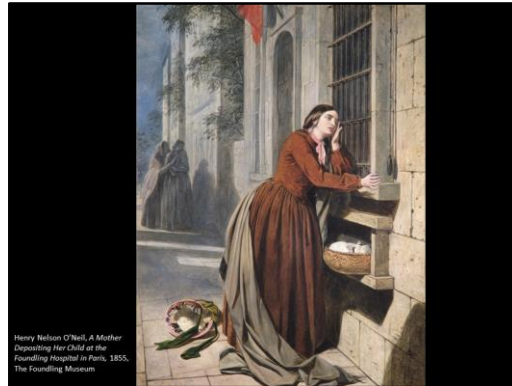
- Powers sculpted six versions of *The Greek Slave*.

References

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



- The fallen woman was an **obsession of the Victorians**. The virtue and purity of a woman was of paramount importance and so any fall from perfection was total. There were no half-perfect women. Once a woman departed from the social norms they became subject to a series of inescapable consequences including poverty, prostitution, disease and death.
- People were much happier with domestic interiors as the hearth and home were regarded as safe and embodying common national ideals and Christian values. However, the home could be rent apart by shame and dishonour...



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

- 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
 Diploma work given by Redgrave to the RA
 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Redgrave

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

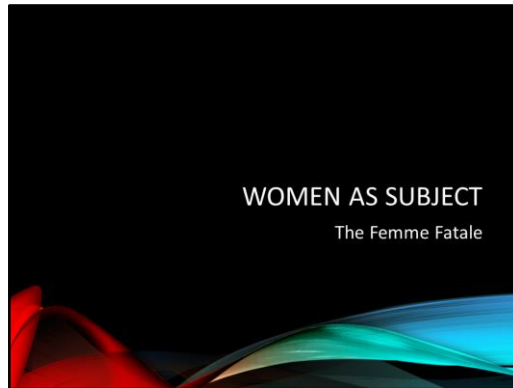
James Tissot

- **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 to clearly what might follow.



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

- 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.



WOMEN AS SUBJECT

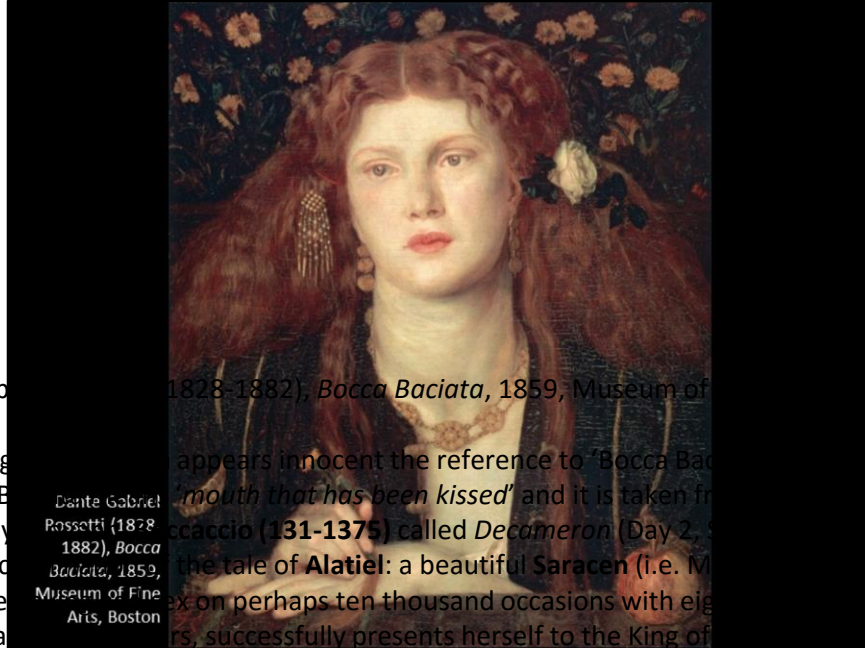
The Femme Fatale



Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), *Sidonia von Bork*, 1860, Tate Britain
 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Burne-Jones

- 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

- Although the painting appears innocent the reference to 'Bocca Baciata' is a reference to a story by Boccaccio (131-1375) called *Decameron* (Day 2, Story 9) where it is used as the tale of **Alatiel**: a beautiful Saracen (i.e. Muslim) princess who, despite the fact that she has been kissed on perhaps ten thousand occasions with eight hundred lovers in the space of ten years, successfully presents herself to the King of Portugal (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

Lady Lilith

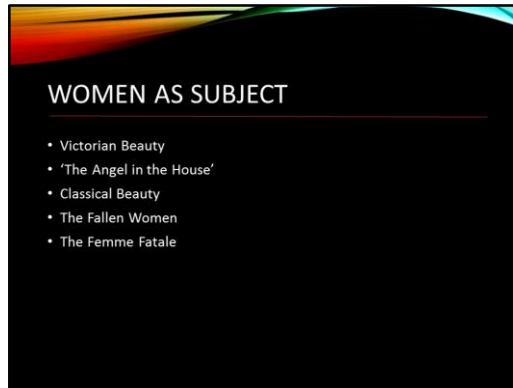
- Lilith, the subject of this painting, is described in Judaic literature as the **first wife of Adam**. She is associated with the seduction of men and the murder of children. The depiction of women as powerful and evil temptresses was prevalent in 19th-century painting, particularly among the Pre-Raphaelites. 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 represent 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



Next week: women artists