

Sleep, Sickness, and Spirituality: Altered States and Victorian Visions of Femininity
in British and American Art, 1850-1915

Kimberly E. Hereford

A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2015

Reading Committee:

Susan Casteras, Chair

Paul Berger

Stuart Lingo

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Art History

©Copyright 2015
Kimberly E. Hereford

University of Washington

Abstract

Sleep, Sickness, and Spirituality: Altered States and Victorian Visions of Femininity
in British and American Art, 1850-1915

Kimberly E. Hereford

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Professor Susan Casteras
Art History

This dissertation examines representations in art of the Victorian woman in “altered states.” Though characterized in Victorian art in a number of ways, women are most commonly stereotyped as physically listless and mentally vacuous. The images examined show the Victorian female in a languid and at times reclining or supine pose in these representations. In addition, her demeanor implies both emotional and physical depletion, and there is both a pronounced abandonment of the physical and a collapsing effect, as if all mental faculties are withdrawing inward. Each chapter is dedicated to examining one of these distinct but interrelated types of femininity that flourished throughout British and American art from c. 1850 to c. 1910. The chapters for this dissertation are organized sequentially to demonstrate a selected progression of various states of consciousness, from the most obvious (the sleeping woman) to

the more nuanced (the female Aesthete and the female medium). In each chapter, there is the visual perception of the Victorian woman as having access to otherworldly conditions of one form or another. In this compelling strand of imagery, the Victorian woman is depicted in a variety of altered states of consciousness. For the first time, this pervasive representation of Victorian femininity is linked to the period's medical and cultural discourse. New analysis reveals that these depictions were part of a much greater cultural and artistic fixation that emerged in several forms and originated, in many ways, from within the scientific and medical communities at large. Accordingly, focus is given to the complex interplay between medical "fact" and pictorial interpretation or outright fiction. In addition, a portion of this dissertation delves into the representation of the female Aesthete both in fine art and popular culture. The final chapter contextualizes the female medium within the Spiritualist movement.

Acknowledgments

Many individuals and institutions have offered generous assistance and contributions in the course of this project. I am pleased to have the opportunity to acknowledge them here. Above all, I am grateful to my advisor and mentor, Professor Susan Casteras, for her encouragement, depth of knowledge, and gentle nudging. I am especially appreciative to her for reviewing my drafts, listening to my concerns, and providing invaluable guidance and insight. Her dedication to her students and the field of art history is inspiring. I am very grateful to Professors Stuart Lingo, Paul Berger, and Jack Berryman for reading my manuscript and providing helpful comments.

I extend a special thank you to the University of Washington, which provided support throughout my studies as a doctoral student. Funding through GOMAP's Bank of American Fellowship provided essential financial support at a critical juncture of my studies. In addition, I am grateful for the support of the University of Washington Art History Department, which allowed me to undertake research in London, England, and elsewhere. I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the Allan and Mary Kollar Endowed Fellowship, which provided additional support in my study of American art. I am thankful for their encouragement and their dedication to American art. I am also appreciative of the many individuals in Seattle who provided support and encouragement. There are many. I extend a special thank you to my editor, who has been with me throughout my graduate studies.

On a personal note, my most profound appreciation goes to my parents for their unconditional love, endless encouragement, patience, and belief in me. Throughout the many arduous years of my education, they patiently listened as I sought to clarify and quantify my

research. They also provided invaluable insight. I am eternally thankful for my mother's incredible capacity to love and her consistent reminder to "believe." I am grateful for my father's intellectual curiosity and calm, steady voice when I felt most overwhelmed. I am so proud to be your daughter.

To my parents,
who are always with me.

My gratitude is boundless,
my love eternal.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
1. THE SLEEPING VICTORIAN WOMAN: LADY, LABORER, DREAMER AND FAIRY	22
2. THE DEAD AND (NEARLY) DEAD VICTORIAN WOMAN	60
3. THE FEMALE CONSUMPTIVE	89
4. THE CULT OF THE INVALID	119
5. THE NEURASTHENIC WOMAN	150
6. THE FEMALE AESTHETE	190
7. SPIRITUALISM AND THE VICTORIAN FEMALE MEDIUM	230
CONCLUSION	285
BIBLIOGRAPHY	293

List of Figures

Please note that reproductions of the listed images have not been included in the online version of this dissertation.

Figure 1. William Shakespeare Burton, *Sleep*, 1866, oil on board, 8¾ x 7¼ inches, private collection. Available from http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_dLSVgS5AxBI/TAZ4HHNNxYI/AAAAAAAAAs1k/NHIRzxe_aQg/s1600/Sleep_Burton.jpg

Figure 2. Edward E. Simmons, *Mother and Child*, 1886, illustrated in Marianna van Rensselaer, *Book of American Figure Painters*, n.p.

Figure 3. Charles W. Cope, *Home Dreams*, 1869, oil on canvas, 25 x 30 inches, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven CT. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charles_West_Cope_-_Home_Dreams_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Figure 4. William Powell Frith, *The Sleeping Model*, 1853, oil on canvas, 25 x 29 inches, Royal Academy of Arts, London. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Powell_Frith_-_The_Sleeping_Model.jpg

Figure 5. William Powell Frith, *Sleep*, 1873, oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches. Available from <http://prints.ensemble-editions.com/500/0/william-powell-frith-sleep-1873.jpg>

Figure 6. Frederick Daniel Hardy, *After the Party*, 1871, oil on canvas, 27¼ x 42 7/8 inches, private collection, Christie's, The Forbe's Collection of Victorian Pictures and Works of Art, New York, 11 October 1979. Available from <https://d312rivt3pqnj2.cloudfront.net/i/prints/lg/2/1/215915.jpg>

Figure 7. Augustus Leopold Egg, *The Travelling Companions*, 1862, oil on canvas, 25 3/8 x 30 1/8 inches, Birmingham City Museums and Art Gallery, England. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Augustus_Leopold_Egg_-_The_Travelling_Companions_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

Figure 8. Henry Nelson O'Neil, *Pleasant Dreams*, 1852, oil on canvas, 13 x 11 inches, private collection. Available from http://41.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m96id2Pthi1rnekqo1_1280.jpg

Figure 9. William Peter Watson, *Sleep Under a Patchwork Quilt*, c. 1900s, oil on canvas, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth, UK. Available from http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_QL2SapBRFjk/T5WsJGiUpSI/AAAAAAAAACmo/MVDu8aOrCwg/s400/patchwork.jpg

Figure 10. English School, *Midsummer Day's Dream*, 1896, colour lithograph, Bibliotheque des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France, Bridgeman Images.

Figure 11. John La Farge, *Sleep or Sleeping Woman*, 1868-1869 (destroyed), illustrated in Marianna van Rensselaer, *Book of American Figure Painters*, n.p.

Figure 12. Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June*, c. 1895, oil on canvas, 47 3/8 x 47 3/8 inches, oil on canvas, Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flaming_June

Figure 13. Edwin Blashfield, *Sleep and Poetry*, 1886, reproduced in Marianna van Rensselaer, *Book of American Figure Painters*, n.p.

Figure 14. Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781, oil on canvas, 40 x 50 inches, Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Henry_Fuseli_-_The_Nightmare.jpg

Figure 15. John Smetham, *The Dream*, 1856, oil on canvas, 14 x 17 inches, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, reproduced in Casteras, *James Smetham*, p. 94.

Figure 16. Frontispiece, "Dreamer's Wonderful Visions," *The Dreamer's Sure Guide, or Interpretation of Dreams Faithfully Revealed*, reproduced in Bown, *The Victorian Supernatural*, p. 157.

Figure 17. John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of*, c. 1858, oil on canvas, 14 x 18 inches, private collection, photo at Maas Gallery, London, Bridgeman Images. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:John_Anster_Fitzgerald#/media/File:John_Anster_Fitzgerald_-_Dreams.jpg

Figure 18. John Anster Fitzgerald, *Artist's Dream*, 1857, oil on millboard, 10 x 12 inches, private collection, Bridgeman Images. Available from <http://www.artmagick.com/images/content/fitzgerald/hi/fitzgerald1.jpg>

Figure 19. John Anster Fitzgerald, *Land of Nod or Dreaming*, n.d., watercolour and bodycolour on paper, 10 x 14 inches, photo at Maas Gallery, London, Bridgeman Images.

Figure 20. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Briar Rose Series: The Rose Bower*, 1870-1890, oil on canvas, 48 x 98 inches, 1870-1890, Faringdon Collection Trust, Buscot Park. Available from Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Legend_of_Briar_Rose#/media/File:The_Rose_Bower_Buscot_Park.jpg

Figure 21. George Cochran Lambdin. *The Last Sleep*, c. 1858, oil on canvas, 40 x 54 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, c. 1858, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh. Available from The Athenaeum at <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=18743>

Figure 22. George Elgar Hicks, *Woman's Mission: Comfort of Old Age*, 1863, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 inches, Tate Gallery, London, UK. Available from <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hicks-womans-mission-comfort-of-old-age-t14037>

Figure 23. Ronald Leslie Melville, *Untitled*, c. 1870s, photographic album, approx. 12 x 9 inches, private collection. UK.

Figure 24. Ronald Leslie, *Broken Lilies*, 1871, photographic album, approx. 12 x 9 inches, Getty Centre, Los Angeles, California.

Figure 25. Joseph Noel Paton, *The Dead Woman*, 1850, reproduced in Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, p. 52.

Figure 26. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix*, 1864-1870, oil on canvas, 32 x 26 inches, Tate Gallery, London, UK. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti_-_Beata_Beatrice,_1864-1870.jpg

Figure 27. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1852, oil on canvas, 30.0 x 44.0 inches, Tate Gallery, London, UK. Available from Wikimedia Commons at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ophelia_\(painting\)#/media/File:John_Everett_Millais_-_Ophelia_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Ophelia_(painting)#/media/File:John_Everett_Millais_-_Ophelia_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)

Figure 28. Frank Dicksee, *The Crisis*, 1891, oil on canvas, 48 x 62 inches, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Available from <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/3915/>

Figure 29. Thomas Eakins, *The Agnew Clinic*, 1889, oil on canvas, 74 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 130 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA. Available from Wikiart at <http://www.wikiart.org/en/thomas-eakins/the-agnew-clinic-1889>

Figure 30. Gabriel Von Max, *The Anatomist*, 1869, oil on canvas, 53.7 x 74.6 inches, Neue Pinakothek, Munich. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gabriel_von_Max_Der_Anatom.jpg

Figure 31. Johann Heinrich Hasselhort, *The Dissection of a Young, Beautiful Woman Directed by J. Ch. G. Lucae (1814-1885) in Order to Determine the Ideal Female Proportions*, 1864, chalk drawing (dim), Wellcome Library, UK. Available from http://wellcomeimages.org/indexplus/obf_images/ea/fd/ca5840223f4b52bcf7f206d89871.jpg

Figure 32. G. F. Watts, *Found Drowned*, c. 1848-1850, oil on canvas, 47 x 84 inches, Watts Gallery, UK. Available from The Athenaeum at <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=137874>

Figure 33. John Collier, *The Death of Albine*, c. 1895, oil on canvas, reproduced in Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, p. 57.

Figure 34. Alfred Stevens, *Mrs. Elizabeth Young Mitchell and Her Baby*, 1851, oil on canvas, 64 x 30 inches, Tate Gallery, London, UK. Available from <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/stevens-mrs-elizabeth-young-mitchell-and-her-baby-n03467>

Figure 35. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Head of Elizabeth Siddal Reclining on a Pillow*, c. 1850s, pencil on paper, 10 x 9 inches, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Available from <http://www.pubhist.com/w22083>

Figure 36. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Head of Elizabeth Siddal Looking Down to the Right*, c. 1855, pencil on paper, 12.1 x 11.4 cm., Victoria and Albert Museum, London, reproduced in Prettejohn, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, p. 152. cat. 29.

Figure 37. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Elizabeth Asleep*, c. 1854, pencil on paper, 7 x 4 inches, private collection. Available from <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/exhibitions/rossetti/works/siddal/elizabethasleep.aspx>

Figure 38. Henry Peach Robinson, *Fading Away*, 1858, albumen silver print from glass negatives, 9 3/8 x 14 5/8 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Peach_Robinson#/media/File:Fading_Away.jpg

Figure 39. William Cullen Bryant, illustration accompanying poem, reproduced in Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture since 1870*, p. 54.

Figure 40. William Lindsay Windus, *Too Late!*, 1858, oil on canvas, 37½ x 30 inches, Tate Gallery, London UK. Available from <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/windus-too-late-n03597>

Figure 41. George Du Maurier, “Wistful and Sweet (Trilby O’Farrell),” *Trilby*, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 88 (January 1894): 175. Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/photos/ellis/1.html>

Figure 42. George Du Maurier, “This is Trilby,” *Trilby*, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 88 (January 1894): 175. Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/photos/ellis/1.html>

Figure 43. Ford Madox Brown, *The Convalescent (Portrait of Emma Madox Brown)*, 1872, oil on canvas, 18 3/8 x 17 3/8 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Available from <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/340945>

Figure 44. John Thomas Peele, *A Prayer for Health*, 1871, oil on canvas, 31 x 41 inches, private collection.

Figure 45. Irving R. Wiles, *The Convalescent*, 1890, oil on canvas, 31 x 22 inches, private collection. Available from The Athenaeum at <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=143668>

Figure 46. “Ladies of Fashion and Their Doctors,” *Punch*, 1897. Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/dumaurier/8.html>

Figure 47. “Spring Farm,” illustration, *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1888. Available from Google Books at <https://books.google.com/books?id=yakiAQAAMAAJ>

Figure 48. James Tissot, *The Convalescent*, 1872, oil on canvas, 14 ¾ x 18 inches, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada. Available from Wikiart at <http://www.wikiart.org/en/james-tissot/a-girl-in-an-armchair>

Figure 49. James Tissot, *Summer Evening (Soiree d'ete)*, 1882, drypoint and etching, 9 1/16 x 15 5/8 inches, Legion of Honor, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, California. Available from <http://art.famsf.org/james-tissot/soirée-dété-summer-evening-1963301392>

Figure 50. *Bellevue Hospital, New York*, engraving, *Harper's Weekly*, 1860, Museum of the City of New York. Available from <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/engraving-from-harpers-weekly-showing-high-res-stock-photography/128616023>

Figure 51. John Everett Millais, *Getting Better*, 1876, oil on canvas, 41 x 36 inches, John and Julie Schaeffer Collection, Sydney, Australia. Available from http://www.artnet.com/artists/sir-john-everett-millais/getting-better-kL7KSgvIH_Ln-ALo4iHF5Q2

Figure 52. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Nurse*, 1872, oil on canvas, 17 1/8 x 23½ inches, private collection. Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/tadema/paintings/1.html>

Figure 53. Advertisement for Lydia E. Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound, “Social Tragedy,” 1896. Available from http://img0.newspapers.com/img/thumbnail/42191895/400/400/0_0_3238_4093.jpg

Figure 54. Nineteenth-century advertisement, Lydia E. Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound, “Nervous Breakdown,” Schlesinger Library, reproduced in Perry, *Women on the Verge*, p. 6.

Figure 55. Thomas Dewing, *The Reading*, 1897, oil on canvas, 20¼ x 30¼ inches, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC. Available from <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=6774>

Figure 56. Thomas Eakins, *The Artist’s Wife and His Setter Dog*, c. 1884-1889, oil on canvas, 30 x 23 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Available from <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/23.139>

Figure 57. John White Alexander, *Portrait of Miss Dorothy Roosevelt (Mrs. Langdon Greer)*, 1901-1902, oil on canvas, 60 x 40 inches, Schwartz Gallery, Philadelphia, Dallas Museum of Art, Texas. Available from

<https://americangallery.wordpress.com/2012/12/16/john-white-alexander-1856-1915-2/miss-dorothy-quincy-roosevelt-later-mrs-langdon-geer/>

Figure 58. Walter Launt Palmer, *De Forest Interior*, 1878, oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 18 inches, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC. Available from

<http://arthistoryreference.com/cgi-bin/hd.exe?art2=a44513>

Figure 59. Anon., *A Society Disease*, “An imposing physician sits with his female patient,” reproduced in Ehrenreich and English, *Complaints and Disorder*, p. 38.

Figure 60. John Atkinson Grimshaw, *Dulce Domum*, 1885, oil on canvas, 33 x 48 inches, private collection. Available from Wikiart at

<http://www.wikiart.org/en/john-atkinson-grimshaw/dulce-domum-1885>

Figure 61. Irving Ramsey Wiles, *Song Without Words*. c. 1895, photogravure, 9 x 12 inches, New York Public Library. Available from NYPL Digital Library at

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchdetail.cfm?trg=1&strucID=1061724&imageID=832754&word=Wiles%2C%20Irving%20Ramsay&s=3¬word=&d=&c=&f=4&k=0&IWord=&lField=&sScope=&sLevel=&sLabel=&total=3&num=0&imgs=20&pNum=&pos=3>

Figure 62. M. Moreau de Tours, *Les Morphinees*, 1891, gravure, *Le Petit Journal*, February 21, 1891. Available from Wikipedia at

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Moreau_de_Tours#/media/File:Morphinees_par_Moreau_de_Tours.jpeg

Figure 63. Eugene Grasset, *Morphinomaniac*, 1897, color lithograph, 17 x 12 inches, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania. Available from Davis Digital Images at

http://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/ummu/x-05-09261/05_09261

Figure 64. Santiago Rusinol, *Before the Morphine*, 1890, oil on canvas, no dim. given. Available from Wikiart at

<http://www.wikiart.org/en/santiago-rusinol/before-the-morphine-1890>

Figure 65. Santiago Rusinol, *The Morphine Addict*, 1894, oil on canvas, 34 x 45 inches, Museum Cau Ferrat, Spain. Available from Wikimedia Commons at

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_morfina_\(Santiago_Rusiñol\).jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_morfina_(Santiago_Rusiñol).jpg)

Figure 66. Nineteenth-century advertisement, Mitchell’s *Belladonna Plasters*, c. 1863. Available from <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/20725>

Figure 67. Jean- Leon Gerome Ferris, *Afternoon Siesta*, 1884, oil on canvas, 51 x 28 inches, private collection.

Figure 68. Irving W. Wiles, *The Green Cushion*, 1897, drawing, 22 x 28 inches, private collection. Available from

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/14932>

Figure 69. John Singer Sargent, *Repose*, 1911, oil on canvas, 25 1/8 x 30 inches, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Available from

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg69/gg69-35080.html>

Figure 70. Attributed to Alfred Steven, *Young Woman Resting in a Music Room* (n.d.), oil on canvas, 15¾ x 24 1/8 inches, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Massachusetts. Available from

<http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/young-woman-resting-in-a-music-room-34072>

Figure 71. Edward Burne-Jones, *Laus Veneris*, 1873-1875, oil on canvas, 47 x 71 inches, The Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Available from Wikimedia Commons at

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Laus_Veneris_by_Edward_Burne-Jones.jpg

Figure 72. George Du Maurier, *Punch*, “The Six-Mark Tea Pot,” October 30, 1880. Available from *Punch* online at

<http://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000s3epJ2mVwsc>

Figure 73. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Silk Blue Dress*, 1868, oil on canvas, 43½ x 35 inches, The Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, UK. Available from Wikimedia Commons at

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jane-morris-blue-silk.jpg>

Figure 74. John Robert Parson, “Jane Morris Album,” photograph of Jane Morris, 1865, albumen print from wet-collodion-on-glass negative, approx. 6 3/8 x 6 inches, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Available from

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1092323/jane-morris-posed-by-rossetti-photograph-parsons-john-r/>

Figure 75. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Pre-Raphaelite Study*, 1870, albumen silver print from wet-collodion-on-glass negative, 12 x 12 inches, Paul F. Walter, New York. Available from Wikimedia Commons at

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pre_Raphaelite_Study_by_Julia_Margaret_Cameron_1870.jpg

Figure 76. Roland Leslie Melville, *Untitled*, c. 1863-1870, photographic album, approx. 12 x 9 inches, private collection, UK.

Figure 77. Alfred Concanen, *The High Art Maiden*, paper sheet-music cover, color lithograph, c. 1880, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Available from

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O113427/music-sheet-m-n-hanhart/>

Figure 78. George Du Maurier, “The Two Ideals,” *Punch*, 1879, reproduced in Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood*, p. 61.

Figure 79. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Golden Stairs*, 1876-1880, oil on canvas, 109 x 46 inches, The Tate Gallery, London, UK. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edward_Burne-Jones_The_Golden_Stairs.jpg

Figure 80. Edward Poynter, *Mary Constance Wyndham, Lady Elcho*, 1886, watercolor, private collection, reproduced in Gere and Abdy, *The Souls*, p. 109.

Figure 81. G. F. Watts, *Portrait of Lady Lindsay*, c. 1879, oil on canvas, private collection, reproduced in Gere and Abdy, *The Souls*, p. 47.

Figure 82. Illustration of an artistic gown for a young girl, Messrs. Stephens and Co., *Home Art Work* 7, no. 32 (April 1890): 9, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, reproduced in Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting*, p. 135.

Figure 83. James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl*, 1864, oil on canvas, 30 x 20 inches, Tate Gallery, London, UK. Available from Available from Wikimedia Commons at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Whistler_James_Symphony_in_White_no_2_\(The_Little_White_Girl\)_1864.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Whistler_James_Symphony_in_White_no_2_(The_Little_White_Girl)_1864.jpg)

Figure 84. George Du Maurier, “Acute Chinamania,” *Punch*, 1875 (originally appeared December 17, 1874). Available from <http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/punch/art/28.html>

Figure 85. James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 3*, 1865-1867, oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, UK. Available from Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_in_White,_No._3

Figure 86. Albert Moore, *Beads*, 1880, oil on canvas, 11 x 20 inches, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh, UK. Available from The Athenaeum at <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=129572>

Figure 87. “The Sage-Green Sickness,” *Judy’s or the London Serio-Comic Periodical’s*, September 15, 1880. Available from Google Books at <https://books.google.com/books?id=ibAOAAAAQAAJ>

Figure 88. *Extase Somnambulique*, c. 1850, French print, Mary Evans Picture Library, reproduced in Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 284.

Figure 89. British, original sketch that inspired this image was published c. 1890, Wellcome Institute, Iconographic Collection, reproduced in Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 351.

Figure 90. “Medium and Re-Medium,” *Punch*, 1864 (originally appeared November 12, 1864). Available from <http://www.agefotostock.com/en/Stock-Images/Rights-Managed/HEZ-1150382>

Figure 91. Thomas Dewing, *The Fortune Teller*, 1904-1905, oil on canvas, 15¾ x 20 inches, Crystal Bridges Art, Arkansas. Available from The Athenaeum at <http://the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=25226>

Figure 92. Lady Clementina Hawarden, *Untitled*, c.1862-1864, albumen prints from wet-collodion-on-glass negatives, 9 1/16 x 11 1/8 inches, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Available from <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/l/lady-clementina-themes-and-style/>

Figure 93. Lady Clementina Hawarden, *Untitled*, c.1862-1864, albumen prints from wet-collodion-on-glass negatives, 9 1/16 x 11 1/8 inches, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Available from <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/l/lady-clementina-themes-and-style/>

Figure 94. Edward Burne-Jones, *Portrait of Baronne Madeleine Deslandes*, 1895-1896, oil on canvas, 46 x 22 inches, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Available from <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/79575/>

Figure 95. Edward Burne-Jones, *Astrologia*, 1865, gouache on paper, 21 x 19 inches, private collection. Available from http://c300221.r21.cf1.rackcdn.com/edward-burne-jones-astrologia-1865-1416075291_b.jpg

Figure 96. J. W. Waterhouse, *The Crystal Ball*, 1902, oil on canvas, 47½ x 34½ inches, private collection. Available from Wikiart at <http://www.wikiart.org/en/john-william-waterhouse/the-crystal-ball-1902>

Figure 97. Valentine Prinsep, *A Student of Necromancy*, 1898, oil on canvas, location unknown.

Figure 98. Sir John Everett Millais, *Bridesmaid*, 1851, oil on canvas, 11 x 8 inches, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK. Available from Wikiart at <http://www.wikiart.org/en/john-everett-millais#supersized-featured-236506>

Figure 99. Legh Mulhall Kilpin, *Crystal Gazer*, c. 1900, oil on canvas, 38 x 33 inches, Langley Centennial Museum, Langley, Canada. Available from https://collections.museum.tol.ca/LangleyCentennialMuseum/Portal.aspx?lang=en-US&p_AAAF=VIS&g_AABK=LangleyCentennialMuseum+%7CObject+%7CCollection+%3D%3D+'de2e3d02-28c0-46ab-9285-4675c5283b69'+AND+Creator.Name+%3D+'kilpin

Figure 100. Henry Siddons Mowbray, *Le Destin*, 1896, oil on canvas, 29 7/8 x 40½ inches, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts. Available from <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/le-destin-34304>

Figure 101. Henry Siddons Mowbray, *Crystal Gazers*, 1895, oil on canvas, 14 x 6 1/8 inches, Kresge Art Center Gallery, Michigan State University, East Lansing. Available from ArtMagick, <http://www.artmagick.com/images/content/mowbray/med/mowbray8.jpg>

Figure 102. Countess of Blessington, frontispiece for *True Interpreter of Dreams, Visions, and Omens of the Wedding Day*, 1861, National Library of Scotland.

Figure 103. Frederick Sandys, *Morgan le Fay*, 1862-1863, oil on panel, 24¾ x 17½ inches, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, UK. Available from Wikimedia Commons at <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Morganlfay.jpg>

Figure 104. Evelyn Pickering de Morgan, *The Love Potion*, 1903, oil on canvas, 41 x 21 inches, De Morgan Foundation, London. Available from Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Love_Potion

Figure 105. Frank Dicksee, *The Magic Crystal*, 1894, oil on canvas, unknown, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK. Available from The Athenaeum at <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=160803>

Figure 106. John Collier, *The Witch*, 1893, oil on canvas, dimensions and location unknown.

Figure 107. John Collier, *The White Devil*, 1909, watercolor, 19 x 14 inches, location unknown. Available from Wikimedia Commons at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Collier_-_The_White_Devil,_1909.jpg

Figure 108. William McGregor Paxton, *The Crystal*, 1900, oil on canvas, 65 x 72 inches, private collection. Available from The Athenaeum at <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=53774>

Figure 109. Gertrude Kasebier, *The Crystal Gazer (Gazer or The Magic Crystal)*, 1904, platinum print photograph, unknown dimensions, National Media Museum, UK. Available from <http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/collection/photography/royalphotographicsociety/collectionitem.aspx?id=2003-5001/2/20043>

Figure 110. Edward Burne-Jones, *Beguiling of Merlin*, 1872-1875, oil on canvas, 73 x 44 inches, Lady Lever Museum, Liverpool, UK. Available from <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ladylever/collections/paintings/gallery2/merlin.aspx>

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines several distinctive but interrelated types of femininity that flourished throughout Victorian art from approximately 1850 to approximately 1910. In this compelling strand of imagery, the Victorian woman is depicted in a variety of altered states of consciousness. This dissertation will employ the term “altered states” to indicate the opposite of wakefulness or alertness—i.e., a state that is either alternative or abnormal. The term will also include the state of sleep. While these representations of women in “altered states” are characterized in Victorian art in a number of ways, they most often stereotype the female as displaying physical listlessness and mental vacuity. Such images are readily recognizable in their subjects’ deviation from the ordinary wakeful state. Typically, the Victorian female adopts a languid and at times reclining or supine physical appearance in these representations. Her demeanor implies both emotional and physical depletion and there is both a pronounced abandonment of the physical and a collapsing effect, as if all mental faculties are withdrawing inward. There is no set model of this altered state and the degree of listlessness varies from subtle to extreme. However, all of these subjects demonstrate a profoundly out-of-touch quality, both physically and mentally, that hints at something much more transcendent, as if they were communing with an otherworldly realm.

My research evolved out of my recognition of the astonishing frequency of this overarching strand of femininity within Victorian art. The recurring appearance of this theme within the visual arts sparked my interest to examine what compelled Victorian artists, as well as society in general, to so strongly link and identify women with abnormal altered states of

consciousness. In addition, I sought to locate how these representations reflected and confirmed the period's identifications and definitions of Victorian femininity. These images coincided, I discovered, at a particular time in which the unconscious attracted comment and speculation from very diverse facets of Victorian society. The intellectual and cultural climate was fluid, and audiences from a wide variety of disciplines engaged in this discourse, from imaginative artists and writers, to medical doctors, to the everyday well-read Victorian person. This new terrain was vast, open, and accommodating to a wealth of ideas and speculations as to the nature of the various states of consciousness and led to a general stigma that women were prone to slipping into such abnormal states. These writings help to create and reinforce certain cultural beliefs about those vulnerable to the disease. That the Victorian woman found herself ideally suited to be representative of these various abnormal phenomena is one of my primary focuses and premises.

In the course of my investigations, I came to realize that these depictions were not anomalies but were very extensive, and part of a vast cultural discourse that consistently reinforced this connection between the Victorian woman and altered states. Thus, I will examine Victorian women's familiarity with otherworldly states and demonstrate how they were part of a much larger and complex discourse that increasingly equated femininity with a culturally constructed representation of the "Other."¹ Thus far in current scholarship, this particular

¹Elizabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body* explores in depth the notion of the "other" in relationship to Victorian femininity, specifically focusing on the dead female body. For Bronfen, "death and femininity serve as ciphers for other values, as privileged tropes." The dissertation extends, and includes, the exploration of the "other" beyond the dead body to reveal how the Victorian woman was ascribed with inherent physical and mental attributes based on gender alone. I apply the notion of the symbolic "otherness" to the idea that Victorian women were

classification of femininity within Victorian art has often been overlooked or treated only in a cursory and scattered way, by various authors, yet it runs consistently throughout Victorian art. My dissertation questions how these images affirmed, and at times even exaggerated, the stereotypes of Victorian femininity, yet simultaneously also reflected the period's anxiety over femininity in the wake of advances in medicine, psychology, and spirituality. It is especially important to note that these images were not limited to one specific classification of femininity but cross-pollinated to various types of subject painting. As I will demonstrate, there is a wealth of relevant imagery of the body and mind in altered states; however, the dearth of research on these classifications specifically regarding women indicates a significant omission in the historical study of the period. This exploration attempts to understand why these images held tremendous sway within British and American art for such a protracted length of time and how they fit within the period's understanding, and prescribed ideal, of the Victorian woman.

The Victorian period was inundated with representations of femininity that idealized women as guardian angels of domesticity and morality, conservators of a realm that provided safe haven from the troubles of society. From a literary perspective, Coventry Patmore's "Angel of the House," published in four installments from 1856 to 1862, exemplifies the codification of this paradigm of Victorian femininity.² In Canto V, "The Comparison," the husband "Fails, in

identified with moral and spiritual qualities as well as "natural" characteristics, such as menstruation, which was perceived as an illness. Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

²Coventry Patmore published the "Angel in the House" in 1854, it was later revised in 1862. Patmore's wife, Emily, whom he believed to be the perfect Victorian wife, inspired the poem. Although it received little recognition when it was first published, the poem became increasingly popular and provided the model of the ideal Victorian woman well into the late

spite of prayer and vow / And agonies of faith and force” and is “never young nor ripe,” yet the Victorian woman “grows / More infantine, auroral, mild,/ And still the more she lives and knows/ The lovelier she’s express’d a child.”³

The language employed in this poem not only sentimentalizes Victorian femininity, but also enshrines it as an object of spiritual veneration. In both Victorian and modern usage, the term “angel” has encompassed widely varied and contradictory notions.⁴ As idolized in secular terms, the “angel” provided a home environment that promoted and protected the well-being of her husband and children. Through steadfast household management, sweetness of temperament and a self-sacrificing nature, she also provided a sanctuary from the world’s pressures. The imagery in the poem suggests the angel’s innocence and helplessness in all matters outside of this sanctuary. As Patmore writes, she “grows / More infantine, auroral, mild.” The emphasis on “infantile” reflects an important theme of my dissertation. In most cases, the images presented are of youthful females in the transitional stage from girlhood to womanhood. The recurring theme of youthfulness, innocence and purity is emphasized in a number of significant and recurring ways; for example, subjects often have a pre-pubescent body, wear a white dress, or

nineteenth century. As modern scholar Carol Christ notes, “One of the most striking characteristics of Victorian literature is its preoccupation with an ideal of womanhood that we have come to call, after the title of Coventry Patmore’s most famous poem, ‘the angel of the house.’” The incredible wealth of images dedicated to representing the Victorian woman also reflects this as a central preoccupation of artists. See Carol Christ in “Victorian Masculinity and the Angel of the House,” in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Woman*, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 146.

³Christ, 148.

⁴As Christ notes, the Victorian woman imbued the home with “moral purity,” and, as the poem suggests, her mate/husband regards her “with a sentimental, essentially religious reverence.” Christ, 146.

have long, flowing hair like a girl versus a woman. A second recurring theme is that the subjects, much like the “Angel of the House,” are usually middle or upper class. Rarely, the images are of working-class women, as in the case of the pre-Raphaelite Stunners, but I demonstrate how depictions of languorous females were often indicative of status or class ascension within Victorian society.

The poem’s use of “angel” as a synonym for the presumably bourgeois Victorian woman also points to another key theme of this dissertation—that is, the idea of the Victorian woman as “Other.” In the most direct sense, this “angel” was the one nearest and most aligned with the spiritual world. In patriarchal Victorian society, women were often perceived as the “other,” and the images discussed in this dissertation will explore how artists enhanced and affirmed this Victorian construct through their representation of women in altered mental states. As modern scholar Beryl Satter has suggested, the claim of the middle- and upper-class woman’s empowered spiritual nature placed her distinctly in opposition to the Victorian man.⁵ Within Victorian society there was a long-standing belief that men were the more rational and intellectual sex, whereas women, in opposition, were the more emotional and intuitive sex.

This distinction between the “emotional” woman versus the “rational” man was summarized by anthropologist J. M. Allan in an 1869 essay titled “On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women.”⁶ Allan succinctly quantified this differentiation, stating, “man’s

⁵Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1930* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 32.

⁶See J. M. Allan, “On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women,” in *Transactions of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 7 (London: Asher & Co., 1896).

realm is the intellect—woman’s the affections.”⁷ In 1865, T. H. Huxley wrote, “women are, by nature, more excitable than men prone to be swept by tides of emotion, proceeding from hidden and inward, as well as from obvious and external causes.”⁸ The poem’s emphasis on the unrestrained emotion emanating from a place “hidden” and obscured not only imbues the Victorian woman with a sense of mystery, but also positions her body as a place which is unknown, untamed, and somehow uncontrolled.

During the Victorian period, women were intimately associated both with emotional states and with the body. The prominent languid positioning of the female body in pictorial classifications repeatedly depicts females as vulnerable and visually accessible for speculation, scrutiny, and implied voyeurism. This repetition also reflects how the Victorian female body was likewise at the center of much medical and cultural debate and discussion. Sarah Stage has recently described the Victorian period as the “Age of the Womb,” a characterization reflecting the period’s preoccupation with the female body.⁹ Medical doctors and society in general believed that women were controlled by their bodies and reproductive system. They were perceived as frail, delicate, and inherently ill solely on the basis of their gender. This perception,

⁷Ibid.

⁸Thomas H. Huxley, *Science and Education: Essays* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 71. Original essay written in 1865 and later reissued in 1899.

⁹This term was first coined in 1868 by French historian Jules Michelet in *L’Amour*. See Sarah Stage, *Female Complaints: Lydia Pinkham and the Business of Women’s Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 64. The period’s overwhelming belief that women were dominated by their uteruses and perceived as inherently sick will be fully discussed in the chapter titled “The Cult of the Invalid.”

encouraged by the medical community, aggravated and endorsed their exclusions from mainstream paradigms of health yet simultaneously enhanced their spiritual nature. As one Victorian British doctor summarized, “If the corporeal agency is thus powerful in man . . . woman, with her exalted spiritualism, is more forcibly under the control of matter . . . She is less under the influence of the brain than the uterine system. . . .”¹⁰ The emphasis on the spiritual component of Victorian femininity led to a downplaying of the physical nature of Victorian women. There was a strong sense of denying and obscuring, often through fashion, any allusion to a woman’s strength and vitality. Prevailing models of beauty, as well as the medical community, contributed to an emphasis on subverting female physicality into something that stressed delicacy and frailty. Pictorially, this was achieved by representing subjects with a particular kind of physiognomy (usually one that was thin, gaunt and ethereal), either engaging in certain kinds of inactive behaviors or possessing precocious mental, moral, or spiritual qualities.

This mutual collusion from society and the medical community thus fostered an image of the Victorian woman as ethereal, elusive, and somehow other than normal. Critical to my study, therefore, is the notion of the Victorian female body as both a site of anxiety and of debate, as well as being a vehicle/vessel for transcendence to otherworldly realms.

In the course of my research, I have identified seven predominant classifications of Victorian femininity that were most popular in depicting women in altered states of consciousness: the sleeping woman, the dying or dead woman, the female consumptive, the

¹⁰Quoted in Shuttleworth, “Female Circulation and Popular Advertising in the Mid-Victorian Era,” in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Dally Shuttleworth (New York: Routledge, 1990), 55.

female invalid, the neurasthenic woman, the Aesthetic woman, and the female Spiritualist. Although these categories appear divergent from each other, they are actually interconnected in meaningful ways that reveal the complexity of the period's understanding of Victorian femininity. Each chapter of this dissertation includes key examples that demonstrate the Victorian woman in the pertinent altered state of consciousness. Examples also encompass a broad span of time—the 1860s to the very early twentieth century—thereby also revealing the popularity and fascination and tenacity this type of femininity had for artists and society as a whole. I include examples representing the major artistic influences of the period, including the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic movements as well as key artists of this period—e.g., Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, G. F. Watts, James McNeil Whistler, and less well-known artists such as America's Irving Wiles and Britain's William Shakespeare Burton and Lindsay Windus, to name a few. This dissertation focuses on British examples but brings in some American counterparts to underscore the congruence of some imagery as well as its widespread existence. In addition to paintings, this study examines some photography, a field that was just beginning to blossom during this period, as well as prints and ephemera. The examples also reveal the ubiquitousness and longevity of this type of imagery, along with its grip on the Victorian imagination, even as the women's movement was making tremendous strides towards the end of the century. Given the incredible number of examples, I have narrowed my selection to a select few.

The chapters for this dissertation are organized to demonstrate a selected progression of various states of consciousness, from the most obvious (the sleeping woman) to the more nuanced (the female Aesthete and the female medium). However, each classification underscores

the perception of Victorian women as having access to otherworldly conditions of one form or another. The chosen images demonstrate both altered states of consciousness (such as sleep and death) as well as the suggestion of heightened states of perception, such as that of the female Aesthete and medium. That is, through these states the Victorian woman often demonstrates the ability to access visions, insight, or supernatural realms unavailable to the male viewer, or at least not often visually linked to his masculinity or socially endorsed attributes.

The first chapter focuses on three aspects of images depicting sleeping women, as well as the preoccupation of dream analysis and the relationship between the Victorian sleeping woman and fairies. First, I examine images of bourgeois Victorian women sleeping and consider how they differ from those of working-class women sleeping. By the late nineteenth century, the field of inquiry into the dream state had gained momentum and there was greater cultural interest in what happens to consciousness during moments of physical and mental abandonment. The period in which artists popularized images of sleeping women coincided with the pivotal moment when the unconscious was still linked to eighteenth-century Romantic notions of the supernatural but was also becoming part of the study of psychology. The supernatural is reflected in the Victorian period's belief in fairies, the prophetic nature of dreams and the idea that dreams were supernatural messages. Because Victorian women were deemed especially vulnerable, they received an exceptional level of scrutiny. Secondly, therefore, I consider the period's burgeoning field of dream analysis and the emergence of dream books, which flooded the market in the 1860s and became a fixture in the female domestic sphere. Thirdly, the chapter examines Victorians' belief in supernatural fairies, who were thought to be frequent, and at times threatening, visitors to a sleeping woman as she slipped into the dark terrain of the unconscious.

In Chapter 2, I address salient images that depict the Victorian woman as either dying or dead. The dying woman presents another example of an altered state in which the Victorian female occupies a liminal space as pertains to her being at a threshold of some sort. I first establish a cultural framework in which death became closely aligned with the Victorian woman through a variety of cultural practices and mourning rituals. Next, I discuss images of women in deathbed scenes, which often included a male as part of the narrative. These images were widely popular and tugged at viewers' heartstrings by emphasizing the finality of death, with the female body the primary signifier of this terminal state. The second portion of this chapter examines images of the dead woman in a variety of settings, such as postmortem or on a deathbed. Significantly, these images often blur the lines between sleep, death and dreaming and suggest how often they overlap and reference one another.

Chapter 3 examines images of the female consumptive, a tubercular condition in which the sufferer's fate was firmly aligned with the inevitability of death. It is important to acknowledge that the images discussed in this and subsequent chapters often present the altered state in nuanced ways. Throughout this dissertation, images are examined that show Victorian women in a variety of states of repose. For example, sometimes these images depict them as fully outstretched and reclining upon a chair or couch. At other times, the images show them standing and either leaning upon some supportive furniture or bent over. In all examples, these women appear on the brink of physical collapse. Moreover, this chapter is key in introducing an overarching theme of the period's medical discourse that often envisioned female illness as a metaphor for spiritualized existence. The image of the female consumptive was especially popular, and I examine how this condition was perceived, illogically, as a female disease. Images

presented in this chapter reveal how consumption, or tuberculosis, was considered a spiritualized illness for women. This was pictorially reinforced by depicting them as ethereal, exuding an otherworldly aura and often exhibiting a distant and detached gaze, as if communing with another realm. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how the female tubercular was considered a type of alluring beauty associated with a certain social class, age and specific body type.

The theme of the Victorian female invalid is explored in Chapter 4. Invalidism was a state of infirmity so popular and accepted from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century that it was considered a rite of passage for many women. While the female consumptive's condition was specific, the female invalid's condition was often vague or undiagnosable. Therefore, the images included in this chapter are an amalgam of feminine beauty and frailty in the guise of an enigmatic illness. Much like the female consumptive, the female invalid's precarious position as perpetually on the verge of infirmity was both a cultural and medical preoccupation. In a similar vein, this chapter traces the development of Victorian gynecological discourse, which envisioned women as inherently weak, delicate and naturally prone to sickness simply because of their gender. In the images discussed in this chapter, the women are depicted as displaying a distinct physical and mental detachment. Moreover, like the female consumptive, images represent the sufferers as displaying acute physical and mental depletion. In this chapter, I also discuss how invalidism was not only expected but also cultivated, not just in pregnancy but in general. Through artists' appropriation of malaise and invalidism, I demonstrate how images of Victorian female invalids become even more beautiful and their otherworldly realm even more rarefied. Central to this discussion is how invalidism was, for some women, a desirable state, and for

working-class women such as the Pre-Raphaelite “Stunner,” it was an aspirational condition that signaled their ascension into the middle and upper classes.

Chapter 5 further extends the association between the Victorian female and maladies through representations of the neurasthenic woman. This chapter first examines the key characteristics associated with neurasthenia and how this was translated pictorially. Neurasthenia falls within the broad category of invalidism but was distinctly different, as this was a condition that quantified and legitimized women’s mystifying complaints into one diagnosable condition. The medical and social discourse surrounding neurasthenia fostered a cultural attitude that perceived the afflicted as both beautiful and spiritual, which, as I demonstrate, was likewise translated pictorially. While previous images of the female consumptive and the invalid were varied, I demonstrate how images of the neurasthenic female, for the most part, were standardized: subjects were most often shown slouching in a chair, or standing, with a sorrowful, vacuous gaze and sometimes with an idle, almost lifeless hand either upturned or dangling. The second part of this chapter briefly touches upon the association of opiates with Victorian women. This was one of the most popular treatments prescribed by Victorian physicians, and I demonstrate how Victorian culture, through various advertisements, associated women with this mind-altering drug.

Chapter 6 explores the Aesthetic movement, which represented a shift in the attitudes of Victorian women. With the essential cultural and medical framework established in the previous chapter, this chapter shifts the emphasis to a discussion of how this type of representation was translated into images of the female Aesthete and how they came to be emblematic of a cultural and artistic force. Through the glorification of languor and lassitude, as represented in the art of

Punch and key paintings, female Aesthetes became steeped in a commerce that specifically catered to Victorian women. As this section reveals, the image of the listless, sickly woman took on an alterative meaning and became part of popular culture. It is important to note that the female Aesthete adopted this physical and mental languor through sartorial trends, such as the Aesthetic gowns sold at Liberty of London, which further promoted and enhanced female adoption of a languid, “droopy” carriage. Often, the female Aesthete is depicted as hypnotized and in a state of reverie over the deep contemplation of some “Aesthetic” object such as a piece of china. This chapter also explores gathering places like the Grosvenor Gallery, where female Aesthetes were on prominent display through both their physical presence and in the plethora of images that filled gallery walls. In this section, I discuss how this characterization was also translated into portraiture associated with a certain influential sect of like-minded artistic and intellectual women. As I reveal, this demeanor and way of being were self-consciously constructed and achieved through a very distinct style of dress and posture.

The final chapter examines Spiritualism and the Victorian woman’s prominent position as medium within this context. Here, many of the central themes linking women to altered states coalesce and take on new significance. By the 1850s, Spiritualism had taken hold in both England and America. The Victorian woman emerged as the linchpin of this cultural and religious trend, quickly eclipsing the male medium as the ideal vessel through which to channel distant spirits. This chapter explores the contemporary cultural and medical discourse that deemed the Victorian woman as innately gifted and vulnerable in accessing otherworldly realms. Significantly, I note that these images also coincided with a time in which women were seeking

higher education, employment and equal rights, inciting an atmosphere of increasing agitation and anxiety.

Exemplary American and British images in this category depict the Victorian woman in a transcendent state, often hovering over a crystal ball. Here, the heightened state transforms her into the mouthpiece of an “invisible authority.” The images presented are different from the earliest representations of this type, as the women are often not entirely collapsed but, much like the female Aesthete, hunched over and in a state of reverie, communing with another realm. This chapter also examines the intimate relationship between invalidism and the female medium, since according to the general consensus of the period, the two went hand in hand.

The art historical research related to this vast topic is fairly extensive and diverse. In the past, much feminist scholarship has been dedicated to discussing the conventional representations, or stages, of Victorian femininity and women’s roles within the constructs of society. Susan Casteras’s groundbreaking *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (1987) was one of the first comprehensive overviews in this regard.¹¹ The same year, Marta Banta’s *Imaging American Women: Ideas and Ideals in Cultural History* studied the art and culture of America from 1876 through 1918, illuminating the national values embodied in various representations of the American Girl.¹²

There has also been a variety of scholarship from a wide range of fields devoted to examining the various permutations of altered states of consciousness. In a study of images

¹¹Susan Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987).

¹²Marta Banta, *Imaging American Women: Ideas and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

depicting women asleep, Jenny Bourne Taylor writes of the Victorian interest in the unconscious and specifically addresses the period's fascination with dreams. She discusses how those who wrote about and discussed dreams did so from widely diverse perspectives, reflecting the fact that during this period psychology was in its infancy and lay on the border between philosophy, physiology and medicine. Her discussion is also helpful as it addresses how the altered state was both class- and gender-specific.¹³ Jeremy Maas was the first to consider the significance of fairy painting in his landmark study of Victorian art.¹⁴ Nicola Bown, in *The Victorian Supernatural*, provides a greater understanding of the period's infatuation with the paranormal, tying this trend to both Spiritualism and scientific advancements of that era.¹⁵ She extends this discussion to fairy painting and dream interpretation, a field of scientific pursuit that also became a cultural fad for many Victorian women. Elizabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body* sheds light on Western culture's preoccupation with the deceased female body and ponders, through narrative and visual representation, how and why female beauty was considered enhanced through death.¹⁶ As this dissertation reveals, there is indeed also a substantial body of scholarship dedicated to the Victorian's pervasive concern with women's health and female invalidism, including the rise of the female convalescent as a cultural figure. Literature romanticized the pallid female beauties

¹³Jenny Bourne Taylor, "Obscure Recesses: Locating the Victorian Unconscious," in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. J. B. Bullen (London: Longman, 1997), 137-179.

¹⁴Jeremy Maas, *Victorian Fairy Paintings* (London: Royal Academy of Arts in association with Merrell Holbertson Publishers, 1997).

¹⁵Nicola Bown et al., *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁶Bronfen, xi.

that hovered precariously between life and death, and advertisements catered to the burgeoning market of products for invalids. My dissertation draws heavily on medical writings and their relationship to artistic works, revealing them to be complex and mutually informing. Early modern feminist scholarship—e.g., Ann Douglas Wood’s “The Fashionable Diseases: Women’s Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America” and *Complaints and Disorder, The Sexual Politics of Sickness* by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English—explored Victorian women’s identification with sickness and the “cult of the female invalid.”¹⁷ More recent research—such as, Maria H. Frawley’s *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain*—examines the peculiarity of this identification with invalidism and the role of the sickroom within the domestic sphere.¹⁸ Diane Price Herndl’s *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction* considers feminine representations of illness in American culture from 1840 to 1940 and argues that the figure of the invalid woman emerged amid significant changes in American literature, medicine and culture.¹⁹ Specifically, she focuses on medical theories that articulated the Victorian woman as biologically inferior and inherently susceptible to disease and pain.

¹⁷Ann Douglas Wood, “The Fashionable Diseases: Women’s Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Clio’s Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois W. Banner (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974).

¹⁸Maria H. Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁹Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

Art historical scholarship has also contributed to our understanding of the female Aesthete's role as a purveyor of taste and as a leading force within the Aesthetic movement. Lionel Lambourne's *The Aesthetic Movement* and Doreen Burke Bolger's *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* offered the first comprehensive overview as well as stunning visual examples of the cultural movement that captivated England and America alike.²⁰ Later, Susan Casteras and Colleen Denney provided an in-depth examination of female Aesthetes' presence—as patrons, consumers, and models—within the Grosvenor Gallery, the palatial and revolutionary venue dedicated to promoting Aestheticism.²¹ These studies explored female Aesthetes' emergence as a cultural force and the tremendous influence they wielded in shaping the movement's distinct style and taste. The art exhibition *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde* also brilliantly brought into focus the pictorial and consumer force that Aestheticism possessed, highlighting the role of the female Aesthete within this global movement.²² Most recently, “Aesthetes on Display: Not Masculine and Progressive but Reclusive and Retrospective,” an essay by Susan Casteras published in conjunction with the 2013 Freer Gallery symposium entitled *Palaces of Art: Whistler and the Art World's Aesthetics*,

²⁰Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon, 1996); and Doreen Burke Bolger, *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Rizzoli, 1986).

²¹Susan Casteras and Colleen Denney, *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, Yale University Press, 1996).

²²Stephen Calloway, Lynn Federle Orr, and Esmé Whittaker, *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde* (London: V & A Publishing; San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; distributed in North America by Harry N. Abrams, 2011).

has offered new insight into the self-fashioning and de-sexualizing of the Aesthetes, as well as the derisive response they inspired.²³

Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism* provides a critical text for understanding how the Victorian woman negotiated gender relations and strict moral codes to emerge as the primary vehicle through which Spiritualism flourished.²⁴ By interweaving medical and cultural ideologies of Victorian femininity, her study demonstrates why women were considered so ideal for communing with otherworldly realms. In addition, "*Malleus Malificarum* or The Witches' Hammer: Victorian Visions of Female Sages and Sorceresses," an essay by Susan Casteras published in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse*, provides an in-depth examination of key images of sorceresses that are central to this dissertation. The essay also contextualizes these images within a cultural framework in which the Victorian woman was renegotiating and leveraging her power.²⁵

These texts provide the foundation for this study of Victorian women and their relationship with altered states of consciousness. As reflected in the wide range of texts, this phenomenon has been selectively examined; however, there is no thorough historical examination focusing on its representation within the visual arts. By taking a visually oriented

²³Susan Casteras, "'Aesthetes on Display': Not Masculine and Progressive but Reclusive and Retrospective," in *Palaces of Art: Whistler and the Art World of Aestheticism*, ed. Lee Glazer and Linda Merrill (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013), 107-120.

²⁴Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989).

²⁵Susan P. Casteras, "Malleus Malificarum or the Witches' Hammer: Victorian Visions of Female Sages and Sorceresses," in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse*, ed. Thais E. Morgan (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 142-170.

approach, this dissertation considers the historical and cultural context of this type of femininity and its materialization in a wide variety of iterations. This dissertation not only analyzes the form, content, meaning and influence of relevant images, but also focuses on the dialogue between these pictorial representations and the cultural climate from which they emerged. At times, these images reinforced the social conditions of Victorian women, but at other times, they contradicted them. By analyzing the cultural discourse in which they flourished, I attempt to reveal the fluidity of their meaning and influence, especially as applied to the inherent characteristics that Victorian women were perceived to possess. I therefore draw upon a wide range of disciplines to demonstrate how these images intersected. This intersection between the great variety of images that depicted women in altered states of consciousness helped solidify their legacy as some of the most popular and consistent figures in Victorian art.

My methodology is a hybrid of several interdisciplinary fields and is designed to examine a specific type of Victorian female representation. Though the style and approach of a variety of leading scholars have inspired this methodology, my most significant model has been the approach followed by Professor Susan P. Casteras. I am indebted to her guidance in my examination of Victorian femininity within its greater social and cultural context. Her extensive scholarship has enhanced art history researchers' understanding of many significant subjects relating to Victorian femininity and has been foundational and also a springboard for my own.

A great deal of this study's scholarship is steeped in the history of medicine, which, from the onset, has revealed the cultural perception and attitudes that identified Victorian femininity with ill health. Medical history has been a critically useful cultural lens, clarifying the period's plethora of images depicting languid women and revealing this trend's origins in general cultural

attitudes. Previous scholars—Ehrenreich, English, and Frawley, to name a few—did much to pave the way in this regard. They provided a cultural framework in which to examine the visual art of the period. My study specifically focuses on key illnesses that afflicted Victorian women—e.g., tuberculosis, invalidism, and neurasthenia—and correlates the contemporary medical literature on these maladies with the period’s trends in fine art. The many physical and mental characteristics of these afflictions provide one important way to analyze the images presented in this study. Therefore, whenever possible, it cites original accounts from preeminent doctors, physiologists, and thinkers of the period. Much of this material was gathered and inspired by research performed at the Wellcome Library in London, an internationally renowned institution dedicated to the history of medicine and the medical humanities.

This dissertation draws from many sources: the paintings themselves, prints, the popular press, periodicals, both amateur and professional photographs, medical ephemera, and contemporary criticism. Images discussed also represent a wide spectrum, from those that are well known to art historians to those that have received little, if any, scholarly attention. Much of the research was conducted at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate Gallery, and the Witt Library. The latter houses reproductions after paintings, drawings and prints and was crucial to my study. In addition, my dissertation includes several British and American literary sources—e.g., Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire—as well as novels and poetry popular during the period. Interwoven into the study are biographical accounts of relevant artists’ models—e.g., Elizabeth Siddal, Kathleen Newton, et al. The stories of their lives are illuminating case studies and enhance analysis of their depiction in several key paintings and photographs.

This project therefore aims to contribute to the decoding and contextualizing of these pictorial representations and recasts their significance in art historical research. Moreover, my dissertation addresses a pervasive type of femininity that has yet to receive any in-depth analysis, even though it clearly sustained the attention of artists for many decades. Accordingly, this study attempts to sharpen an understanding of the ideological constructs that defined Victorian women and the ways in which artists of the period contributed to the shaping of these constructs.

CHAPTER 1

THE SLEEPING VICTORIAN WOMAN: LADY, LABORER, DREAMER AND FAIRY

At first glance, William Shakespeare Burton's *Sleep* (1866) (Figure 1) reveals a cozily decorated Victorian parlor with all the familiar accouterments symbolizing a happy home: a piano is shown in the background, richly embellished tapestry rugs bedeck the wooden floor, and the wall is adorned with an ornate mirror. A delicate drawing, or perhaps a watercolor, also hangs on the wall, and near it a wallpaper border of vines trails down and along the floor's molding. The young female subject's head gently nestles into the folded blanket on the back of her chair, and a striped, square cushion comforts her feet. Her sweet face hints at the deep sleep she enjoys, her voluminous skirt billows outward and her hands rest passively and relaxed in her lap. The woman rests in a diagonal sloping position and occupies nearly the entire foreground of the painting, and while the spindly legs of the chair are visible, her languorous pose suggests that she may just as well be relaxing on a divan. Yet, the initial domestic bliss conveyed in this image is tinged with an ominous tone. As if to threaten this idealized image of domesticity, a man, either the woman's husband or an admirer, hovers like a discordant note in this tranquil vignette and his looming figure disrupts the general serenity of this traditionally female architectural domain.¹ This image in particular is striking as the male viewer, in this case presumably the husband or admirer, is depicted rather than merely insinuated. Thus the male gaze, which is only

¹The exact setting of this intriguing image is uncertain, as it may be either the parlor or the drawing room. In either case, the inclusion of the piano, fireplace, and various accoutrements suggests that this is a distinctly Victorian feminine space.

previously implied, is brought to the forefront of this work and made its central subject.² To the right of the composition the hearth, the shrine of Victorian domesticity, remains cold and unlit, and, rather suggestively, a phallic-like poker protrudes from the fireplace barrier.³ To the left, the male sits before a dark table that spatially bisects the composition. This spatial divide, coupled with the woman's sleeping state, enhances the sense of man's separation and voyeuristic gaze.⁴ On the tabletop an open book lies abandoned as he rests his forehead against his hand, gazing at the sleeping figure. Susan Casteras has noted the ambiguity of his countenance, which the Victorian viewer may well have construed his demeanor as "tender concern."⁵ Yet an aura of

²As Susan Casteras explains in "The Unsettled Hearth," Burton's painting, "on the other hand, is quite a different cultural production. . . . As in many preceding examples with or without the implied presence of men, the resulting symbolic representation confirms male dominance enacted over the female protagonist and a conscious (or subconscious) sexualized gaze confined to the domestic sphere. While the gaze is implied, identification of domestic duty and womanly surveillance of the hearth has, in effect, been subverted." Susan Casteras, "The Unsettled Hearth," in *Re-Framing the Pre-Raphaelites: Historical and Theoretical Essays* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1996), 149-172, at 170-171.

³Casteras, "Unsettled Hearth," 169. Susan Casteras also notes the same "somewhat phallic poker" in Philip Hermogenes Calderon's *Lord! Thy Will Be Done* (1855) as well as Ford Madox Brown's *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-5* (1855). Casteras, "Unsettled Hearth," 169. As Linda H. Peterson notes, during the Victorian period, tremendous symbolic meaning was invested in the image of the Victorian hearth. "Considered the altar of domesticity, it was a privileged space and inspiration for several poems, such as Alaric A. Watt's 'My Own Fireside' which tells of a mother and babe at the hearth, 'Shrine of my household deities; / Bright scenes of home's unsullied joys.'" Linda H. Peterson, *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Anthony H. Harrison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 4.

⁴Casteras, "Unsettled Hearth," 169. As Casteras notes, the woman's state of sleep leaves her vulnerable and therefore creates a sexually charged environment. *Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

intense, or perhaps brooding, watchfulness also seems to emanate from the man's posture and countenance.⁶

Burton's painting implies a peculiar voyeurism in the Victorian male viewer and hints at societal anxieties surrounding the debate over women, the unconscious, and the nature of both. As Casteras observes, the idyllic harmony of the domesticity Burton conveys so adroitly barely obscures the sexually charged nature of the setting and the tension inherent between the observant male and passive female. The wall's descending trellis symbolizes a great chasm between both—and between Victorian men and women in general. Like the slumbering woman, a piano remains dormant and unattended. The music rack is void of any sheet music. A circular mirror hangs above the piano, suggestively reflecting an empty bedroom, bed, and window. The setting contains all the trappings of a typical Victorian home, but their vacancy and neglect imply an equally troubling relationship between the vulnerable sleeping woman and her male companion.

This chapter examines images of sleeping women and how a subject so tranquil and apparently innocuous became part of a much larger cultural fascination with unlocking the subconscious recesses that lay beneath their surface. Burton's *Sleep* is just one of many similar images that saturated visual culture during the nineteenth century and serves as an emblem of the Victorian preoccupation with depictions of sleeping women. With the penetrating gaze of the male interloper, the work can be understood as part of a much larger discourse, which centered on the relationship among sleep, femininity, and the unconscious. For Victorians, this led to much speculation, investigation, and at times anxiety, as to what transpired during these

⁶As a side note, it is interesting to compare the strong resemblance of the man in *Sleeping* to a portrait of the artist, dated much later, at the National Portrait Gallery, London.

moments of female withdrawal from the woman's domestic life. Delving into these deepest areas of the unconscious, Victorian artists at times alluded to, or overtly represented what they imagined, and at times firmly believed, to occur during these moments of altered states of consciousness.

By focusing on general representations of American and British sleeping women, this chapter establishes a pictorial framework that reveals how these images functioned within a culture steeped in class divisions. The chapter then examines the most popular and provocative aspects of the sleeping woman obsession, including the symbolism of "dream states" and the hidden world of fairies or other nocturnal creatures that supposedly revealed themselves especially in the night's darkest hours. This exploration demonstrates that the preoccupation with altered states was not only peculiar to the visual arts, but can also be historically located within a much wider field of social and medical concern.

Both Adeline R. Tintner and Lionel Lambourne recognized the subject as a fixation for many artists. Lambourne observes that most sleeping subjects were women and suggests that, in sleep, "problems . . . between men and women are postponed, so that the sleeping person for the viewer becomes an object of admiration or worship and physical involvement is sublimated."⁷ Likewise, Tintner suggests that images of sleeping women expose a desire to "'freeze' women because women were beginning to assume a new role in society at the turn of the century."⁸ Why did these images appear with such frequency from 1850 and well into the 1890s? The answer to

⁷Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 195.

⁸Adeline R. Tintner, "The Sleeping Woman: A Victorian Fantasy," *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 2 (Nov. 1978): 12-26, at 18.

this vexing question is deeply rooted in a fascination with the unconscious that was percolating by the mid-nineteenth century and also intersected the period's fascination with representations of women in various languorous states. As noted in the introduction, intertwined with this new awakening of an interest in the subconscious were a burgeoning interest in dreams, Spiritualism, and the Victorian women's role in these arenas.⁹ Theories and speculation on these subjects help to reveal the history of Victorian attitudes towards women, their bodies, their sexuality and ultimately their role in society. It is this nexus of competing theories that artists articulated in visual form. Images of sleeping women proliferated in wide and varied ways, yet at the center of each is the languid female figure presented to the male viewer for contemplation and consideration.

The peaceful sleep represented in Burton's *Sleep* was a state reserved for the privileged, for the halcyon lives of those select Victorian women who could relish such moments, unfettered by mundane worries. Cocooned within the folds of domesticity, Burton's subject is protected from the outside world. Unblemished and pure, she resides as the "Angel of the House," as the ideal Victorian female. The subject of the sleeping woman is intertwined with the period's idolization of the Victorian middle-class woman, and it is notable that working-class women who toiled in factories and as domestic servants were not part of this cultural preoccupation with the unconscious. In works representing them, sleep takes on a different meaning, being linked to industry and hard labor. A review of the images representing Victorian sleeping women reveals a chasm between the types of sleep represented by the working-class subject and the privileged

⁹The role of Victorian women in the Spiritualist movement is discussed in detail in Chapter 7 and considers the depiction of women in various trancelike states, both physically and mentally. In each instance they convey an open receptivity for channeling spirits.

“Angel of the House.” Edward E. Simmons’ *Mother and Child* (1886) (Figure 2) also depicts a sleeping woman, but her reclining state, as she slumps against the side of a rumpled bed, reflects sheer physical exhaustion brought on by her bedside vigil, just one of the many burdens of her life. Unlike the sleeping woman in Burton’s painting where the diminutive female body is decorously stretched out and elegantly arranged, highlighting her delicate hands, the working-class’s female body slumps haphazardly and awkwardly against the bed. In modern scholar Beryl Satter’s study of Victorian woman, the author draws an illuminating distinction between the bodies of the white middle-middle class female as, represented in Burton’s image, and the working-class women. Culturally perceived as “opposites,” it was believed that “if working-class...women were animalistic, strong, and active, then white middle-class women were passionless, weak, and passive.”¹⁰ This image alludes to the massive strength of the working-class woman, now grown weary and utterly depleted by a hard day of physical labor. Her broad back and rather large hands speak of her back-breaking physical labor and she sits on a hard wooden crate, too tired to arrange herself on the bed properly, and her paring knife, which she was using to peel potatoes, has dropped to her feet, leaving the pittance of their rationed dinner lying haphazardly on the floor. In understandable concern, her young child gazes intently at his/her exhausted mother, altogether aware of the heavy burden she carries and the harsh realities of everyday life. Exhibited at the American Art Galleries in 1886, the work received praise from *The Critic*, which extolled the “general absence of anything deeper” than the working-class

¹⁰Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 30. As Satter explains, the exclusiveness of the idealized Victorian woman was further exclusive in nature as it was only “white women of the middle class who were depicted as angels of the home. . . . White middle-class women were therefore understood as the opposites of working-class women and non-white women.” Ibid.

empathies that tug at “the heart of the toiling multitudes.”¹¹ This illuminating comment suggests that images of working-class women functioned more as social commentary, or as sentimental representations of the harsh realities so many Victorian women faced. Indeed, images of working- women collapsing with physical exhaustion reveal the abject reality of life as it was for the vast majority of Victorian women on both sides of the Atlantic. The issue of class, therefore, is critical to understanding each representation of Victorian women in various states of languidness and will be a recurring theme throughout this study.

Another group of sleeping class working women can be found in images of seamstresses. The plight of seamstresses was much discussed during the Victorian period and in 1843 inspired Thomas Hood’s widely popular “Song of the Shirt.” Susan Casteras distinguishes the needlewoman as “one of the most tenacious images of the female worker in the public imagination (and indeed one of the most popular of all social themes).”¹² Charles W. Cope’s *Home Dreams* (1869) (Figure 3) is one of the many paintings depicting the laborers of dressmaking and milliner. Here, a needlewoman is shown sleeping, collapsed in an utter state of exhaustion as she toils in the late night hours. While the genteel pleasant face of the seamstress, coupled with comfortable interior, seems to superficially suggest that of contentment, elements within the painting suggest a more sinister narrative. Gently smiling and dreaming of memories

¹¹Jeannette Leonard Gilder and Joseph Benson Gilder, *The Critic* (New York: The Critic Company, 1886), 244-245.

¹²Susan Casteras, *The Substance or the Shadow: Images of Victorian Womanhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 1982), 31. Scholarship dedicated to the subject of seamstresses and needlewomen is extensive. For example, see Lynn M. Alexander’s *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlework in Victorian Art and Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); as well as Beth Harris, ed., *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2005).

of home, the spectator is left to contemplate the harsh reality and perhaps ominous future that awaits this young woman. As modern scholar Beth Harris observes, the unusual length and prominence of the white shirt is “suggestive more of the material used to wind up a body in a shroud than of pieces cut out to make a man’s shirt.”¹³ Indeed, the material, seems to already be wrapped around the young woman’s body, especially her left arm, perhaps in anticipation of her untimely demise.

Sleep caused by physically taxing burdens signaled a state void of any romantic or sexually charged associations. William Powell Frith’s *The Sleeping Model* (1853) (Figure 4) depicts another young working-class woman, an orange seller whose “rustic beauty” captured the artist’s attention one day.¹⁴ Perched on a circular green mini-stage or dais, the model slumbers, physically spent after a day of posing. Cupped in her hands are the precious oranges that she sells to eke out a meager living, with the remaining few are placed in a wicker basket beside her feet. In the near background lies a wooden mannequin, awkwardly contorted. The proximity of this crude apparatus suggests that the orange seller has been reduced to a mere studio prop, but in this instance a living one. Like Burton’s *Sleep*, a man, in this case a frustrated artist, also gazes

¹³Harris, 29-30.

¹⁴The model for this painting was an orange seller who was described by Frith as possessing a “rare type of rustic beauty.” When Frith first encountered the young woman, he was entranced with her captivating smile and intended the picture to be of a laughing orange seller, as seen on his unfinished canvas. As Frith recalled, “I determined to paint a laughing face from her. . . . I could not find anything to talk with her about that would amuse her and she could not talk with me. . . . After many attempts to rouse an expression that would help make a laughing face, I found the worst of hindrances that can afflict a painter come upon me . . . my model fell fast asleep.” Mark Bills and Vivien Knight, *William Powell Frith: Painting the Victorian Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 134. The exact reason for the model’s deep slumber remains ambiguous, as it may have been caused by boredom or sheer exhaustion. Nevertheless, her state is related to her working-class status and lacks the romanticism so often evident in images of middle- and upper-class Victorian sleeping.

intensely at a slumbering female. On the one hand, the artist gaze's depicted by Frith is one motivated by labor to achieve the task at hand. He is making the best of a frustrating and difficult situation by edifying reality to a wakeful and vibrant fruit-seller with a cheerful visage. On the canvas, the buoyant smile, ruddy cheeks and twinkling eyes provide a dramatic foil to the slumbering model drooped in the chair. However, it too is tinged with the disturbing and invasive element of the male gaze. The artist's gaze, much like that represented in Burton's *Sleep*, consumes the vulnerable female and is rife with sexuality and voyeurism, exhibiting an intensity that not only scrutinizes her physical body, but also seems to be probing, or questioning, her unconscious state. Frith's *Sleep* (1873) (Figure 5) again explores the theme of a sleeping woman and demonstrates schism between the sleep of working-class and idealized Victorian young ladies. For example, here also Frith depicts a sleeping woman but of an entirely different nature. Her long hair cascades down her back and she rests against a plush red velvet pillow. The intricate lace detail of her dress and its rich mahogany fabric reflect her status as a lady of leisure. A book rests idly beside her, momentarily abandoned, as she indulges in peaceful sleep.¹⁵

The theme of working-class exhaustion is also evident in Frederick Daniel Hardy's *After the Party* (1871) (Figure 6), which depicts a domestic servant surrendering to a nap.¹⁶ Remnants of an elaborate evening's festivities are haphazardly displayed and border the sleeping woman on either side. Carelessly forgotten white gloves and a fan lie upon a velvet-covered red chair, its

¹⁵Though the setting is sparse, it is clearly the bedroom. The woman's hairstyle, half up and half down, suggests her youthfulness, as does the rather simple iron adolescent-like bed.

¹⁶This image is illustrated in Susan Casteras's *The Substance or the Shadow: Images of Victorian Womanhood*, pl. 28.

elegant owner long since retired for the evening. A red chair is flirtatiously angled towards the seat once inhabited by the female guest, leaving in its wake an empty plate and wine glass. The vacant seats and position of the chair provide a visual surrogate of intimate conversation and the evening's regalement. To the left of the servant is a long table cluttered with glasses and plates. The nearly empty wine carafe and low-burning candles on the candelabra signal the late evening hour, and the scattering of crumbs on the floor anticipate the enormity of the task at hand. The young weary woman, resigned to a long evening at hand, slumps and dozes in the chair, her momentary reprieve disrupted by a maid whose hand is placed on her shoulder. Above the two women hang stately ancestral portraits, their commanding presence attesting to the wealth and status of the homeowner and reminding the maids of their duties, as well as their "place" in terms of social class. As in Burton's *Sleep*, an ornate circular mirror bejewels the wall, but rather than a vacant bedroom, it reflects a male domestic carrying what looks like a large silver tray. He glances outward, as if observing the unfolding scene while engrossed in his nightly labors.

These images were all reflections of the array of occupations that non-elite Victorian women were obligated to seek. Artists depicted sleeping working-class women in a wide variety of settings predicated on the type of labor involved: a seamstress inhabits a drafty, ominous attic chamber; a servant works within the relentlessly taxing confines of her mistress's home, and a model sits within an artist's studio. While working-class women were depicted asleep in an assortment of scenarios and environments, this was not so much the case for middle- and upper-class women, who more often than not were depicted within the cloistered domestic sphere or the boudoir. In fact, the latter became one of the most conventional settings for depicting ladies of leisure. It is important, however, to note that while images of sleeping woman set within the

boudoir dominated, there were of course exceptions. For example, Augustus Leopold Egg's *The Travelling Companions* (1862) (Figure 7) is set in a first-class railway carriage and shows two identically dressed sisters, one reading, the other in a deep sleep. However, once again, the confining railway carriage conveys a mood of enclosure and distance from the exterior world. As modern scholar Michael Cohen notes, the work on one hand conveys rivalry "while also showing us a pair of women who take no interest in what goes on outside their little enclosed world and who seem to require nothing beyond themselves."¹⁷

In the domestic interiors of the Victorian period, certain rooms were identified with the female and invested with a new meaning and symbolism.¹⁸ Some of the most intriguing examples depict the female within the haven of the bedroom. Although this room was not solely gendered as "female," the bedroom accommodated and transformed according to the various needs of the Victorian woman.¹⁹ Furthermore, the room during the Victorian period was invested

¹⁷Michael Cohen, *Sisters: Relation and Rescue in Nineteenth-Century British Novels and Paintings* (London: Associated University Press, 1995), 22.

¹⁸Women had always been intimately bound to the domestic sphere, yet it was during the Victorian period that the great divide between the female private sphere and the male public sphere was most deeply evident and revered. Upholding these "separate spheres" was critical for the Victorians and reveals their prescriptive ideals. Men acted in the "public sphere," and women remained within the "private," or domestic, sphere. Judith Flanders' *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* provides a detailed account of the separate male and female domains within the Victorian home. Each chapter explores a different room and takes into account the daily life of the Victorian home. In each chapter, Flanders designates certain rooms as "masculine," such as the library, the dining room, and the study, while others were firmly associated with the "feminine" realm, such as the parlor and the drawing room. See Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003). Images of sleeping women within their "proper" sphere reiterated and confirmed this deeply entrenched role.

¹⁹As Judith Flanders explains, the bedroom within the Victorian home served multiple purposes. For example, the bedroom was not only a place to sleep but could also be turned into a sickroom, a place to give birth, a temporary mortuary, or a site for marital relations. Flanders,

with new meaning that suggested a sense of intimacy and withdrawal that aligned with the image of the Victorian woman. According to Tom Crook, a modern scholar who has examined the symbolism of the Victorian bedroom, the bedroom emerged in the nineteenth century as a site specifically reserved for emotional and physical privacy.²⁰ Bedrooms lost their interconnection with other rooms in the house and became realms “of seclusion, rather than . . . points of passage.”²¹ The bed, of course, remained inseparably linked to sexual activity, a hushed, if not taboo, topic within Victorian society. Bill Bryson’s illuminating study of the Victorian sphere provides a fascinating account of the troublesome relationship of the bed with sexual activity and the gendered prescription for navigating this relationship.²² Bryson states, “The real problem with beds, certainly by the Victorian period, was that they were inseparable from that most troublesome of activities, sex.”²³ Henry Nelson O’Neil’s *Pleasant Dreams* (1852) (Figure 8) also explores this theme of the intimate depiction of sleep in the bedroom and the interlacing of

37-63. The transformative nature of this interior accommodated and changed, it seems, according to the various needs of the Victorian woman. In Chapter 4, I delve more deeply into how bedrooms were transformed into a sickroom. Furthermore, in Chapter 2, I explain the bedroom’s function in relation to deathbed scenes and images of dead women.

²⁰Tom Crook, “Norms, Forms and Beds: Spatializing Sleep in Victorian Britain,” *Body and Society* 14, no. 4 (Dec. 2008): 15-35, at 15-16. As Crook states, “Only in the post-1800 period did the bedroom, as distinct from the bed, emerge as a significant site of privacy and, in turn, emotional and physical investment.” Crook, 16.

²¹Crook, 23. As Crook notes, there was a “general reorganization of domestic space.” While earlier bedrooms were interconnected and may have had two or three doors, they were now provided only with a single entryway. Thus they became “spaces of seclusion.” Crook, 22-23.

²²Bill Bryson, *At Home: A Short History of Private Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 320-323.

²³Bryson goes on to elaborate on how issues such as “female arousal,” “self-abuse,” and “seminal fluid” were dealt with during the Victorian period. See Bryson, 325-326.

sensuality and innocence. The image is charged with underlying sexuality, and the circular framing of the scene explicitly suggests voyeurism, a “peephole” gaze as the girl’s nightgown falls from her shoulders and threatens to expose her breasts almost entirely. She is propped against two pillows, and a book with the edge of its page turned down suggests a moment of interruption. Lying against a darkened background, the woman’s dark hair cascades down her bare shoulders. She rests against a cream-colored pillow decorated with gold tassels, the bright color echoed in the gaudy circular frame. The moment seems too intimate and invites comparison with the setting of a brothel. This effect is reinforced by the scarlet striped pillow supporting her body as her upturned hand droops on a sumptuous cover of velvet green and a bangle encircles her forearm. William Peter Watson’s *Sleep Under a Patchwork Quilt* (c. 1900s) (Figure 9) also dramatizes the emotional vestments bestowed on the bedroom. The image depicts the unblemished youthfulness of a girl nestled in the comfortable folds of her boudoir and combines the idea of women’s bond to the domestic world with the bedroom’s perceived intimacy. Covered by a cozy quilt, the woman battles drooping eyelids as she slips into deep slumber. A white nightgown exposes her alabaster shoulder, and the arrangement of her hair reveals the delicacy and length of her neck. The focus on the vulnerability of her transition into unconsciousness is a device that may have heightened the titillation of the moment for Victorian viewers. The all-white interior, barely punctuated by the light pink and blue quilt, underscores a heady mix of youthfulness and innocence, yet the scene is also tinged with the sexuality of blossoming womanhood.

Victorian artists reveled in showcasing the aesthetic beauty of sleeping women.

Decorously outstretched, they exude a languor and bewitching appeal that captivated the period’s

imagination. However, beyond their surface beauty, these images of femininity can also be understood within a much larger cultural framework that included the burgeoning field of psychology and an intense inquiry into various aspects of the unconscious. This fascination developed, though perhaps at different rates, in both Britain and America.²⁴ Modern scholars agree that although it is often assumed that Sigmund Freud “discovered” the unconscious as a category within psychological analysis, the central ideas of the “pervasive influence of the unconscious” were well established by the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵ As modern scholar Jenny Bourne Taylor’s explains in her essay “Locating the Victorian Unconscious,” this fascination with the “obscure recesses of the mind” underwent a theoretical and cultural reshaping in both countries during the Victorian period.²⁶ In the eighteenth century the unconscious was central to Romantic thought and more closely aligned with the field of philosophy; however, during the

²⁴In general, the British and the American relationship and understanding of the unconscious were similar. To read specifically on the development of psychology within Victorian America, see Robert C. Fuller, *The Psyche as Symbol: Theological Anticipations in Americans and the Unconscious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11-27; as well as Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995).

²⁵Taylor states, “We often assume that Sigmund Freud ‘discovered’ the unconscious as a crucial category of psychological analysis. . . . But in developing his theory of the unconscious, Freud, with Breuer, was drawing on and transforming not only clinical practice (particularly Charcot’s use of hypnosis in the study of hysteria) but also well-known theories of the pervasive influence of unconscious mental processes.” Jenny Bourne Taylor, “Obscure Recesses: Locating the Victorian Unconscious,” in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. J. B. Bullen (London: Longman, 1997), 140. See also Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 127.

²⁶Taylor, 142.

mid-Victorian period, the subject of the unconscious became part of the study of psychology and was increasingly linked to physiology and organic theory, rather than philosophy.²⁷

The heyday of artistic representations of sleeping women coincided with a critical moment in which the field of psychology was still in its infancy. Questions about the unconscious during the Victorian period transformed from a philosophical debate once reserved for intellectual society into a discussion that engaged a much broader audience.²⁸ Psychology not only attracted comment in one form or another from an incredibly diverse cross section of the Victorian intellectual and artistic communities, but it also captivated the everyday layman. According to modern scholar Rick Rylance, who has examined the field of Victorian psychology, “their fascination, factionalized controversy, contempt, astonishment, and thirst for discussion of it rivaled the railways as a topic.”²⁹ He comments on the unique atmosphere in which the study of the unconscious blossomed. The study was an “open discourse,” “spaciously framed in its address to common issues, and with an audience crossing wide disciplinary

²⁷Ibid. Reed also draws the distinction between what the unconscious meant for the Romantics versus the Victorians. See Reed, 127.

²⁸From approximately 1850 to 1880, the study of psychology quickly became part of Victorian public discourse, and the very word “psychology” was coming into the everyday vernacular. Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13. At this time, psychology had yet to be firmly aligned and established within an academic and intellectual framework. In Rylance’s study of the development of psychology, he draws a firm distinction between the period 1850-1880, the focus of his book, and post-1880. As Rylance notes, “The first experimental psychological laboratories were opening in British universities in 1897 at Cambridge and University College London; the British psychology Association was founded in 1901; and the *British Journal of Psychology* was launched in 1904.” Rylance continues, “In these years psychology was constituted as an academic and scientific discipline in a way quite different from that of the period covered by this book [1850-1880].” Rylance, 5.

²⁹Rylance, 14.

interests. Economists, imaginative writers, philosophers, clerics, . . . contributed to its formation. It was unshapely, accommodating, contested, emergent, energetic . . . without settled lines of theory or protocols for investigation.”³⁰

The rethinking and redefinition of the body unconscious had tremendous influence on the art of the period, and images of women sleeping were recast with new insight and cultural, as well as moral, significance. As Taylor notes, the “mental sciences” became the subject of many newly established publications and were widely discussed in a range of popular journals—e.g., *Household Words*, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Quarterly Review* and others.³¹ The critical role these general periodicals played in fomenting discussion and debate attests to the broad audience engaged with these new ideas. As Rylance suggests, this popularity reflects the perceived belief that the issues raised in the periodicals were “matters of common, not specialized, intellectual and cultural concerns.”³² Evident throughout the public and medical discourse on the unconscious was the desire to know, predict and control aspects of this obscure region of the mind. As a wide variety of literature fostered this new familiarity in both Britain and America, the unconscious became very much part of the period’s intellectual and creative climate, resulting in its nuanced exploration outside of academia—in literature, for example—as well as in the visual arts.

Sleep and dreams, especially the unregulated images and ideas that pour forth during such moments of “abandonment,” were the most obvious instances in which the unconscious

³⁰Rylance, 6.

³¹Taylor also lists the new journals that were established to accommodate this growing field: *Medical Times*, the *Journal of Mental Science*, the *Asylum Journal*, etc. Rylance, 142.

³²Rylance, 7.

functioned outside the realm of human control. Dreams became one of the most intricately researched facets of consciousness. As Nicola Bown asserts, “Although speculation about the nature of dreams had formed a current in Enlightenment thinking about the nature of the human mind, this developed in the course of the nineteenth century into an explosion of interest in the nature of dreams and it became an important issue in debates over the nature of consciousness and the relationship between the mind and the external world.”³³ Scientific investigation stressed the abandonment of will that accompanied the dream state. For example, eminent psychologist Sir James Crichton-Browne, whose theories were widely favored in both Britain and America, delivered a lecture entitled “Dreamy Mental States,” in which he defined these states as “an impression suddenly taking possession of the mind.”³⁴ In the lecture, the psychologist stressed the abnormality of these moments: “Even in their simplest forms and occurring in otherwise healthy persons, they are a deviation from the standard of health, and involve a slightly raised activity of nervous arrangements with loss of control . . . they betoken instability in some corner of the brain—a defect of consciousness in one direction.”³⁵ Browne describes the most “severe and awe-inspiring” dream states as the “outcome of thoses of a simpler and more innocent nature.”³⁶ These states, he asserts, are “capable of bringing both extreme pleasure and torment, as

³³Nicola Bown, “What Is the Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of?” in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 159.

³⁴Crichton-Browne delivered the lecture “Dreamy Mental States” in London on June 30, 1895. James Crichton-Browne, “Dreamy Mental States,” in *Stray Leaves from a Physician’s Portfolio* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 1.

³⁵Crichton-Browne, 6.

³⁶Crichton-Browne, 8. The suggestion here, it seems, is that these extreme moments of deep unconscious and the overtaking of dreams is something that goes hand in hand with the lack

well as a sense of of losing one's physical body." He explains that dreams "consist in a feeling of being somewhere else—in double consciousness—in a loss of personal identity—in supernatural joyousness or profound despair—in losing touch with the world—in a deprivation of corporeal substance."³⁷

The conflation of the abdication of will and the complete retreat from the external world while dreaming dovetailed with the idea that Victorian women lacked their own volition and willpower. At the same time, discussions of the nature and origins of dreams generally characterized them as an abnormality and associated them with both mental as well as physical disturbance.³⁸ As a twenty-first-century scholar who has extensively studied the complex nexus between dream states and the Victorian woman, Maureen Perkins notes, "Women's association with hysteria and altered states of consciousness was depicted by medical opinion as connected with menstruation and physiological weakness, and disturbed sleep was part of this pattern of

of willpower or intellectual strength, mental deficiencies that were often attributed to the Victorian woman.

³⁷Chrichton-Browne, 7-8. Chrichton-Browne's essay is just one of the many lectures, essays, and books to emerge during this period that theorized and discussed dreams. For example, in an 1893 issue of the *Fortnightly Review*, James Sully, the respected writer in psychology, published an essay titled "The Dream as a Revelation." This essay discusses the dream state as a fragmentation of the conscious and an experience of weakened mental activity. Sully underscores the mysteriousness of dreams and distinguishes them from other altered states, such as hypnosis. "Thus," he writes, "dreaming may be distinguished from the other species of the class as depending on the most complete withdrawal of the mind from the external world.... In dreams . . . the exclusion of the external world from consciousness is for the most part complete." James Scully and George Croom Robertson, *Aesthetics, Dreams, and Association of Ideas* (New York, Humboldt Pub. Co., 1888), 26. For a collection of "dream" texts dating from 1830 to 1890, see Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 102-140.

³⁸Maureen Perkins, "The Meaning of Dream Books," *History of Workshop Journal* 48 (Autumn 1999): 102-113, at 107.

neurotic disorder.”³⁹ The established exclusion of Victorian women from mainstream paradigms of robust physical and mental health, coupled with the mushrooming medical discussion on the perils of femininity, often positioned women as prime subjects of this new area of study.⁴⁰ Interestingly, Browne’s case studies included a greater portion of women and young girls. In one compelling instance, Browne describes an older teenager who dreamed of “skimming over the surface of the ground and flying down the stairs.” Interestingly, her malady, according to Browne, rapidly improved “when [she was] relieved from educational pressure and carefully nourished.”⁴¹

Though dream theorists and culture at large were adamant in reinforcing the morality of Victorian women, there is a sense that the abandonment inherent in dreaming could render them vulnerable due to the potentially licentious, or prophetic, visions that might ensue. According to Robert MacNish’s *The Philosophy of Sleep*—a book that garnered widespread Victorian readership, though it was originally published in 1834—dreams “pervade the female breast with equal intensity; and the young maiden, stretched upon the couch of sleep, may have her spirit filled with the image of her lover, while her whole being swims in the ecstasies of impassioned, BUT virtuous attachment.”⁴² First, MacNish conjures up the image of a young woman outstretched and enraptured in the throes of some future love, then tempers this heightened

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰The overarching belief during this period was that the Victorian woman was ruled by the uterus, and, simply based on her gender, was considered prone to illness. See Chapter 4.

⁴¹Chrichton-Browne, 25-26. See pages 1-43 for the lecture in its entirety.

⁴²Robert Macnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep* (New York: D. Appleton, 1834), 101. Emphasis is mine.

sensuality by insisting that, though she may find herself consumed with desire, her chastity and virtue would remain in a perfectly “virtuous” and unblemished state. How and what, then, did the Victorians envision the ideal woman to dream? The colored lithograph *Midsummer Day’s Dream* (1896) (Figure 10) depicts a young woman sleeping upon a hammock. A small table beside her shows an open book and a closed fan. As she sleeps, bucolic visions of figures past, present or future who are either her family, or premonitions of her intended family, spring forth. Ironically, this slumbering lady of leisure is contrasted with her family, who tend the garden of her dreams. Bent attentively over the garden, the husband tends its foliage, while a young girl, perhaps the daughter, dutifully fills a small wagon, her dress cradling a few tendrils. In the well-tended garden, a white cat peacefully naps.

Both American and British artists were captivated with depicting women in various states of slumber and shared a mutual interest in exploring the unconscious and dream states. These images often highlighted the vulnerability of the female body as it relinquished itself to such moments of abandonment. *Sleep or Sleeping Woman* (1868-1869) (Figure 11), by American artist John La Farge, underscores what Browne describes in his lecture as both the mental and physical relinquishment associated with sleep. Moreover, well-known late twentieth-century modern scholar Kathleen Pyne includes La Farge as one of a number of artists, both in America and Europe, who “like scientists, were drawn to the unconscious mind.” In this image, a woman dressed in a loose, flowered dress lies outstretched on a sloping wooden chair. Her left arm dangles lifelessly, while her right hand lies suggestively in her lap. Slipping into the dream state was often veiled with allusions to its sensuality. For example, Victorian physician and mesmerists Dr. Joseph Ennmoser contends that the experience “arises from the secret activity of

the spirit in the sensuous organ of the brain.”⁴³ Indeed, the woman’s day dress is simultaneously loose and clinging, hugging her legs and provocatively outlining her erogenous zones (such as her breasts, abdomen, and legs). The material falls from her body into delicate pools at her feet, intermingling and conflating the sensual with the mystical. Turned away from the viewer, her head rests against a blanket drooped over the chair. Pyne’s discussion draws a strong parallel between Victorian femininity and the unconscious. “Representing the unconscious mind [as] feminine,” this image, according to Pyne, is very close to La Farge’s representation of flowers, which are also “revealed as mysterious feminine presences.”⁴⁴ Elusive and obscure, the Victorian woman becomes even more spiritually endowed. The mysterious nature of the female unconscious is underscored both in her presence and by the background, which is plunged into a void of darkness, intensifying the sensation of silence, mystery, and the woman’s mental relinquishment to sleep.

Frederic Leighton’s *Flaming June* (c. 1895) (Figure 12) likewise depicts a sensuous sleeping woman in a nondescript setting. Here, the woman is shown lying on her side, her head resting in the nook of her arms, and her legs pulled upward and inward with a sensuousness suggestive of a serpent or feline. Her body, unlike previous examples, is colossal, almost androgynous, suggesting that she is a member of the Greek Pantheon. This connection is fostered by the gold anthemion-patterned awning above the slumbering goddess.⁴⁵ The undulating folds

⁴³Quoted by Dr. Joseph Ennmoser (1848) in Bown, 163.

⁴⁴Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 77.

⁴⁵Christopher Newall et al., *Frederic, Lord Leighton: Eminnet Victorian* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 236.

of fiery orange fabric cascading over her curvaceous body reveal not only full breasts but also a massive and powerful leg. Flowing red hair envelopes her in a soporific reverie. As Christopher Newall has recently explained, the painting's title references both the patterns formed by the diaphanous scarlet fabric as well as the profound "sense of heat and airlessness of midday in a southern climate."⁴⁶ Directly above the woman's head is a placid expanse, sun reflecting off the ocean's glimmering surface, perhaps suggesting her dream activity. A low-lying parapet transects the composition, and a dramatic red pole supports the awning. The color echoes and draws attention to a stem of oleander flowers and leaves, which, as Newhall observes, not only conflicts with the generally cohesive design, but also introduces a symbol of death since the oleander's leaves and flowers are poisonous. This suggests that the slumbering maiden will indeed never awaken.⁴⁷

American artist Edwin Blashfield's *Sleep and Poetry* (1886) (Figure 13) depicts another interpretation of the dreaming woman. Set within a Grecian interior, replete with a Doric column and an elaborate botanical frieze that borders a bed, a young, dark-haired woman who resembled a goddess from the Pantheon, slumbers peacefully. Propped up by mountains of downy pillows and covered to the waist with massive bedding, her upper body is left exposed and the contours of her breasts are strongly, and suggestively, outlined. At the foot of the massive bed, intoxicating plumes of smoke waft upward from a gilded urn of burning incense. Perhaps these vapors are meant to imply that narcotic dreams or fantasies are being induced. From the billowing fumes, a mystical figure of poetry emerges, its tendrils of smoke undulating as it

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

hovers above the sleeping woman. Modern scholar Bailey Van Hook describes the image as an “allegorical figure of poetry alighting to impart inspiration to a sleeping woman.”⁴⁸ As in La Farge’s *Sleep*, the image conflates the erotic with the spiritual. The woman’s Grecian gown clings suggestively to her breasts, its sleeve slipping provocatively off her shoulder.

Blashfield and La Farge’s images also recall one of the most famous representations of women dreaming, Henry Fuseli’s painting entitled *The Nightmare* (1781) (Figure 14). *The Nightmare* shows a woman provocatively outstretched as her thin, nearly translucent gown molds to her voluptuous body and highlights her shapely legs and torso. Crouched on her chest and gazing demonically on her unconscious state sits an incubus, a term used in the eighteenth century to represent an “evil spirit” thought to cause nightmares.⁴⁹ Heightening its nightmarish quality is the belief that incubuses had sexual intercourse with sleeping women in order to father children.⁵⁰ Peering through the curtains is the head of a horse with white, phosphorescent eyes. The woman’s somnolence is underscored by a small jar of liquid nearby, which some researchers

⁴⁸Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 95.

⁴⁹Nicole Bown notes it was Henry Fuseli who was the first artist to take up fairy subjects. “From the 1790s until the late 1840s fairy painting followed Fuseli’s lead, mainly taking subjects from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*, working within the genre of history painting, and producing large exhibition pieces. Millais’s *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (1849), though still a literary subject, brought the naturalism and intense concentration on minute detail of early Pre-Raphaelitism to fairy painting.” Nicole Bown, “‘A Case of Such Familiars at Home’: Natural and Supernatural in the Work of John Anster Fitzgerald,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 210. See also Nicolas Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 50. It is also interesting to note that the incubus that perches threateningly on the chest of the young woman is meant to represent the crushing weight associated with nightmares. It is the physical and not the mental manifestation of dreams that Fuseli was depicting. During the Victorian period, there is a shift in the study of dreams away from the physical sensation and into the supernatural connotations.

⁵⁰The female counterpart to the incubus is the succubus.

have identified as a type of medicine for nervousness.⁵¹ Alternatively, it may be a narcotic or opiate substance like the one seen in Blashfield's *Sleep and Poetry*.

Fuseli's *The Nightmare* helped lay the groundwork for the coupling of sleeping women with strange visitations of supernatural provenance.⁵² While the Victorians displayed an interest in deciphering prophetic dreams, another facet of sleep occupied their imaginations: the consideration of what types of beings visited during these states of dormancy. Supernatural entities often took the form of fairies, and their overwhelming prevalence in Victorian society led to a flourishing of "fairy painting," a subject that Christopher Wood distinguishes as a "tributary" rather than a distinct art movement.⁵³ Yet the rise of "fairy painting" was part of the much larger cultural phenomenon of Spiritualism. The belief in fairies proliferated during a period of spiritual doubt and duress, which was aided by the rise of Spiritualism in the 1850s and its expansion during the 1880s and 1890s with occult beliefs like Theosophy.⁵⁴ As Wood notes, "the connection between all this (Spiritualism) and fairy painting is not entirely clear, but it undoubtedly helped to create an atmosphere in which fairy painting and literature could

⁵¹Martin Myrone, *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 16.

⁵²Fuseli's *Titania Awakes, Surrounded by Attendant Fairies* (1794) likewise reflects the period's early preoccupation with fairies and their various antics. His depictions of fairies, along with those by William Blake, influenced later Victorian fairy painting.

⁵³Christopher Wood, *Fairies in Victorian Art* (Woodbridge, UK: Antique Collectors Club, 2000), 16.

⁵⁴Inevitably one of the questions to arise during the course of studying Victorian fairies is, did Victorians really believe in fairies? As Carole G. Silver has discussed, the answer is a resounding yes, and believers ranged from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to Arthur Machen and others. See Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7, 34-36, 202-203, and 205-207.

flourish.”⁵⁵ Victorian women were positioned as key figures in the Spiritualist movement, and the inclusion of fairies with images of sleeping women suggests societal perceptions of femininity.⁵⁶ As Nicola Bown asserts, during the nineteenth century, even adults quickly fell under the sway of the belief in fairies and freely indulged the fantastical visions and elaborate descriptions of fairies and fairyland.⁵⁷ The supernatural “Otherness” of fairies mirrors the period’s attitude regarding the “Otherness” of Victorian women, whose biological constructs—e.g., the monthly female cycle and menopause—were often viewed by society and even the medical field as “abnormalities.”

A prototype of images depicting the visitation of sleeping women by supernatural beings is John Smetham’s *The Dream* (1856) (Figure 15). Here, the “melodic” nature of sleep, set within a cozy interior, is tinged with foreboding in the form of an austere bedchamber. Here a young woman with unbound hair sleeps in a “death-like trance,” her hands folded, corpse-like, on her chest.⁵⁸ A small posy of flowers rests on the white pillows that support her head. A heavy, dark bed-curtain is swept behind and next to the bed is a tall wooden chair. Nearby, a snuffed candle is placed upon an open book, its contents unknown. Dominating the upper portion of the composition is a large window that reveals the vast ocean and a small vessel dotting its horizon.

⁵⁵Wood, 16. Victorian novelist Thomas Hardy observed that the rise of fairy paintings was born out of a fear of disappearing customs of country life. Hardy wrote, “A vast amount of unwritten folklore, local chronicle, local topography, and nomenclature is absolutely sinking, has nearly sunk, into eternal oblivion.” Quoted in Wood, 15.

⁵⁶See Chapter 7.

⁵⁷Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

⁵⁸Susan Casteras, *James Smetham: Artist, Author, Pre-Raphaelite Associate* (Aldershot, UK: Scolar Press, 1995), 99.

Dark clouds, perhaps a fog bank or impending storm, loom outside, sending cold, dank air into the girl's sparse bedchamber. Arising from the murky shadows of the mist, a ghostly apparition materializes and ascends above her bed. With its head downward and a large swath of hair falling to one side, a long muscular arm emerges from the folds of its robe, pointing, perhaps prophetically, towards the diminutive boat.

The prophetic nature of dreams and the idea that they were supernatural messages also blended into the period's fascination with Spiritualism, a movement in which women played an important role as seers and mediums.⁵⁹ While Victorian psychologists, medical doctors and society at large postulated on the nature of sleep, the unconscious and dreams, Victorian women likewise took an active role in deciphering the meaning of their nocturnal dreams, yet in an entirely novel and alternative way. As modern scholar Phyllis Weliver notes, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, various studies on dreams concentrated on their symbolism and prophetic qualities.⁶⁰ The potential for unlocking the meaning of dreams created a wave of excitement among Victorian women. One of the most significant and accessible ways women explored the meaning of dreams was through books on dreams, which quickly flooded the market and soon graced the parlors of many homes, becoming part of the private culture of

⁵⁹See Chapter 7.

⁶⁰Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 94. Weliver outlines the various studies of dreams that emerged during the second half of the century. She outlines three specific areas of concentration: how time functioned in dreams, time's connection with trance and insanity, and finally dreams' prophetic nature. It is the prophetic nature of dreams that took hold of the public imagination and coincides with the rise of Spiritualism. Taylor and Shuttleworth also note Scully's important lecture "Dream as Revelation" as indicative of this new emphasis. The importance of Scully's essay was underscored when years later Freud cited it in his own work on dreams. Taylor and Shuttleworth, 69-70.

Victorian women. “The Meaning of Dream Books,” an essay by modern scholar Maureen Perkins, notes that the public demand for these slim volumes was so great that they developed into a cottage industry.⁶¹ Alternatively called “dreamers,” these books “often included questions related to dreams of love, marriage, and children.”⁶² According to Perkins, “Dream books, or dreamers, provided an A to Z of meanings; for example, the appearance of comets in a dream ‘is ominous of war, plague, famine, and death,’ to dream of a cat signifies that you will soon catch a thief, beer is a portent of an accident, and crows flying in cloudy weather show coming loss and misery.”⁶³

Perkins’ study on nineteenth-century dream books and their association with the Victorian female demonstrate how crucial women were to this genre. Perkins notes the “There was indeed a common belief that the use of dreams as oracles of the future was very much part of women’s culture.” She observes that the very content of the books confirm that readership was largely directed towards women.⁶⁴ Dream books’ rise in popularity reveals a critical cultural shift in the identification of Victorian women and their alignment with prophetic and spiritual

⁶¹In the context of her essay, Perkins includes several examples and shows how they were marketed to the female reader. Perkins, 102-113. Indeed, as Perkins notes, “with enticing titles such as *The Countess of Blessington’s True Interpreter of Dreams Vision and Omens of the Wedding Day* (1861), *The Dreamer’s True Friend* (1861), and its inclusion within such widely read journals as the *Englishwomen’s Domestic Magazine*, Victorian women had a wealth of resources at hand.” The content of these books included questions related to dreams of love, marriage, and children and further testifies to the Victorian female readership. Perkins, 106.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Quoted from *The Golden Dreamer, or Dreamer’s Interpreter, Clearly Showing How All Things Past, Present and to Come May Be Ascertained by Means of Dreams*, Newcastle upon Tyne, located in the British Library, approximate 1850. Perkins, 103.

⁶⁴Perkins, 105-106.

qualities. Whereas earlier versions of dream books addressed an audience that was both female and male, by the end of the century men as potential readers seem to have entirely disappeared.⁶⁵ Indeed, during this period, sibyllic dreams were strongly identified with women and were characterized as emanating effortlessly from the female mind. As Perkins notes, when men dared to claim possession of such prophetic powers, they were stigmatized as effeminate and as a “challenge [to] the norms of middle-class masculinity of the day.”⁶⁶

Cultural preoccupation with the content of women’s dreams is evident in a large hand-colored frontispiece to one of the many dream books available during the nineteenth century. Entitled the “Dreamer’s Wonderful Visions,” from the book *The Dreamer’s Sure Guide, or Interpretation of Dreams Faithfully Revealed*, (c. 1850) (Figure 16) the frontispiece depicts a fully clothed woman outstretched and asleep on an ornate divan.⁶⁷ Acting as her “sure guide,” a male companion stands above her and points to the visions that surround her slumbering frame. With his presence reassuring as well as protective, he attempts to “steer” her away from the confusing and inharmonious visions that fill the composition. Although the image is a peek into the woman’s subconscious, the male’s presence also signals that the female mind is porous, something that, due to perceptions of its inherent “weakness,” men can cajole into submission and control. Bathed in bright light, the conventional narrative of Victorian femininity unfolds,

⁶⁵Perkins, 110.

⁶⁶This also holds true for male mediums. Because of their insights and visions, male mediums were also considered effeminate. See the final chapter on representation of the Victorian female medium and Spiritualism. Perkins also observes that, interestingly, men authored the vast majority of dream books. Perkins, 107, n. 20.

⁶⁷Illustrated in Bown, 157. This image appears to have been popular, as it was on the title page, albeit in abbreviated form, for the dream-book *The Ladies’ New Dreamer*, published in 1890. Illustrated in Perkins, 102.

pointing to the aspirations prerequisite for any nineteenth-century woman: courtship, marriage and children. On the outskirts of this image, cloaked in darkness, are celestial omens such as lightning bolts, a shooting star and a half moon—all of which contribute to the otherworldly effect of the frontispiece. As Nicola Bown suggests, the dreams represented herein are symbolic and their meaning is accessible through the book's lexicon of imagery: a ghost, a skeleton, a lion and a serpent, fire, a coffin, keys and jewelry, playing cards, and a mirror.⁶⁸ For the Victorian woman, dream books had a calming effect and played a critical role in providing order to the jumbled world of hallucinations that accompanied sleep. The soothing balm of the dream book's lexicon untangled the mysteries of the dream world and countered any troubling images with rational attributions.⁶⁹

Victorian British artist John Anster Fitzgerald's series of fairy paintings reveals two important insights into Victorian culture relative to this study: the period's preoccupation with conflating the dream and supernatural worlds with the unconscious and the Victorian's woman relationship to the supernatural. As Bown observes, "He {Fitzgerald} put into the same frame pictorial conventions which were underpinned by quite different ideas about the origins of dreams, and in his representations of what dreams look he brought together references to both science and the supernatural."⁷⁰ Wood also contends that Fitzgerald's fairy paintings "open a

⁶⁸As Bown notes, these images are symbolic and predict the dreamer's future. Bown, Burdett, and Thurschwell, 158.

⁶⁹It is also interesting to note how the foreboding images in this frontispiece also recall the pictorial device that Henry Fuseli used in *The Nightmare* to create a distinct division between the space occupied by the female sleeper and the nightmarish dream.

⁷⁰Bown continues, "His [Fitzgerald's] various ways of visualizing dreams correspond both to the efforts his contemporaries made to understand them and to the limits of their understanding." Bown, Burdett, and Thurschwell, 167. It is also important to note that the artist

window on the Victorian subconscious to reveal its dark secret.”⁷¹ However, simultaneously, his fairy paintings also illuminate, in a very important way, the overlapping perceptions of the supernatural relative to Victorian femininity. Unlike Fuseli and later Victorian fairy painters, Fitzgerald breaks with convention by not employing literary subjects in his interpretation of fairies. Rather, he clearly depicts them within commonplace domestic spaces. For example, in Fitzgerald’s *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of* (c. 1858) (Figure 17) a girl sleeps in a cozy Victorian bedroom. Fully clothed, perhaps having just returned from an evening of festivities, she is surrounded by her dreams. In the upper left portion of the painting, a shadowy image depicts her standing with a young man under mistletoe. Although the exact narrative is unclear, the romantic union and suggestion of marriage adheres to the prescribed cycle for the Victorian woman.⁷² Meanwhile, creating discordance in this picturesque vignette, ghoulish fairies and goblin-like creatures surround the girl on one side, where they attempt to wreak havoc on her nocturnal peace. The interior recalls Smetham’s *The Dream*: a glowing moon shines through a large window in the background, heavy bed curtains are pulled back, and a chair sits beside the sumptuous bed. Both images depict a deathlike sleep, yet the girl in Fitzgerald’s painting displays even more pronounced visual and physical vulnerability. However, unlike the girl in Smetham’s painting, who is covered by a heavy blanket that protects her from the night chill,

created other similar paintings exploring this theme. However, for the sake of brevity, I have selected to focus only on this one, dated 1858.

⁷¹Wood, 16.

⁷²Bown notes that various interpretations are possible. For example, she suggests that the vision may be memory of a young man she met at a “fancy dress party,” or perhaps it is a wishful vision of a betrothed. Bown, Burdett, and Thurschwell, 166. The image, nevertheless, conforms to what would have been the natural next step for the young Victorian woman—that is, the union of marriage—followed inevitably by motherhood.

Fitzgerald's subject lies in a lavish brocade skirt and jacket, her bare feet extending beyond the vast folds, defenseless from the night air. While the sexless goblins are fully formed beings of all shapes and sizes, the remaining dream space is filled with spectral white outlines. As Bown observes, "the transparency of their outlined bodies implies both that they are the flimsy and insubstantial creatures of dream . . . that they are the forms of spiritual bodies, clustering round and conversing with the girl's own spirit."⁷³ However, as Bown also observes, the creatures' origin is obscured by the darkening evening apparent beyond the window, which suggests a physical, not spiritual, reality.⁷⁴ Thus, in Fitzgerald's work, the distinction between real and imagined is blurred. Further enhancing this effect is the girl's white brocade skirt, which seems to merge and blend with the spiritually populated background. Meanwhile, the translucent creatures standing along the girl's bedside frolic in the folds of her long skirt. One even places its hands on her skirt while the other brazenly perches atop her, another has just alighted at the foot of her bed. Yet, the meaning of the figures that hover above is unclear. They may be part of the girl's dream, hopes for the future, or perhaps, as Bown suggests, part of a trance-like state in which the girl's "spirit" has left the material world to commune with the man in the spiritual realm.⁷⁵

The painting is visually encoded with the period's competing and at times contradictory theory of dreams.⁷⁶ Blending these psychological theories and the period's fascination with the

⁷³Bown, 166-167.

⁷⁴Bown, 167.

⁷⁵Bown, 166.

⁷⁶Bown, 167.

supernatural, the work vacillates between the material and the immaterial. This conflation between science and the supernatural is evident, for example, in the row of fiends that line the bottom of the bed and stand on the red velvet chair. Except for the goblin sipping tea on the left, the other creatures create a racket with a cello, harp, and trumpet, while the goblin on the chair exuberantly bangs on a massive drum. As was previously discussed, while the music may indeed function as mere accompaniment to the girl's dream, it also may allude to the scientific theory that dreams were caused by external stimuli, in this case music. Significantly, music was the primary tool used by Victorian male mesmerists to induce hypotonic states in the female subjects.⁷⁷ Phyllis Weliver's study of the female musician in Victorian fictions examines the period's belief that "music is a portal between the conscious and unconscious because it awakens imagination in our conscious thoughts."⁷⁸ Indeed, an 1871 article in *Macmillan's Magazine* describes dreams in musical terms: "Dreams are to our waking thoughts much like echoes to music."⁷⁹ Therefore, the raucous and unruly male gremlins are divested with new scientific meaning and as possible agents for inducing in the young woman the unconscious state. Yet, although these associations are rooted in the period's scientific investigations, the sexless yet sexualized creatures responsible for the music are clearly supernatural beings, suggesting the fluidity in which these two seemingly opposing fields operated and merged during this period.

Fitzgerald's recurring theme of dreams and fairy visitations also attests to the period's gendered interpretation of the supernatural and the unconscious. For example, in the *Artist's*

⁷⁷Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science, and Gender in the Leisured Home* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 64.

⁷⁸Weliver, 93.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Dream (1857) (Figure 18), a bearded man slumbers in an ornate chair while his dreams manifest above. Much like Victorian women, this strand of imagery also depicted males being influenced by fairies, albeit in a very different way. Here, the slumbering male is accompanied by two red goblins: one sits attentively on a wooden table, while the other is perched above a tall columnar chair, other spectres congregate at his feet and above his head. Unlike *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of*, which takes place in the feminine realm of an intimate bedroom, the setting here is distinctly masculine, an artist's studio filled with massive furniture and professional tools of the artist's trade. In contrast to the recumbent girl, the male artist is sitting in a slouched position in a chair, not a bed, as if implying that the unconscious state is temporary, a momentary nodding off that will soon be broken when he resumes his work. The artist's dreams nearly occupy the entire left portion of the composition and depict him as a prodigious painter, sitting at his easel painting the portrait of a beautiful winged fairy. Unlike the young girl's romantic vision of domestic contentment, his dreams are filled with ambition and accomplishment, elements from the male world. The entire dream radiates with golden light, and yet there is a deliberate and strong effort to contrast between the light-filled dreams and the darkness of the studio, creating a pictorial delineation and separation between the dream state and physical. Here, speculations regarding the nature of dreams are made clear, and there is a distinct division between the material and immaterial. This division suggests that unlike in *What the Stuff Dreams are Made Of* where the supernatural and physical occupy and interact, here the masculine will has dominated, contained, separated the material and immaterial.⁸⁰

⁸⁰This echoes the prevailing belief that men were ruled by their brains and were inherently rational, willful beings. Conversely, women were believed to be governed by their bodies and prone to being passive, irrational, and emotional. See Chapter 4.

Fitzgerald's *Land of Nod* or *Dreaming* (n.d) (Figure 19) also explores the blending of the real and the imagined within a conventional Victorian interior. In this painting a woman sleeps in a plush chair, the unlit hearth links her to the previously discussed dreamer in Burton's *Sleep*. Here, also the darkened hearth simultaneously hints at the length of her slumber in a piece of furniture that seems decidedly bed-like with its large pillow. Swirling at her feet are delicately winged fairies in diaphanous gowns that create a hazy mist. Barely visible in the background sits a small congregation of fairies, appearing to partake in afternoon tea. The sleeping woman wears a floral tiara similar to those adorning the pixies, and the woman's blue kimono-like gown enhances her "Otherness," hinting at the exotic realm they inhabit. Yet the celestial gathering is marred by the barely visible creature tucked away in a dark corner just left of the chair. A discordant note to the whirlwind of fairy activity, the sinister goblin waits like an incubus with spindly arms tucked to his side and hands folded in his lap. The creature's devious grin leaves nothing clear about his intent or purpose.

The painting is an intriguing combination of the real and the imagined and leads to the question of the very nature of what is occurring here. Like the sleeping woman in Burton's painting, the young woman slumbers heavily, oblivious to the room's other inhabitants. The fireplace also seems as well to be unlit, and a phallic poker rests on its holder, projecting outward toward the sleeping woman. Though the woman is resting peacefully, the manner in which her dress and floral hair-wreath mirror those of the fairies suggests that she, too, is part of this supernatural world. Like *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of*, there is the commingling of the material and supernatural, yet here it is even more pronounced as the fairies swirl en masse around the sleeping woman. The boundary between the two worlds seems to dissolve and the

fairy dust left behind merges with the girl's dress, as if pulling her into the fairies' supernatural realm. The fairies' congregation may also be interpreted as an enchantment to transform the young mortal into a fairy, anointing her as one of their own. As modern scholar Carole G. Silver has discussed in her examination of the Victorian fascination with fairies, there was also a fear of young women being "abducted" and married off to these creatures.⁸¹ Further enhancing the visual association between the young woman and the supernatural being is the slightly open fan she holds, similar to the one held by the fairy perched upon her chair, perhaps alluding to courtship or pending romance. The positioning of the fan is at odds with the young woman's relaxed, slumbering frame, which rests heavily against the peach-colored headrest of the chair. Neither entirely closed nor open, as if caught in mid-motion, the fan suggests that she, too, has partaken in the fairies' afternoon festivities. Lurking to the left of the composition is a sinister element in the form of evil-looking beings, yet the fairies seem to create a protective shield around the woman's body. At her feet a feisty pixie fends off a demonic being with an umbrella, and another fairy, perched on the woman's left shoulder, lays her hands protectively on the woman with a look of concern. The disturbing figures on the left could thus represent the troubling and harassing types of fairies that were blamed by Victorians for kidnappings and other mischief, while others on the right seem quite benign.⁸²

The visual parallel between the sweet-faced sleeping woman and the delicate fairies brings into focus the Victorians' taste for fairy paintings. This included male spectators, and as modern scholar Nicola Bown notes, the nineteenth-century "masculine taste for fairies can be

⁸¹Silver, 219.

⁸²For further discussion on fairy abduction, see Carole Silver's chapter "Come Away Thou Human Child" in *Strange and Secret Peoples*, 59-88.

explained simply. Fairies, one tends to think are mostly female, tiny and beautiful; the word ‘fairy-like’ seems a perfect epithet for the ideal of Victorian femininity which required that women be diminutive in relation to men, magical in their unavailability, of delicate constitution, playful rather than earnest.”⁸³ The fairy’s body was perfect in shape and form, in a state of perpetual pre-pubescence, and unaffected by the ravages of life, thus echoing the general perception of Victorian women as delicate in nature and possessed of childlike qualities. As Susan Casteras notes, female fairies tend to “seem arrested in childhood or adolescence” and “full of vitality, sensuality and boldness.”⁸⁴ Because their world was one of pure fantasy, the fairies’ often-exaggerated nudity and sexual activities were excusable. As Casteras notes, “it often seems as if pictorial fairies overtly acted out what humans only covertly expressed in literature and kept under wraps in varying degrees in real-life.”⁸⁵ In their inability to mature and their sustained child-like beauty, fairies were a personification of “the Other.” Like the Victorian woman enclosed within the domestic sphere, they occupied a realm isolated from the external world. In *Land of Nod*, the fairies are intimately engaged with the sleeping woman, touching her, observing her, and thus aligning her with the Otherness of these fantastical beings. Yet underlying this frolicking world is an association with improper and risqué behavior that reveals anxieties about female power and fantasies of destructive female sexuality. This undercurrent of

⁸³Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art*, 14.

⁸⁴Susan Casteras, “Winged Fantasies: Constructions of Childhood, Innocence, Adolescence, and Sexuality in Victorian Fairy Painting,” in *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*, ed. Marilyn R. Brown (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 128.

⁸⁵Casteras, “Winged Fantasies: Constructions of Childhood, Innocence, Adolescence, and Sexuality in Victorian Fairy Painting,” 127.

anxiety regarding the Victorian woman's cultivation of spiritual power will be explored in further chapters.

Typically, the pictorial representation of the sleeping Victorian woman was multilayered and steeped in notions of class and gender identification. While the depiction of the sleeping working-class woman was a commentary on the tribulation of everyday labor, the depiction of the middle- and upper-class woman in a similar state functioned as a point of investigation into the nature of the unconscious. While ascending to the throne of the "Angel of the House," the Victorian woman had also simultaneously and paradoxically descended into the occult realm of the subconscious and the supernatural. These selective images of decorously arranged sleeping women may function superficially as reveries of beauty, but they also contain a subtext that evokes a great debate over the nature of consciousness. Such images repeatedly couple Victorian femininity with the supernatural, suggesting an inherent relationship between the two. Just as the boundaries between the supernatural and the material were blurred during this period, these images suggest the Victorian woman's perceived ability to occupy both worlds at once, granting her a privileged but also anxiety-provoking access to a type of spiritual power based purely on her gender. Commenting on Fitzgerald's fairy paintings, Bown claimed that for the artists, "dreams are truly boundary-defying; both physical and supernatural, material and immaterial." And yet, based on pictorial representation presented in this chapter, the same holds true for Victorian women. They too pass freely and seamlessly between one world to the next, their idealized virtue and beauty sustained and suspend. These images echo the period's intense scrutiny into the nature of female consciousness and reveal, pictorially, what was inaccessible to male viewers, the Victorian woman's dreams, visions and supernatural dalliance with other

realms. Nonetheless, the images of sleeping women symbolize just one iteration on the subject of the unconscious. Depictions of women hovering between life and death equally enthralled the Victorian imagination and this theme will be explored in the next chapter, revealing the period's strange association between the Victorian woman and death.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEAD AND (NEARLY) DEAD VICTORIAN WOMAN

The most passive and moribund iterations in the link between Victorian femininity and altered states of consciousness are portrayals of women who are either dead or dying. For the Victorians, death was viewed as a rite of passage rather than fatal finality and artists often used “innocent female sleepers” as an analogy for the dead, thereby blurring the distinction. Edward Burne-Jones’ *Rose Bower*, part of a four-panel series entitled *The Legend of Briar Rose*, is a salient example of the period’s fascination with sleep, death and femininity.¹ From approximately 1873 to 1890, Burne-Jones worked intermittently on the series, which presents a simplified retelling of Charles Perrault’s seventeenth-century tale “Sleeping Beauty.”² The four panels are connected by the thorny tentacles of a wild rose bush, and the first, *The Briar Wood* depicts a stoic knight at the entry of the thorny mass. The series concludes with the *Rose Bower*,

¹For a comprehensive study on the representation of Sleeping Beauties, see Béatrice Laurent, *Sleeping Beauties in Victorian Britain: Cultural, Literary, and Artistic Explorations of a Myth* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014).

²John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: The Earthly Paradise* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 138. Christian notes that Perrault first told this story in his *Contes du Temps Passe*. The story was “recast at least twice for nineteenth-century readers, first by the brothers Grimm in their *Kinder-und Hausmarchen*, secondly by Alfred Tennyson in an early poem, “The Day Dream.” It was probably in this form that Burne-Jones first encountered it.” Christian, 138. For a thorough description of this series, see also Kirsten Powell, “Edward Burne-Jones and the Legend of Briar Rose.” *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 5, no. 2 (May 1986): 15-28; and Debra N. Mancoff, “Epitaph in Avalon: Edward Burne-Jones’s Last Picture,” in *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*, ed. Margaretta Frederick Watson (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1997), 163-174.

a panel that shows the princess in a death-like slumber.³ In the unfolding narrative that fills the panels, the entire palace has succumbed to the spell's power, leaving a jumbled mass of soldiers, attendants and maidens who have also plunged into a deep sleep.⁴ In Burne-Jones' *Rose Bower* (1890) (Figure 20) the final panel, the narrative reaches a climactic moment in its depiction of the young princess. As she reclines against a large pillow, a slight smile suggests the idle and pleasant dreams of youth, while her arms rest at her side. Yet, unlike the somnambulant postures of her surrounding handmaidens, the portrayal of the young princess has an exaggerated death-like quality. Displayed on a surface that is half bier, half bed, her recumbent body seems more like a corpse than someone asleep. In stark contrast to her attendants' robust bodies, the princess's face is pale and her limbs are emaciated, as if wasted away by disease, as well as rigid and stiff, as if responding to the onset of death. Only a long but flimsy strand of transparent, gauzy fabric, which recalls a shroud, covers her emaciated body, and her delicate feet are splayed open and bare, a reference to the fact that the dead are buried without shoes. The thorny bush encloses the intimate boudoir and protects it with serpentine vines that grow around her and arch towards her feet at the foot of the bed, suggesting her imminent return to the earth. Yet, this image is equally tinged with erotic connotations. Dijkstra's discussion of "Sleeping Beauty" observes that she "too, inevitably came to be seen as symbolic of woman in her virginal state of

³Like many Victorian artists, Burne-Jones was fascinated with flower iconography and took extreme care in depicting the briar rose. See Debra Mancoff, *Flora Symbolica: Flowers in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (Munch: Prestel, 1988), 46-47.

⁴Several leading scholars have explored the symbolism of this series. See, for example, Barbara Miliaras, "Love and Death: The Function of the Grotesque in the Paintings of Edward Burne-Jones," in *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts*, ed. Liana De Girolami Cheney (New York: E. Mellen Press, c. 1992), 127-149.

sleep—her state of suspended animation and, as it were, death-in life.”⁵ In a bold break from tradition, the artist did not include the climactic moment of consummation between the knight and the princess. Commenting on his decision not to include this key moment, Burne-Jones stated, “I want it to stop with the princess asleep and to tell no more, to leave all afterwards to the invention and imagination of the people.”⁶ Consequently, this absence of the tale’s most critical moment suspends the sleeping woman in a perpetual state of virginity. Protected by thorns, she is also a flower who will never bloom to maturity. Allusions to her chastity are interwoven throughout this panel: a banner of the Virgin Mary surmounts the bed and is a powerful indication of the sleeping woman’s purity, as are the unopened white rosebuds guarded by the thornbush, while her hand is protectively placed over a sash that adorns her pelvis.⁷ Arrested in time, the Sleeping Beauty is transformed into an icon of aesthetic female perfection in this blending of death and Victorian femininity.

This chapter explores how images like Burne-Jones’ *Rose Bower* and others are part of a larger trope in which death became gender-specific in nineteenth-century art. This study establishes how this symbiosis between femininity and death arose and flourished in British and American art and how it is relevant to the focus of my examination of the representation of

⁵Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 61.

⁶Powell, 16.

⁷Powell, 20. According to the Victorian language of flowers, the white rose bud is symbolic of “being too young to love.” In Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale’s *Flora’s Interpreter*, she says of the white rose bud: “Untouched upon its thorny stem, Hangs the pale *rose* unfolding. By Hurdis.” Sarah Josepha Hale, *Flora’s Interpreter; or, The American Book of Flowers and Sentiments* (Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey & Co., 1848), 184.

languid women in altered states. This chapter focuses on providing key visual representations of dying and dead women that reinforce an overarching association between Victorian femininity and death. This investigation also provides further examples of paintings and select photographs that reflect the pervasive commingling of sleep, death and Victorian femininity. The study of the representation of death and femininity has been pursued by several leading scholars, as well as noteworthy historians of photography. Dijkstra has discussed this equation of death and sleep in the visual arts and observes that the “portrayal of women whose obvious inanition seemed to prove that sleep was death and death was sleep became a source of endless delight among late nineteenth-century painters. Images of women who were so fast asleep that they looked as if they were dead become legion.”⁸ This chapter has also been informed by modern scholar Elizabeth Bronfen; her encyclopedic examination of dead and dying women in paintings and poetry demonstrates this trope to be so ubiquitous as to qualify as its own subgenre.⁹ In addition, I establish the cultural framework that cast mourning and the rituals of death as female responsibilities, which ultimately helped pave the way for this artistic and cultural association. This section moreover considers deathbed scenes and the inclusion of the male interloper. In these images, the female figure resides somewhere between the cultural and the terrestrial. Finally, I briefly examine the “aestheticized female corpse” depicted as lying vulnerably “open” before the male spectator. I furthermore highlight the sensuality evident in even the most death-

⁸Dijkstra, 62.

⁹Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

like renderings and include representations that reinforce one of the central themes of this study: that this imagery was both gender- and class-specific.

George Cochran Lambdin's *The Last Sleep* (c. 1858) (Figure 21) demonstrates how American artists were equally fascinated with evoking the tradition of "sleepers" in their depictions of dead women. However, unlike Burne-Jones' representation of the sleeping princess in which sleep and death are more abstract and symbolic, Lambdin's *The Last Sleep* focuses on the passion, sentimentalism, and rituals of the grieving. At first glance, the female figure recalls the many images of Victorian "sleeping women" in Chapter 1. With eyes closed and serene, she lies under a rich red coverlet, her hands resting gently on her chest. Yet, the inclusion of the male shown collapsed over the woman's body, coupled with key objects placed within the darkened room, suggest that the boudoir has been transformed into a death chamber. In the background, two empty chairs, his and hers, suggest the tragic loss of marital bliss. Meanwhile, a small bouquet of what appears to be white roses, symbolic of sadness according to the Victorian language of flowers, sits at her bedside and a single bloom lies discarded at the dead woman's side.¹⁰ While Fitzgerald's *The Stuff Dreams Are Made Of*, as well other examples from Chapter 1, include a riotous cavalry of fairies presiding over the sleeping woman's bedside, here the ominous presence of the glowing angelic sculpture mounted on the wall symbolizes the state of death, not sleep. The statuette hovers, almost protectively like a guardian angel, over the recently deceased, and the silvery bed curtain is transformed into a symbolic shroud. Likewise, Lambdin alludes to death by titling the work with lines from Tennyson's "The Deserted House": "Life and

¹⁰Hale, 185.

thought / Here no longer dwell / But in a city glorious / A Great and distant city they have bought
/ A mansion incorruptible.”¹¹

Like many nineteenth-century artists, British poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti was also preoccupied with exploring this equation of death and sleep in representations of femininity. For example, Rossetti’s “My Sister’s Last Sleep,” demonstrates the coupling of death and femininity as well as simultaneously invokes the image of an entranced, yet fatally, passive sleeping woman. The narrator describes the tragic scene “She fell asleep on Christmas Eve:/ At length the ungranted shade’ of weary eyelid overweighed’d/ The pain nought else might yet relieve.”¹² The culmination of the poem coalesces to create an aesthetic moment of exquisite proportion in which the beauty of death is symbolized in the expired Victorian woman. Modern scholar James G. Nelson discusses how in her “swoon of whiteness,” the dying woman is “symbolic of the fate of beauty in a fallen world.” Nelson discusses how this image likewise anticipated the Victorian’s fascination with the “dead woman”: “In the whiteness of her sleep

¹¹Lambdin included Tennyson’s lines when the painting was first exhibited in 1858 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. It was later shown at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867 without the poem. Yet even without the poem, the work stirred emotional responses from viewers. For example, leading Victorian American critic Henry Tuckerman provided a passionate narration: “The husband, utterly crushed with grief, has flung himself across the bed. His face is not seen, but we can imagine its pallor, even as in fancy we can hear the choking sobs with which his bosom heaves.” Charles C. Eldredge, *Tales from the Easel: American Narrative Paintings from Southeastern Museum, circa 1800-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 59-60.

¹²Joseph Black et al. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Victorian Era*, 2nd ed. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012), 513.

and the morbid pleasure she affords her brother, the sister looks forward to the obsession and fascination with the death of beauty and the aesthetic state of mind.”¹³

The inclination of nineteenth-century American and British viewers to associate women with death was largely due to shared cultural assumptions. In an era that predated antibiotics, death was a far more frequent and often premature companion. Thus, Victorian customs and rituals of death indicate its intense emotional and psychic significance. Late twentieth-century scholar Pat Jalland has contributed a great deal to the study of the Victorian “cult of death.” Her discussion focuses, in part, on the influence of religion and the importance of achieving a “good death.”¹⁴ She writes, “Religion played a powerful role in the lives of most middle-and upper-class Victorians...the idea of the good Christian death was still exceptionally powerful in the 1850.” However, as she notes, by the 1870s the rise of spiritualism, cremation, and the decline in Christian faith led to a general shift in attitude. Yet, as this chapter reveals, throughout the mid- and even early twentieth century a fascination in images of dead women continued.

Mourning was marketed to the female consumer and became yet another sphere in which she became the pillar of the family and home, ultimately shouldering the responsibility for managing and enforcing its stringent rules and etiquette.¹⁵ Modern scholar Michael Wheeler

¹³James G. Nelson, “Aesthetic Experience and Rossetti’s ‘My Sister’s Sleep.’” *Victorian Poetry* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1969): 154-158, at 156.

¹⁴See Jalland’s chapter titled “Victorian Death and Its Decline: 1850-1918,” in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 230-255.

¹⁵For example, in an excerpt from Mrs. Elizabeth Stone’s diary, written in 1858, she laments that mourning in England was “regulated . . . by a power hardly less stringent than those laws by which the royalty and *noblesse* of France used to be governed.” James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000), 196.

discusses the evidence for Victorians' preoccupation with the subject and specifically the merchandise that was tailored for the Victorian woman—e.g., anthologies of poems for mourners, fiction with deathbed scenes, mourning costumes and jewelry, as well as elaborate plumes and other trappings of the Victorian funeral.¹⁶ Wheeler suggests that, considered together, what emerges during the Victorian period is a shared language by both Victorian men and women that points to a measure of social and intellectual homogeneity.¹⁷ By the mid- to late nineteenth century, a dramatic increase in the rigidity and complexity of mourning rituals had developed.¹⁸ Etiquette books marketed to female readers reflected this shift and devoted at least one chapter outlining the minute details of managing these rituals, including funeral or wake invitations, appropriate apparel, and proper behavior.¹⁹ In her article on American mourning practices, modern scholar Martha Pike notes that the United States appropriated many of its customs and much of its etiquette from the English.²⁰ The association of Victorian women with the “cult of death” began in the very early stages of girlhood through various art classes that

¹⁶Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1994), 28. For further reading, see also James Stevens Curl's chapter “Funerals, Ephemera, and Mourning” in Curl, 194-221.

¹⁷Wheeler, 28.

¹⁸Modern scholar Martha Pike likewise notes how the rigidity and complexity of mourning etiquette and rituals described in etiquette books “increased substantially during the latter half of the nineteenth century.” Martha Pike, “In Memory Of: Artifacts Relating to Mourning in Nineteenth-century America,” in *Ritual and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 306.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 307.

²⁰In Pike's study of mourning rituals, she notes, “Passages and even entire chapters of English etiquette books were published in American etiquette books.” Pike, 311-312.

included the creation of memorial pictures, either with watercolors on paper or embroidered on silk.²¹ Likewise, Victorian women often wore memorial “jewelry” fashioned from human hair of the deceased. Intricate confections of hair, usually in the form of wreaths or floral arrangements, were also created and graced the interiors of the parlor, the female sanctuary within the domestic sphere. As Pike notes, however, when it came to men, few rules or regulations applied. While women donned “widow’s weeds,” at times wearing them throughout their lives, mourning requirements did not substantially alter men’s clothing.²² At the very most, widowers wore dark gray clothes, black gloves and a hatband or an armband. Moreover, while male mourners freely navigated and engaged with society, women were expected to behave as virtual outcasts and refuse any and all invitations to leave home for many months if not years.²³

The fact that for the middle and upper class Victorian death usually occurred at home and not at a hospital further linked women as the caretaker to the dead and dying. Death therefore was an intimate experience associated with everyday life, and because the dying typically remained home throughout their decline, the proximity of death was an undeniable reality of daily existence. Jalland’s thorough examination of Victorians’ attitude toward dying, death and grieving highlights the emphasis placed on the Victorian woman’s caregiving responsibilities.²⁴

²¹Pike, 297.

²²Pike, 310. Jalland also discusses how Victorian men were not forced to adhere to rigid and formalized codes and their dress was not substantially altered. Jalland, 301.

²³Ibid.

²⁴For example, Jalland notes how medical professionals expected women to be responsible for the nursing of the sick and dying. According to one Victorian doctor, nursing required “the most constant close unwearyingly waiting” coupled with “untiring thoughtfulness about them,” characteristics considered by all accounts as inherently female. Jalland, 98.

As Jalland notes, nursing was considered a “natural” role for women, and it was presumed they would provide an optimally comfortable transition from this world to the next. *Woman’s* (1863), a triptych by George Elgar Hicks, is just one of the many visual examples that reinforced this role of self-sacrificing caregiver within the domestic sphere. *Woman’s Mission: Comfort of Old Age* (1862) (Figure 22), the final image in this sentimental series, firmly inscribes the woman’s role as the individual responsible for the ailing’s emotional and physical health. Here a young woman tenderly offers a glass of water to an ailing aged male. The delicate, yet demure, lace piping along her all-white dress contrasts with her faintly rose-colored cheeks as she leans attentively towards the man, who returns her gaze appreciatively.

The Victorian’s familiarity with death is moreover underscored in British and American post-mortem photographs that repeatedly pose the deceased as if sleeping. Photography also played an important role in establishing this relationship between femininity and death. Tableaux vivants were another way in which dead and dying women were represented in Victorian photography. The Victorian fascination with tableaux vivants, literally translated as “living pictures” is often overlooked, but reflect importantly how this association with femininity and death was so deeply seeded in Victorian culture. Considered an intellectual pastime, tableaux vivants often featured figures posed, silent and immobile in imitation of either well-known works of arts or pivotal scenes from history or literature. Modern scholar Mary Chapman observes that the Victorian woman was the central narrative focus of tableaux vivants and it was the “silenced” and “suicidal” image of femininity became their most popular theme.²⁵ For example, British

²⁵Mary Chapman, “Living Pictures: Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor: Michigan: University

amateur photographer's Ronald Leslie Melville's album includes several images of women where the corpse-like female body is posed in a states of rest or sleep. In one provocative untitled photograph (c. 1870s) (Figure 23) the image stirs an unsettling morbidity and suggests intent more focused on eternal stillness and preserved beauty. Here, a small bouquet of lilies, the hallmark adornments associated with the tragic figure, is prominently displayed within the crook of the model's arm. The scene is stark and austere; the woman's hair is tamed, parted down the middle and carefully arranged around the pillow. Supporting her head is a dark, somber pillow, utterly void of embellishment or decoration. Likewise, the simple gown, reminiscent of a shroud, is equally severe and tucked tightly over the model's naked feet, its material stretched to capacity to connote attenuation. The long fold of the gown stretches into rigid pleats that connote entrapment, immobility and passivity. The snowy white gown, symbolic of her virginal state, glows against a dark background that emphasizes martyrdom, while the dramatic cropping is claustrophobic, conjuring fears of dank tombs and catacombs. The total effect is one that recalls medieval stone tomb sculptures. Likewise, the taut covering of the feet, is both reminiscent of postmortem photographs of the period well as that of a deathbed scene.

Perhaps one of the most potent examples of the reclining woman within Melville's staged photographs are his multiple representations of Elaine from Alfred Lord Tennyson Idyll's of the King.²⁶ In photographing Elaine, Melville was participating in a reigning cultural fad. In total

Microfilms International, 1993), 11. Chapman states that the predominance of this theme suggests "the codes of silence and immobility that govern tableaux vivants reflect an important cultural fantasy." Ibid.

²⁶Given the scope of this chapter, I will touch only briefly upon the popularity of Arthurian legends during the nineteenth century. To read more, see Christine Poulson, *The Quest*

Melville created three versions of Elaine for his amateur albums, reflecting both his, as well as the period's, fascination with this female subject.

Like many others, Melville chose to photograph the most frequently illustrated point of Tennyson's poem, Elaine's deathbed, a choice that highlights the period's predilection with the romantic notion of preserved, virginal death. As modern scholar Christine Poulson notes, "Paintings of the dead and dying Lady of Shalott and Elaine bear a relation to this Victorian obsession with commemoration of the dead and to the tradition of deathbed art."²⁷ In 1871, Melville exhibited a version of Elaine entitled *Broken Lilies* (Figure 24) at the International Exhibition in London.²⁸ In the photograph a woman collapses in a fit of mourning and holds in her hand vines of ivy, perhaps symbolic of Elaine's fidelity to Lancelot. The deceased Elaine is shown with her head propped up by a pillow, her long, wavy hair cascading down the makeshift funeral bier. The female model playing Elaine has a lily in her hair and wears a voluminous white gown that extends from head to toe. Only her hand peeks out of its folds, clasping a second lily to her breast. As a symbol of purity and virginity, the bloom is an overt reference to her position as the "lily maid of Astolat" and also signifies the Virgin Mary.²⁹ The image is a bold amalgamation of contrasting patterns and textures; the female mourner is outfitted in an eye-

for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art, 1840-1920 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

²⁷Poulson, 191.

²⁸See Marta Weiss's chapter "Staged photography in the Victorian album" in *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre*, ed. Lori Pauli (London: Merrell Publisher, 2006), 96. This image is part of an album located at the Getty Centre: "Lady Middleton as 'Elaine' and Sophy L. M. in Tableau Vivant from 'Idylls of the King' from R. Leslie Melville album, dated 1871."

²⁹According to Hale, a white lily is symbolic of purity and beauty. Hale, 114.

catching striped headdress that envelops her entire body, while Elaine's pillow is covered in a material of Oriental inspiration. When the work appeared at the International Exhibition, *The British Journal* was apparently flummoxed by Melville's subject: "We are left in some doubt as to the story intended to be told by the production. Of course it is a tale of woe, although we have not discovered the point. A female form lies recumbent on a couch, but whether the lady is dead, slumbering, or merely studying the botany in connection with some flowers placed on her bosom, we are a little uncertain."³⁰ Despite the critics' confusion and apparent failure to decipher the subject, Melville's inclusion of critical elements like the lily, which Tennyson describes as "set in her hand . . . all her bright hair streaming down," clearly shows allegiance to the original text. Recent scholars such as Marta have also suggested that the ambiguity of Melville's tableau may have been intentional, as Tennyson's poem describes Elaine in a similarly "ambiguous" state hovering between sleep and death: "that clear-featured face / Was lovely, for she did not seem dead, / But fast asleep, and lay as though she smiled."³¹ Moreover, the reviewer's apparent struggle to recognize the image as one of sleep or death invites a reading that would have allowed the viewer to envision a young woman, perhaps an invalid, lying in bed. Although the concept of death was readily familiar to the Victorians, the notion of gazing at the deathbed of a young woman would have indeed been considered somewhat gruesome and unsettling. In order to temper the scene's morbidity, artists included elements that alluded to the female's boudoir and the notion of sleep.

³⁰Review of *International Exhibition in British Journal of Photography*, May 1871, 216.

³¹Weiss, 98.

Beyond the realm of poetry, Victorian women were associated in a variety of ways culturally with death and dying, but it was the image of the dead or dying woman within British and American fine art that emerged as one of the most potent icons of Victorian femininity. The nineteenth century was awash with pallid images of dead or dying women that were simultaneously romanticized with a tinge of sentimentality and even overt sexuality. For the Victorians, the association between femininity and death was tightly interwoven and kept vividly alive in countless images depicting the long drawn-out suffering of women on their deathbeds.³² Joseph Noel Paton's *The Dead Woman* (1850) (Figure 25) depicts a man mourning the loss of his beloved, collapsing in grief at the loved one's bedside. The tragic moment takes place in a sumptuous interior with a sublime mountainous skyline and one twinkling star framed by architectural arches. The dead woman is covered in a white shroud and posed as if peacefully asleep, with her hair undone and a slight smile on her lips. As the crestfallen man wilts at her bedside, his cape rumpled and a book haphazardly discarded nearby, the viewer understands that the moment of death has just arrived. The evening setting further deepens the depressing finale.

Depictions of Victorian women in altered states and anticipating death suggest how this moment of transformation was infused with sensuality. In her study of the matrix of sex and death within Victorian literature, modern scholar Regina Barreca observes how, "Approaching death, a character could . . . achieve a heightened bodily, even sensual awareness" and undergo

³²In modern scholar Garrett Stewart's study of death and dying in the Victorian arts, he comments, "Some characters must die in any period of novel writing. As everyone allows, characters die more often, more slowly and more vocally in the Victorian age than ever before or since. " While his study is limited to the Victorian novel, the same holds true for the visual arts, which likewise indulged in emotionally charged deathbed scenes, especially those of women. Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences: Styles of Dying in British Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 8.

an “ecstatic, profound and epiphanic transformation which, under other more favorable circumstances, would certainly appear orgasmic in nature.”³³ Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s iconic *Beata Beatrix* (1864-1870) (Figure 26) depicts the woman’s passage from one realm to the other. As Elizabeth Prettejohn recently noted, *Beata Beatrix* was inspired by the closing lines of Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, and the title alludes to Dante’s deceased beloved Beatrix. Rossetti explained this relationship in a letter to the painter’s first owner:

“She sees through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world, as expressed in the last words of the *Vita Nuova*.”³⁴ The title, *Beata Beatrix* or “blessed Beatrice,” derives from those “last words”—in Rossetti’s translation, “that blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on His countenance qui est per Omnia saecula benedictus” (“who is blessed throughout all ages”).³⁵

Significantly, this image not only eulogizes Dante’s beloved Beatrix, but also Rossetti’s beloved wife Elizabeth Siddal, a Victorian woman equally renowned for her beauty. Rossetti painted *Beata Beatrix* shortly after her tragic death and depicts her moving along the threshold of death, thereby symbolizing both life and the anticipation of death. Like many images of women in altered states, Beatrix emanates privileged foresight into the vast unknown. Awaiting metamorphosis, she anticipates leaving her physical and earthly confinement. Her head lifts slightly and her eyes are closed, suggesting entrancement, as if she is communing with the heavenly light that bathes her visage in gold. The image conflates sensuality and spiritualism, as Beatrix’s lips are shown provocatively parted and her hair is unbound, streaming magnificently

³³Regina Barreca, *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1990), 7.

³⁴Cited by Virginia Surtees in Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 81.

³⁵Quoted by Rossetti (1911) in Prettejohn, 81.

down her back. In the background, a sundial reminds us of the inexorable passage of time that brings death to all. The subject's hands are upturned and folded, expectantly, as a dove, symbolic of the Holy Spirit and imminent death, descends from above.³⁶ Clasped in its beak is an opium poppy, which, as modern scholar Andrew Wilton notes, is a traditional symbol of sleep, dreams and death. In this context, however, it is also a reference to the manner of Lizzie's death from an overdose of laudanum as well as her apparent addition to the opiate.³⁷ With its rapturous mix of beauty, sexuality, and spirituality, *Beata Beatrix* provides a compelling frame of reference for an examination of the cultural ideal that linked Victorian femininity with death. Moreover, with its references to illness, drug consumption and death, this image demonstrates how some images in this study do not fall easily into any of the six categories described but rather allude to various states of altered consciousness.

Siddal's spiritual allure inspired not only Rossetti, but also Sir John Everett Millais, who depicted her as the tragic *Ophelia* (1852) (Figure 27). In this image, the dying Ophelia, much like *Beata Beatrix*, is shown in transition, her hands also upraised to the heavens, beckoning and welcoming the moment of passage. As in *Beata Beatrix*, the subject's eyes are closed and she appears to be communing with the great beyond. In both works the model is in an altered state of consciousness, yet behind the model's silence lurk spiritual and mystical powers that reference a type of control and transformation. While the trance-like states represented in this chapter are physically passive and inert, they suggest the Victorian woman's ability, via altered states, to

³⁶Andrew Wilton, Robert Upstone, et al., *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910* (London: Tate Gallery, 1997), 155.

³⁷*Ibid.*

gather into herself both life and death, to act as a type of self-creator. The potential for power is a central theme that becomes more explicit in the final chapter on women and Spiritualism.

While deathbed scenes such as Lambdin's *The Last Sleep* exemplify an overt sentimentality, the inclusion of the male presence, usually in the form of a bereaved betrothed or husband, can also dramatically shift the dynamic and tone of the scene to one that is sexually charged. In these images, the grip of death tinges dying or dead women with an unearthly eroticism that places them on display. Terminal illness transpired in the Victorian bedroom, and the passions of death played out in the bed, already ripe with sensual connotations, where the transformation of death was often equated with either the passions of desire or sleep. Just as images focused on the sentimentality of deathbed scenes, veiled sensuality also infused many of these pictorial moments. As previously mentioned, the drama of mortal illness played out in the intimacy of the bedroom, which imbued the moment of death with a modicum of eroticism. Barreca, notes that both are ecstatic "out of body" experiences in which the person is "separated from the conventions of the everyday."³⁸ This "otherness" and displacement outside of mainstream society is enhanced pictorially, as well as in literature, by the proactive cocoon-like bed-curtains that create a sense of "looking in" from the outside. According to Barreca by, "{t}he lushness of these scenes, with the curtain drawn against the light, the highly charged emotions of the spectators (not to mention the participant), the mystery of the moment of death; all these echo the sexual act."³⁹ Barreca also notes that "terms such as 'passion',

³⁸Wilton and Upstone, 6.

³⁹Ibid.

‘consummation’, and ‘ecstasy’ serve efficiently as bridges between the two categories of meaning, connecting sex and death through a shared and yet particular language.”⁴⁰

A compelling example of this sexualized deathbed scene is British artist’s Frank Dicksee’s *The Crisis* (1891) (Figure 28). As this dark drama unfolds, a woman lies in the throes of death as bed curtains obscure and shadows a face that is slightly raised and pressed against the pillow. Her mouth is slightly open, as if gasping and clinging to the very last moments of life. Next to her a man, perhaps her husband or a doctor, sits and leans heavily against the edge of the bed. The woman’s hands lie face down on the bedcover and her arms are wide open, leaving her body exposed to male visitor, whose hand is raised ponderously against his face. Here, the male’s gaze is not only sexual but equally as so medical. Unlike Lambdin’s *The Last Sleep*, whose male protagonist, overcome by grief, physically collapses and averts his eyes from the deceased, the male figure in *The Crisis* is composed, and his demeanor is one that is both scrutinizing and penetrating.

In a recent important article, Bridget L. Goodbody discussed the medical gaze as it relates to American artist Thomas Eakins’ *The Agnew Clinic* (1889) (Figure 29), a commissioned painting commemorating the noted Victorian surgeon Dr. D. Hayes Agnew in the process of a mastectomy.⁴¹ Although the female in this image is not necessarily deceased, her supine body is reminiscent of a corpse due to her anesthetized state of unconsciousness. This painting has been thoroughly discussed by many leading scholars, but for this chapter discussion will focus only on

⁴⁰Wilton and Upstone, 5.

⁴¹Bridget L. Goodbody, “The Present Opprobrium of Surgery: ‘The Agnew Clinic’ and Nineteenth-Century Representations of Cancerous Female Breasts,” *American Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 31-51, at 33.

how it relates to the medical gaze.⁴² This painting depicts Agnew, dressed in white and holding a scalpel, as he stands in an amphitheater explaining the procedure as it nears completion. In the audience, male students are shown listening and scrutinizing the “center of attraction”: an unconscious female whose body is naked and prostrate. Goodbody argues that this painting functions as a “marker of a broad context of ideas circulated and appropriated by the medical profession,” specifically those related to the Victorian woman.⁴³ During the Victorian period, the belief that a woman’s reproductive organs rendered her especially vulnerable to disease, including breast cancer, was entrenched.⁴⁴ Goodbody specifically invokes Michael Foucault’s theory of the “medical gaze and glance” to reveal how this demeanor functions as a subordination of the unconsciousness female body in Eakins’ *Agnew Clinic*.⁴⁵ As Goodbody explains, Foucault coined the term “medical gaze” to explain the medical profession’s historically application of this authoritative device “to create an apparently seamless system of knowledge.”⁴⁶ The medical gaze became a systematic way of defining and controlling disease.⁴⁷ As Goodbody asserts, in a profession that was primarily male, this “new homosocial order, the cornerstone of clinical medicine, could be said to have built itself upon the gaze of the male

⁴²See, for example, Amy Werbel, *Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁴³Goodbody, 34.

⁴⁴The Victorian cultural belief that women were inherently prone to illness will be fully addressed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

⁴⁵Goodbody, 33.

⁴⁶Goodbody, 36.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

surgeon.”⁴⁸ During a period in which medical and scientific technology was limited, both repetitive clinical observation and verbal description were essential in the transference of knowledge from teacher to pupil. They were also attempts to define a disease and make it real.⁴⁹

In this painting specifically, much like the male protagonist in *The Crisis*, Dr. Agnew has an air of refinement and professionalism. His gaze implies equanimity and suggests mastery of his profession as well as mastery over the female body. With his scalpel in hand, he is self-possessed and the master of the ceremony, directing students’ visual attention towards the female body.⁵⁰ Here, the amphitheater’s occupants apply the medical gaze, and, with the exception of the female nurse, all reflect the male hierarchy of medicine. Goodbody explains the inclusion of the nurse, noting that nursing was historically identified as an extension of idealized femininity, which thereby “legitimized” her participation.⁵¹ Yet, pointedly, her sexuality and femininity have been neutered and desexualized.⁵² The medical gaze is therefore not only about defining the disease of cancer; as Goodbody explains, when directed pictorially upon the naked, vulnerable female body it becomes part of the “doctor-over-patient hierarchy, a way to “manage the patient’s body for her.”⁵³

⁴⁸Goodbody, 39.

⁴⁹Goodbody, 36.

⁵⁰Goodbody, 39.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Goodbody, 37-38.

The depiction of the male medical and sexual gaze upon the unconscious female is also evident in Austrian artist Gabriel Von Max's *The Anatomist* (1869) (Figure 30), another demonstration of what Dijkstra calls the nineteenth century's "morbid eroticism."⁵⁴ Dijkstra discusses the period's obsession: "Whatever the narrative excuse, representations of beautiful women safely dead remained the late nineteenth-century painter's favorite way of depicting the transcendent spiritual value of passive female sacrifice."⁵⁵ In the image of the dead woman, the long, drawn-out suffering of the Victorian female has concluded and the undercurrent of inherent eroticism and sexuality has become even more explicit. In this painting, the medical and sexualized gaze is unmistakable and the moment depicted is one of desire and titillating hesitation as the physician pulls away the shroud to reveal the beautiful young female corpse. Modern scholar Elisabeth Bronfen examines the nexus between aesthetics, femininity, and death in Von Max's *The Anatomist*. In this image a doctor is shown in a pose similar to that found in Burton's *Sleep* and Dicksee's *The Crisis*. He, too, rests his chin upon his hand and examines the woman's nude body with a studious, thoughtful gaze. Indeed, Von Max's image invokes the medical gaze, but in comparison to the *Agnew Clinic*, the interaction is more intimate and perhaps more salacious, as it is solely between the physician and the female cadaver. In the shadowy background are a multitude of instruments and devices, yet the young and beautiful female corpse immediately seizes the viewer's gaze. As Bronfen observes, "only when the painting is seen in connection with its title can the semantic coding of the male figure and his

⁵⁴Dijkstra, 54.

⁵⁵Dijkstra, 50.

enterprise be fixed as that of an anatomist preparing for a dissection of post mortem.”⁵⁶ Expired in the prime of life, the beautiful young woman has streaming hair that is exquisitely arranged on the table, and her alabaster skin, red lips, and peaceful countenance retain their youthfulness. Though she has died, her beauty is miraculously suspended and not yet in a state of decay. Bronfen elaborates on this “arrested” moment between the beauty of the female corpse and the anticipation of “destruction” enacted by the dissection of her flesh.⁵⁷ Here, as the anatomist pulls away the shroud, the young woman is shown in a “arrested state,” on the brink of womanhood, an icon of beautiful perfection. Likewise, Burne-Jones’ *Sleeping Beauty* is presented on a similar platform and covered in a nearly transparent shroud. Bronfen elaborates on this moment: “On the one hand, the soul has departed from the woman’s body, but her beauty has not begun to disappear, as it will in the natural process of decomposition. On the other hand, the anatomist has not yet begun dissection, in the process of which he will cut into and destroy the lines of her perfectly shaped body.”⁵⁸ Similar to *The Agnew Clinic*, the woman is exposed and vulnerable as the doctor gently raises the white shroud to reveal her naked body. The explicit eroticism and voyeurism are indicative of the appeal that the deceased female form held in the imagination of many Victorians. Moreover, the revelation of the dead woman’s naked breast recalls that of the anaesthetized female patient in Eakins’ *The Agnew Clinic*. In both *The Agnew Clinic* and *The Anatomist*, the bloodiness of the event, one that led to death and the other surgical, has been

⁵⁶Bronfen, 5.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

erased and concealed.⁵⁹ Likewise, in both works the female body has been fragmented to various degrees in the foreground, and the healthy, perfectly formed breasts are both fetishized and aestheticized. Goodbody discusses this commingling of the medical and erotic gaze and suggests that the display of the breast “lends a voyeuristic element to the painting, revealing that the desire for knowledge and mastery through the sight is intimately bound up with sexuality.”⁶⁰

There is further evidence of how inextricably bound the medical and sexual gaze are in Victorian art, as demonstrated by continental artist Johann Heinrich Hasselhort’s chalk drawing, which is descriptively titled *The Dissection of a Young, Beautiful Woman Directed by J. Ch. G. Lucae (1814-1885) in Order to Determine the Ideal Female Proportions* (Figure 31). The unsettling title suggests that only through death can perfect femininity be determined. This image depicts the physician, Lucae, surrounded by men, perhaps his colleagues, who are scrutinizing an outstretched naked female body, a scene that recalls *The Agnew Clinic*. Here, too, the leading physician, Lucae, is shown in the act of instructing while holding an instrument of his profession, perhaps a scald, as he peels a fold of skin from the dead woman’s body. In this drawing, the representation of the female form is arguably even more graphic and morbid, as the entire body is on display, including her genitalia, and half of her skull lies on a tray. A light shines brightly, like the one in *The Agnew Clinic*, symbolic of medical knowledge and mastery. The surgeon is shown at the moment of pulling the flesh away from the female cadaver to examine its interior. This macabre observation recalls Goodbody’s discussion of the medical gaze, which also functions to see through the surface of the patient’s body, providing a further level of domination

⁵⁹Goodbody makes this point in relation to Eakins’s *Agnew Clinic*. Goodbody, 49.

⁶⁰Goodbody, 45.

and control.⁶¹ Meanwhile, a bearded man looms over the operating table, his gaze fixed on the naked woman. As he leans forward, his knuckles press upon a book that sits upon the surgical table, exerting physical, as well as hierarchal, domination over the unconscious Victorian woman. In the background a man also assumes a powerful masculine stance while smoking a phallic symbol, a pipe that he clenches in his teeth as he scrutinizes the body. At the same time, a more apprehensive man stands at his side, his eyes averted. Eerily and gruesomely, a skeleton, its bony hands positioned with palms up, hovers over the beautiful female corpse, a foreboding premonition of this procedure's culmination.

Thus, with astonishing frequency the correlation between femininity and the dead female played out in all facets of art—not only in painting, but also in the period's novels, poetry, music, and theatre—ultimately ingraining it in the public psyche. The Victorian taste for the macabre in this triumvirate of death, femininity and art is exemplified in a famous quotation from Edgar Allen Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846): "the death, then of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world. . . ."⁶² In modern scholar Beth Ann Bassein's examination of the links between women and death in Western thought and literature, she describes how the aestheticization of female death attracted a wide-range of artist and how Poe's morbid sentiment resonated with many Victorians.⁶³ For example, Dante Gabriel

⁶¹Goodbody, 37.

⁶²Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. G. R. Thompson (New York: Norton, 2004), 680.

⁶³In Bassein's chapter titled "Poe's Most Poetic Subject," she discusses the influence of Poe's poetic expression and attempts to explain why he linked women and death. She specifically discusses the impact Poe had on such artists as Rossetti as well as Baudelaire. Poe expressed a similar sentiment in his highly influential and controversial "Flowers of Evil." Beth

Rossetti, who, when setting out to write the poem “Blessed Damozel,” stated that he had to go beyond Poe’s treatment of death and grief on earth, that he had “to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved ones in heaven.”⁶⁴ In addition, Bassein discusses the influence of Poe’s poetic expression on nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire. His infamous *Fleurs de Mal (Flowers of Evil)*, published in 1857, obsessively evokes the association of women with death. As Dijkstra noted, in this poem, the French poem invokes the “sensuous woman” just as much as dangerous “harpy,” thereby revealing the contradiction both the beautiful, but potentially dangerous Victorian women.⁶⁵ The age was saturated with this morbid yet idealized notion of the long-suffering beauty lying on her deathbed, a pre-occupation that also developed in well-read popular fiction like Oliver Wendell Holmes’ *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*. Published in 1857 as a three-part essay for the *Atlantic Monthly*, it is a work in which the author passionately declares his hunger for “a woman true as Death. A woman, upon whose first real lie which works from the heart outward she should be tenderly chloroformed into a better world, where she could have an angel for a governess, and feed on strange fruits which . . . make her all over again, even to her bones and marrow.”⁶⁶ This alluring marriage of women to

Ann Bassein, “Poe’s Most Poetic Subject,” in *Women and Death: Linkages in Western Thought and Literature* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), 47.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Dijkstra, 233-234.

⁶⁶*The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, written by O. W. Holmes, was printed in monthly installments for the *Atlantic Monthly* beginning in November 1857 and lasting until October 1858. The essays proved to be incredibly popular and were eventually published in book form, with many editions thereafter. O. W. Holmes, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table: Every Man His Own Boswell* (London: Ward Lock, 1865), 243.

death in both literature and the fine arts created a cultural nexus, or attitude, that barely camouflaged the male sexual desire underpinning it.

Noticeably absent from this trope is the image of the dead working-class Victorian woman. However, whether a lady or a prostitute, both are rendered fallen, comatose or worse. British artist G. F. Watts' *Found Drowned* (c. 1848-1850)

(Figure 32) is one example and depicts a gruesome scene of a female corpse that has washed up on the banks of the Thames River. The body is framed by the arches of the Waterloo Bridge, a site that, as modern scholar Marks Bills notes, Victorian viewers would have immediately recognized as a place where countless women had committed suicide. This landmark was made even more famous by Thomas Hood's *The Bridge of Sighs*.⁶⁷ Yet, while images of a beautiful, nameless dead women, such as *The Anatomist*, are laced with strong sexual overtones, *Found Drowned* was intentionally meant to provoke sympathy and highlight the grim plight of countless women.⁶⁸ While previous images depicted dead or dying women enshrined within the domestic setting, this image locates the dead woman within a vast city space, her body exposed to the harsh elements of the cold night and her body, forgotten and nameless, still half immersed in the freezing water of the Thames. A single star shines above the city and highlights her body, which is outstretched to form a crucifix. Her lifeless hand contains a chain with a heart-shaped locket, a possible indication of her status as a fallen woman. Unlike the feeble and nubile body of Burne-Jones' sleeping princess, the dead woman's corpse suggests

⁶⁷Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant, eds. *G. F. Watts: Victorian Visionary: Highlights from the Watts Gallery Collection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 114.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

her maturity, enhanced by the drenched material of the dress, which outlines her fully formed breasts and reveals her status as a working-class woman. Girlhood has long since passed and the woman is presented as one who has weathered a hard life of physical labors. Here, the woman's arms, rather than lying listlessly at her side, are positioned to form a strong diagonal line, and the clinging fabric highlights their sinewy musculature and substantial mass. The virginal white garments worn by Burne-Jones' sleeping princess and others are replaced with a rust or dirt-colored day-dress, like those worn by housemaids, and the folds of the material seem to gather at her abdomen, perhaps a subtle reference to an unexpected pregnancy. The dress is adorned with a simple cream ruffle, which tightly encircles her neck and runs down the middle of her torso, eerily resembling a rope and further alluding to the possibility of suicide. The woman's illuminated face is harshly rendered and seems almost androgynous; her nose is angular and pronounced, and her hair pools unattractively around her broad forehead. *Found Drowned* sweeps away any romanticization of death and boldly contrasts with depictions of youthful bourgeois women who, in their deaths, were deemed icons of perfection.

John Collier's *The Death of Albine* (c. 1895) (Figure 33) underscores the period's morbid and disturbing fascination with the demise of pre-adolescent females. Modern scholar Leslie Fiedler discusses this Victorian obsession with the "pre-pubescent corpse": "The only safe woman is a dead woman; but even she, if young and beautiful, is only half safe, as any American knows, recalling the necrophilia of Edgar Allan Poe. The only *safe*, safe female is a pre-adolescent girl dying or dead."⁶⁹ Like Von Max's *The Anatomist*, *The Death of Albine* is also invested with sensuality and eroticism. Here, however, no male interloper is present, but his

⁶⁹Quoted by Fiedler in Poulson, 195.

presence is implied, as the female body lies fully exposed on a bed and her arms are folded upon her chest, as if she were asleep. While Lambdin's *The Last Sleep* also invokes the notion of the "dead sleeping woman," his rendition is inspirational, and lachrymose sentiment has been replaced with overt sensuality. In contrast, *The Death of Albine* supplants the domestic bedchamber with an interior much like a boudoir. It is decorated with elaborate, gaudy drapes and has an ornate bed frame with undulating curves that echo the sensual outline of the dead female body. In his Academy Notes for 1895, Henry Blackburn wrote enthusiastically "a warm light suffuses the picture and falls upon the red flowers and satin draperies of the bed."⁷⁰ In *Idols of Perversity*, modern scholar Dijkstra discusses this painting as "a striking expression of the erotic ambiguity of the Victorian ideal of passive womanhood—the dead woman—indicating how easily painterly homage to feminine self-sacrifice could shift toward a necrophilia preoccupation with the erotic potential of woman when in a state of virtually guaranteed passivity."⁷¹ A literal hothouse of pungent fully bloomed roses, suggestive of carnal love, adorns the bed and surrounds the young, nubile dead woman, trailing to the bedside table and down the edge of the bed. Emanating a feast of olfactory delights, the roses surround and direct the gaze to the barely clad female body. Albine's right leg is slightly raised to highlight the ripe, soft contours of her belly and loin. Her diaphanous gown intensifies the voyeuristic sensuality of the image by affording a glimpse of her voluptuous thigh and delicate feet. Even in the most extreme states of unconsciousness, Albine's body pulses ironically with sexuality, her beauty and allure heighten and grow in death. In this complete state of death, her arrested state not only symbolizes

⁷⁰Dijkstra, 58.

⁷¹Ibid.

physical perfection, but also that her sexuality will never blossom to become a powerful, and potential intimidating and threatening force.

This chapter demonstrates how the dialectic between women and death was one of the most influential patterns in Victorian art. The image of the dead or dying woman demonstrates how varied the trope of women in altered physical and mental states was within Victorian art. In each example, the woman displays some element and degree of mental and physical depletion—the most extreme being the female corpse—and demonstrates the ultimate perfection. Poulson observes that these types of images in death “have become a Sleeping Beauty who can never be wakened, symbols of perfect passivity.”⁷² The next chapter, on tuberculosis, builds upon the central theme of images depicting women accessing spiritual realms through their anticipation of death.

⁷²Poulson, 195.

CHAPTER 3

THE FEMALE CONSUMPTIVE

As has been demonstrated, the cult of death permeated everyday Victorian life, and images of women either dead or expiring were firmly entrenched in the Victorian imagination. Yet, under this cloud of aesthetic morbidity, it was tuberculosis and the “beauty” of the dying consumptive that became the perfect expression of the Victorian artistic climate’s conflation of femininity, death and altered states of consciousness. This chapter examines the female consumptive in British and American art. Because consumption was considered fatal, the sufferer has much in common with representations of dead and dying women. Although the female consumptive is often shown upright, nevertheless she is represented as otherworldly, physically portraying a wan and death-like aesthetic commingled with tragic beauty while also exhibiting a complex but vacuous psychological state. Her fate was inevitable, and thus through her anticipation of this inevitability, she was depicted as occupying another realm. This chapter focuses on how the malady was culturally perceived as a “spiritual disease” and also on how the medical discourse of the period helped to shape the depiction and perception of the female consumptive in Victorian paintings and photography. Significantly, the titles of the images selected do not overtly reference the disease, yet the symptoms of consumption were readily familiar and easily identifiable to Victorian viewers.

This chapter explains how Victorians came to view tuberculosis as a singularly female disease and as a metaphor for the perceived delicacy, sensitivity and spirituality of the Victorian woman. Recent scholarship has explored in depth the connection between consumption and

Victorian femininity. For example, in *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination*, modern scholar Kathleen Byrne discusses how Victorians pathologized tuberculosis as feminine and how the ailment garnered its distinction as the most spiritual of all diseases.¹ Byrne also questions both how and why the emaciated, yet beautiful, consumptive became a Victorian feminine ideal. Victorian medical doctors corroborated the unique “feminine” qualities of the disease, noting how, as one Dr. Rowland East observes, it “throws an ethereal character” over its victims.² For the Victorians, the physical symptoms of tuberculosis—waxen skin, bright eyes, flushed cheeks, an emaciated, listless body, and a strange luminous quality—were entrenched in the cultural discourse, and chillingly, these telltale signs became a gruesome standard for middle- and upper-class beauty.³ As a complex disease, tuberculosis took on a wide variety of forms, but

¹Katherine Byrne’s study provides invaluable insight into the interrelationship of literature, art, and tuberculosis. Her book deals more with literature; however, several of the themes provide invaluable insight into visual representations of the disease, especially how the medical community as well as Victorian society in general envisioned and edified female consumption. A subtheme running throughout Byrne’s book, as well as in many other texts discussing consumption, is its reputation as the most spiritual of all disease. Katherine Byrne, *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²In the same text the surgeon declares in 1842 that “some of the most interesting specimens of female beauty, may be seen in the early stage.” Quoted by East (1842) in Byrne, 33-34.

³Tuberculosis took on a wide variety of forms and is a complex disease in itself. However, for this study, I will be focusing on the pulmonary form, which affects the lungs. Throughout this study, I will employ “consumption,” “tuberculosis,” and “phthisis” to invoke the tubercular medical state. As Katherine Ott notes, a variety of terms were employed: “Consumption, the catchall terms for any and all chronic wasting disease, usually designated emaciation with pulmonary symptoms. ‘Consumption’ was used interchangeably with ‘phthisis,’ weight loss being its most significant feature.” She then goes on to list the physical attributes of a person of tubercular diathesis: “Delicate and emaciated physique, some strange luminous quality about the eyes, and pallor.” Katherine Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture Since 1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 12-13.

this section focuses on the pulmonary form that affects the lungs. Throughout this study, I employ terms like “consumption,” “tuberculosis,” and “phthisis” interchangeably to invoke the tubercular medical state. Modern scholar Katherine Ott has also provided new insight into this disease and chronicles its changing definition in nineteenth-century America. In her book, Ott succinctly provides some understanding into how these medical terms were employed:

“Consumption, the catchall terms for any and all chronic wasting disease, usually designated emaciation with pulmonary symptoms. ‘Consumption’ was used interchangeably with ‘phthisis,’ weight loss being its most significant feature.” Ott then goes on to list the physical attributes of a person of tubercular diathesis: “delicate and emaciated physique, some strange luminous quality about the eyes, and pallor.”⁴ The illness was aestheticized in Victorian art as beautiful and romantic, its victim desirable yet aloof, a heavenly spiritual being who, through suffering, ascends to another realm. Thus, in the study of the relationship between Victorian women and altered states of consciousness, tuberculosis reveals the validation of wider cultural stereotypes that cast Victorian women as spiritually “other,” as residents of a different realm.

Representations of tubercular women deliberately reconstructed the ugly reality of the disease, hiding its most gruesome signs, such as racking coughs and blood-stained pillows. Instead, the works exalted the wan beauty of the patient and emphasized her languid tranquility, offering no evidence of pain or distress.

The identification of tuberculosis with femininity held a distinctly unique place in the imagination of the Victorian cult of death. The disease therefore emerges as a fascinating case study in which a fatal sickness became a symbol for an idealized and spiritual Victorian

⁴Ott, 12-13.

femininity. As modern scholar F.B. Smith acutely observes, “Tuberculosis had, in the tragic mode, replaced the semi-comic gout of the eighteenth century.”⁵ Underscoring its symbolic Victorian role, Smith distinguishes tuberculosis from all of the other chronic diseases and life-threatening conditions as the only one that became for Victorian artists and writers an “aesthetic or emotional device.”⁶ Some clergymen also participated in reinforcing this idealization of consumption and felt the prolonged death wrought by tuberculosis provided time for spiritual reflection and contemplation.⁷ For example, a sermon by Daniel C. Eddy in 1885 declared “of all disease [consumption] is best calculated to bring out the better traits of human character and develop the graces of the Christian life.”⁸ Yet despite its unique Victorian characterization as an “ideal” death, the reality of tuberculosis was much more bleak.⁹ Mid-twentieth-century scholars Rene and Jean Dubos describe tuberculosis as “unquestionably the greatest single cause of disease and death in the Western world,” a killer of more people than smallpox and cholera combined.¹⁰ In addition, Smith notes that most consumptives were in fact poor people suffering from an incurable disease: “as a fundamental destructive social force it was rivaled among

⁵F. B. Smith, *The Retreat of Tuberculosis, 1850-1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 225.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1996), 41.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Jalland notes the grim reality of the disease, especially among poor working-class families. In 1842 the *Christian Remembrance* journal noted, “The subject is, to half the families of England, too fraught with painful reality to be thus introduced . . . amid dreamy sentiment.” Likewise, in 1882, the widely read medical journal *The Lancet* rejected the romantic view of consumptive death, “which seems to us as false as can well be.” Jalland, 40.

¹⁰Rene Dubos and Jean Dubos, *The White Plague: Tuberculosis, Man, and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952), 10.

illnesses only by venereal disease and insanity.”¹¹ It is therefore ironic that a disease so idealized in Victorian art and literature was a product of poverty, overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. In her investigation of the impact of tuberculosis on Victorian literature, modern scholar Kathryn Byrne notes that the disease baffled the medical community for years. Its origins and contagion were unknown and this only enhanced its mysterious, elusive associations. Byrne writes, “This disease took on many and affected many different parts of the body—brain, spine, stomach and skin as well as lungs—with the result that it resembled a number of different diseases rather than a single killer.”¹² Tuberculosis was sphinx-like, striking apparently at random. Discussions of how one caught the disease were widely speculative, and some felt it was either inherited or cultivated through one’s disposition.¹³ It is reasonable to assume that Berlin physician Robert Koch’s groundbreaking identification of the tuberculosis bacillus in 1882 would have altered or at least shifted the ailment’s mysterious grasp on the Victorian psyche.¹⁴ However, this finding did not address the seemingly random nature of its contraction. Victorian physicians were continuously perplexed when large groups of people were exposed to the disease yet did not become actively consumptive, and thus the disease continued to capture the nineteenth-century imagination.¹⁵

¹¹Smith, 1.

¹²Byrne, 2.

¹³Equally complex were hypothesized circulating in regard to how one became infected with tuberculosis. For further reading on these medical theories, see Ott, 18-19.

¹⁴As Jalland notes, Victorian treatment was “empirical” and “inadequate”; “doctors had no cure for tuberculosis until streptomycin was isolated in 1943.” Jalland, 40.

¹⁵While modern scholar David S. Barnes notes that “it is possible that a near totality of the population of many large European cities in the nineteenth century . . . would have tested

In a perverse and disturbing twist on this disease, tuberculosis was described as “the death of the chosen,” as if its victims were selected for inexplicable reasons.¹⁶ As public opinion and the art of the period reveal, inevitably it was the Victorian woman who found herself the unwitting martyr to this disease. In her landmark work *Illness as Metaphor*, modern scholar Susan Sontag introduced the metaphorical nature of sickness, revealing how artistic representations provide insight into how society experiences and values illness. Sontag identifies tuberculosis as a “mysterious disease of individuals,” as, unlike other epidemics, it handpicked its target and left the remaining community unscathed.¹⁷ Thus, the female consumptive in art and society is also set apart from others; the disease itself is different, selective, and mysterious, and therefore, by implication, so too are its victims. As Dijkstra has demonstrated, the disease was feminized in popular as well as “high art,” which often fetishized the emaciation of the tubercular woman.¹⁸ Images of ghostly pale, bedridden, cadaverous women with vacuous stares

positive for exposure to the tubercle bacillus . . . only a small proportion of those would have actually become consumptive.” David S. Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease: Tuberculosis in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: University of California Press, 1995), 4. See also Byrne, 2.

¹⁶In 1854, Dr. Samuel Beckett wrote of witnessing the slow demise of his sister suffering from consumption. In his view, it was delightful “to observe this ‘death of the chosen’ and ‘to witness the calm, heavenly, and truly edifying bearing and conversation of a pious young person slowly wearing away under pulmonary consumption.” Quoted by Beckett (1854) in Jalland, 41.

¹⁷Sontag goes on to describe tuberculosis as being like “a deadly arrow that could strike anyone, that singled out its victims one by one.” Susan Sontag, *Illness as a Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 38.

¹⁸Dijkstra, 65-66. As Byrne notes, “There are very few male consumptives in nineteenth-century novels and when they do exist they are generally children . . . or emasculated, sexually unsuccessful men.” Byrne, 30-31. The general cultural idea of the effeminate consumptive holds true in the visual arts. For example, in Ott’s study, she includes an illustration from *McClure’s Magazine* depicting an “artistic” consumptive man sparked with creative genius. The image was

quicken the pulse of Victorian men both here and abroad. Poe was so moved by the disease as to begin his “Ode to Consumption” with the grim line, “There is a beauty in women’s decay.”¹⁹ Upon hearing of the death of a young female friend from the disease, Poe, so taken with the beauty of the disease, enthusiastically responded, “I would wish all I love to perish of that disease. How glorious!”²⁰ Likewise, Ralph Waldo Emerson waxed poetically over the early death of his consumptive fiancée, Ellen Tucker, finding her “too lovely to live long.”²¹

These chilling remarks suggest just how pervasive the conflation of femininity with a lofty yet morbid ideal had become in Victorian society. Tuberculosis quickly moved from being a relatively ignored disease to one that was very popular in debate and discussion. The Victorian medical community played a key role in the gendering of tuberculosis as a female disease, repeatedly insisting that its victims were overwhelmingly female, not male.²² For example, in 1880, Victorian physician Edwin Alabone asserted the disease was “more frequently met with in females than in males.”²³ He then notes others who agree with his claim, “the opinions of a very

accompanied by a heading that underscored his very “feminine” qualities: “He had a face, delicate, sensitive, yet wasted—Wasted! Aye, there was just the trouble.” Ott, 233.

¹⁹Quoted by Poe (1850) in Mario Praz, *Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 91.

²⁰Quoted by Poe (1850) in Jalland, 41.

²¹Ott, 13.

²²Byrne notes the link between consumption and femaleness was one that was more symbolic than medical. Although physicians were adamant that tuberculosis affected more women than men, statistics “do not provide any concrete medical evidence for this.” To illustrate her point, Byrne provides in his manuscript’s Appendix C a table titled “Gender distribution of phthisis.” Byrne, 31 and 191. See also Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 51.

²³Quote by Alabone (1880) in Byrne, 31.

great number of medical men, all in favor of a greater liability of females to this disease.”²⁴

Although this disease had existed long before, it is specifically during the Victorian period that the medical community were firm in their conviction that natural biological functions like menstruation, childbirth and breastfeeding made women more susceptible to tuberculosis.²⁵ In this way, society branded her essential “femaleness” as culpable and a woman’s body once more becomes a source of potential danger. It is specifically the pulmonary form of tuberculosis, a disease of the lungs, which was identified as the particular affliction of Victorian women. In this form of tuberculosis, the bacillus entered the lungs, either through a cough or a sneeze, and caused internal deadly lesions called tubercles.²⁶ In this version of the disease the interior of the female woman slowly decayed, and the unsightly and more gruesome symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis were conveniently internal and thus essentially hidden from the observer.

Meanwhile, her external beauty remained intact, and as medical accounts and art suggested, grew even more magnificent and flourished as the disease progressed. In an age still lacking certain medical technology, diagnosis was based primarily on outward appearances. The medical community contributed, in part, to creating a consumptive “type” by outlining specific physical attributions that laymen could easily recognize. The medical community helped set the stage for this new standard of beauty by making startling pronouncements. Their diagnosis of the physical symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis was often interlaced with an idealization of the patient. For

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵The perceived reasons for Victorian women’s susceptibility to tuberculosis were vast and wide ranging. For example, one Victorian doctor noted that “symptoms of phthisis accompanied uterine disease,” but it was more commonly believed “menstruation and menstrual disorders,” evidence of their essential “femaleness,” made them vulnerable. Ibid.

²⁶Ott, 7.

example, in 1876, one young doctor described consumption as the “most flattering of all diseases,” while another Victorian doctor admiringly noted that “a person, once seeing a consumptive face can never forget it. . . . Some of the most interesting specimens of female beauty may be seen in the early stage. . . .”²⁷ In a widely used medical textbook of the period, the diathesis, or “look,” of consumption is described as follows: “Tall, slim, erect, delicate-looking, having scarcely any fat. While they present usually a pretty oval face, a clear complexion, bright eyes and large pupils, the skin is very thin, soft and delicate, and through it bluish veins are visible.”²⁸ Likewise, “bright” and “glittering eyes” as well as “flushed cheeks,” brought on by fever, were defining physical characteristics.²⁹ In another classic example, the Victorian physician S. Dougan Bird identified the classic consumptive “type” in 1863: “This type . . . has remarkable beauty of person . . . slender, graceful figures . . . narrow chests, harmonious and delicate features, . . . all their senses are highly developed and they almost always have a high appreciation of the high arts. They are . . . ‘too good to live.’”³⁰ In this way, the medical profession contributed significantly to cultural stereotypes that exalted the “beauty” of the disease, which helped foster the notion that it was also the most “spiritual” disease.

The vast cultural coding surrounding tuberculosis and the resulting aestheticism of the disease are most evident in mid-nineteenth-century images that, while not directly addressing the disease, do clearly depict the female subject as bearing both the consumptive “look” and the

²⁷Ott, 10; Byrne, 96.

²⁸Ott, 10.

²⁹Byrne, 133, n. 59.

³⁰Quoted by Bird (1863) in Byrne, 76.

physical prolegomena of death. The telltale signs—a consumption-wasted frame, flushed cheeks, bright, vacant eyes with large pupils—would have been immediately recognizable to the Victorian viewer. For example, in Alfred Stevens' *Mrs. Elizabeth Young Mitchell and Her Baby* (1851) (Figure 34), a young mother holds her bouncy, cherubic child in her lap. Her etiolated visage and emaciated beauty provide a dramatic foil to the animated glow and healthy vibrancy of her child. With a waxen, almost death-like pallor, the mother stares listlessly through heavy lids etched with dark circles. The woman's eyes convey a sense of profound distance and complete disengagement from reality, not even her child's ebullience can call her back to her domestic haven.³¹

Just as the beautiful female invalid or corpse was bound to notions of class, consumption was considered a refined disease for the privileged women of the upper and middle classes. Once again, the medical community played a key role in enforcing this identification. For example, in 1880, the influential Alabone stated, "The taint of consumption can in many cases be easily recognized by physical signs. . . . The eyes . . . possess a most remarkable brilliancy . . . the nervous system is especially developed, hence it is a frequent thing for consumptive patients to be of a most refined nature. . . ." ³² Modern scholar Clark Lawlor discusses how consumption was perceived differently for working-class women, who supposedly contracted the disease due to certain vices and were considered too coarse to experience nervous disorders.³³ Conversely, an

³¹Research did not reveal that the sitter was consumptive, although it may indeed be possible. However, whether fact or fiction, I include this example to illustrate how this aesthetic was used in portraiture.

³²Byrne, 28.

³³Lawlor draws this class division, noting the high incidence of tuberculosis in the lower class. He states that it "was ignored or placed in a different conceptual category to that of the

upper- or middle-class woman was sensitive and delicate, having “finer” nerves, which made her vulnerable to the illness. In this way, tuberculosis was conveniently compatible with the delicate “nerves” and physical fragility attributed to Victorian women of the higher classes. Indeed, such characteristics were deemed desirable and even admirable, connoting womanly “perfection” and social standing.³⁴ Dr. S. Dougan Bird’s statement on the consumptive type reflects the malady’s strong connotations of class and beauty: “a thorough-bred look, which in our national pride we associate with the British aristocracy.”³⁵ In a strange and rather morbid twist, a certain group of women in England and America clamored to transfigure their healthy, glowing countenance with the ghostly pallor of the phthisis aesthetic. Ironically, however, the “thorough-bred” look that suggested strength and vitality was in fact the direct opposite, as it was based on a physical demeanor that was wasting away. In a comprehensive study of the idea and ideal of Victorian beauty, modern scholar Louis Banner notes that women sought to cultivate pellucid skin, which they thought suggested a “special spirituality.”³⁶ The consumptive appearance—an ethereal pallor with bright, feverish eyes—became a defining fashionable and desirable look for many women. It connoted not only a certain ethereal beauty, but also the well-bred comportment of the

higher orders; working class consumption was more likely to be due to various vices like drinking and fornication.” In contrast, middle- and upper-class consumption “was a disease of refinement and delicate sensibilities above all.” Lawlor, 51.

³⁴To read more on the class division regarding sickness, and the issue of “nerves,” see Peter Melville Logan’s *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in British Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); as well as Janet Oppenheim’s *“Shattered Nerves”: Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³⁵Byrne, 76.

³⁶Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 52.

upper classes. In extreme cases, healthy women even drank vinegar and ate small amounts of arsenic to achieve the translucent pallor and liquid eyes of the tubercular.³⁷ Some even applied a rigorous regime of heavy makeup to create or enhance blue veins on the temples, throat and breasts, all in an attempt to create the impression they were “soon to leave this world.”

By extension, young Victorian girls also sought to emulate this deathly aesthetic. Moreover, the trend was not simply a matter of appearance, which could be lightly cast or wiped off but an entire way of being and acting. Published in 1882, Marion Harland’s *Eve’s Daughter* expressed alarm at this growing fad among adolescent girls and urged mothers to steer their daughters away from the consumptive aesthetic.³⁸ Harland advised parents to “Show no charity to the faded frippery of sentiment that prates over romantic sickliness. Inculcate a fine scorn for the desire to exchange her present excellent health for the estate of the pale, drooping, human-flower damsel; the taste that covets the ‘fascination’ of lingering consumption; the sensation of early decease induced by the rupture of a blood-vessel over a laced handkerchief held firmly to her lily mouth by agonized parent or distracted lover.”³⁹ While spitting blood into a white handkerchief was one of consumption’s calling cards, Harland’s use of the phrase “lily mouth” contained a coded message for the Victorian reader. In the parlance of Victorian floral

³⁷Sarah Stage, *Female Complaints: Lydia Pinkham and the Business of Women’s Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 98.

³⁸Marion Harland, *Eve’s Daughters; or, Common Sense for Maid, Wife, and Mother*, with an introduction by Sheila M. Rothman (Farmingdale, NY: John R. Anderson & Henry S. Allen, 1885), 135, 153.

³⁹*Ibid.*

symbolism, lilies signified modesty, purity, and sweetness on the one hand and imminent death or spiritual otherworldliness on the other.⁴⁰

Many Pre-Raphaelite paintings, as well as their models (called “Stunners”), conveyed the unearthly type of beauty linked to the tubercular aesthetic.⁴¹ For example, with obsessive repetition, Rossetti’s drawings of Elizabeth Siddal depict her in a variety of poses, each iteration emphasizing and beautifying the state of invalidism. In *Head of Elizabeth Siddal Reclining on a Pillow* (c. 1850s) (Figure 35), she exudes utter exhaustion and extreme detachment, staring through heavy lids, while her hand rests in a gesture of lassitude. In another variation, *Head of Elizabeth Siddal Looking Down to the Right* (c. 1855) (Figure 36), she sits wearily in a chair, her hair unbound, her delicate, emaciated frame suggesting sexuality as much as invalidism. Again, as Marsh states, “...there is no evidence that Elizabeth Siddal suffered from any physical complaint. Commonly described as tall and elegant, she never exhibited a sign...of the well-defined and recognizable symptom of tuberculosis.”⁴² With hands loosely clasped in her lap, she tilts her head, exposing her long, thin neck, and gazes listlessly, as if overwhelmed by the suffering she must endure. Considered together, these drawings initially reinforce a sense of invalidism to the modern eye. However, it was specifically through the lens of consumption, not general sickness, that Victorian society at large, as well as the medical community, often viewed

⁴⁰See, for example, Rossetti’s use of the lily to symbolize innocence and purity in *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1849-1850). For more examples, see Debra N. Mancoff, *Flora Symbolica: Flowers in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 32, 38.

⁴¹Chapter 7 will specifically discuss how this sickly form of beauty was identified with the female aesthete. To read more on Elizabeth Siddal and her role as the Pre-Raphaelite muse, see Jan Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (London: Quartet Books, 1989), 61-64.

⁴²Marsh, 63.

Pre-Raphaelite models, thus creating a cultural identification that also inevitably affected the viewing of these works. For example, in discussing consumptive beauty in art, Victorian doctor Alfred Hillier describes the consumptive condition: “the slight hollowness of the cheek, the long slender neck, the steep sloping shoulders . . . all suggest the probability of phthisis. . . .”⁴³ He then goes on to cite Rossetti: “many of Rossetti’s more famous pictures have this expression of suffering which is undoubtedly phthisic in origin. . . it is the appealing sadness of the disease.”⁴⁴

Throughout her life, and even in some respects today, Elizabeth Siddal’s illness, which developed simultaneously with her ascension into the artistic class, has been strangely linked to consumption, even though there is no concrete evidence of this. For example, Jan Marsh, Siddal’s foremost biographer, finds no indication that Siddal suffered from any physical complaint, and though Rossetti’s personal letters discuss Siddal’s primary symptoms as extreme thinness, debilitating weakness, and indeterminable pain, there is no mention of the constant cough or pulmonary hemorrhage typical of consumption. However, her friends and contemporaries constantly characterized her as suffering from phthisis. As Byrne documents, John Ruskin was utterly convinced Siddal suffered from phthisis and suggested she winter in the south of France.⁴⁵ Gabriel Rossetti’s brother William, considered the most notable biographer of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, identified Siddal’s illness as “phthisis, with the accompaniment of . . . wearing neuralgia.”⁴⁶ Likewise, early biographer Violet Hunt, who grew up in the Pre-

⁴³Quoted by Hillier (1903) in Byrne, 34.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵It was believed that the “breath of oxen” was a cure for consumption. Byrne, 97-98.

⁴⁶Byrne, 97.

Raphaelite circle and based her account on childhood recollections, writes of Siddal's "long legs, long fingers, long throat, dullish prominent eyes, luxuriant hair—all characteristic of one type of what we now colloquially call TB."⁴⁷ As Marsh notes, in Siddal's very early days in the artistic world of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, she "was definitely not regarded as a beauty."⁴⁸ Her drab complexion, abundant red hair and gangly limbs were, according to one contemporary, "never beautiful in my eyes."⁴⁹ Yet with the apparent onset of her malady in 1854 and the later "diagnosis" of phthisis, these very same physical characteristics alchemize into the beautifying "symptoms" of the disease. Since the disease was already associated with refinement and purity, it therefore functioned symbolically for Siddal, transforming her into an idealized version of femininity. Ford Madox Brown's effusive description of Siddal, in 1854, reveals the ethereal mantle that the perception of consumption lent the model: "Called on Dante Rossetti, saw Miss Siddal looking thinner and more deathlike and more beautiful and more ragged than ever, a real artist, a woman without parallel for many a long year."⁵⁰ Tuberculosis as a symbol of class equaled its reputation as a gendered disease, and while Victorians diagnosed the "wasted frame"

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Marsh also notes that in the early months of 1850, Rossetti, in fact, largely ignored Siddal. It was, therefore, not until she was deemed sickly that she acquired her distinct beauty, in the eyes of Rossetti. Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (London: Quartet Books, 1985), 26.

⁴⁹Quoted by William Allingham (1850s) in Byrne, 96-97.

⁵⁰Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism; Papers, 1854 to 1862*, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: George Allen, 1899), 75. See also Byrne, 100. It is also interesting to note that when Rossetti did experiment at a later date with more voluptuous female physicality, using his robust mistress Fanny Cornwith as his model, both the model and the works were largely panned by critics. These paintings were described as "fleshy," "coarse," and overtly sexual. Therefore, it is only the frail, delicate beauty embodied by Elizabeth Siddal that was considered the most suitable for the portrayal of women in these altered states.

of the bourgeois woman as a sign of phthisis, physicians were quick to point out women of the working class, with more robust bodies, never suffered from consumption.⁵¹ For example, in 1882 one experienced doctor observed that comparison to the wasted frame, flushed cheeks, and bright eyes associated with the consumptive, a person of the opposite form, that is, “with large breasts, and its accompanying small lungs, an enlarged and powerful heart, well-developed abdominal viscera, and a hearty appetite, rarely if ever, become consumptive.”⁵² Phthisis not only signified an ideal beauty, but was also a mark of breeding and distinction. The disease therefore became a vehicle, or foothold, for Siddal’s social advancement into the middle class.⁵³

As discussed earlier, phthisis’ most defining physical characteristic was extreme emaciation, resulting in long, attenuated limbs and a gaunt countenance. This wasting away was the most recognizable aspect of the “consumptive type” and perfectly accorded with the period’s ideal of female delicacy. Medically and culturally, the female sufferer was always defined by her slenderness, and, as previously observed, Siddal’s contemporaries repeatedly noted her “long legs, long fingers, and long throat,” as well as her delicate frame. *The Fasting Girls*, modern scholar Joan Jacobs Brumberg’s important study on the history of anorexia, discusses thinness as a centuries-old symbol of purity, self-sacrifice, and spiritual triumph, just as, conversely, fleshiness, especially in the female body, has been equated with sensuality and self-indulgence. As she notes, “such a rejection of appetite can be interpreted as the transcendence of the true self,

⁵¹Ott, 11.

⁵²Quoted by “The Physiognomy of Consumption,” *Nature* 25 (1882), in Ott, 11.

⁵³Chapter 4, on the “cult of the invalid,” will discuss how illness afforded women a degree of power and influence.

whether conceptualized as soul or mind, over the corrupt and temporal body.”⁵⁴ Brumberg emphasizes that this cultural myth was never so active as during the Victorian period, when slenderness became a desirable physicality desired from, and by, the bourgeois woman.

Explaining this connection, she writes, “The genteel woman responded not to the lower senses of taste and smell but to the highest senses—sight and hearing—which were used for moral and aesthetic purposes. One of the most convincing demonstrations of a spiritual orientation was a thin body—that is, a physique that symbolized rejection of all carnal appetites.”⁵⁵

Thus, for Victorian women, the painfully thin, consumption-ravaged body comingled with the ideal of fragile beauty to signify, in the cultural and artistic imagination, the concept of spirituality and otherworldliness. In her essay “Codes of Consumption: Tuberculosis and Body Image at the Fin-de-Siècle,” modern scholar Sharon Hirsh explores this symbiotic relationship, underscoring that it was specifically pulmonary tuberculosis, which provided the key ingredient to women’s spiritual ascension and which came to denote the concept of spirituality itself.⁵⁶ She writes, “It should be noted, that in order for this code to have come full circle, signifying spiritual beauty by means of reference to a disease, the code had developed with allusion to a singular

⁵⁴Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 182. Dijkstra also dedicates a section in his book to the “weightless woman” and connects her also to the “collapsing woman.” Dijkstra notes, “It is clear that the weightless woman has a great deal in common with the collapsing woman, for she was both passive and sexual, but once again she was sexual in a manner that was likely to discourage any sort of participation on the part of the observer of her airy trajectory.” Dijkstra, 89-90.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶Sharon Hirsh, “Codes of Consumption: Tuberculosis and Body Image at the Fin-de-Siècle,” in *In Sickness and in Health: Disease as Metaphor in Art and Popular Wisdom*, ed. Laurinda S. Dixon and Gabriel P. Wesiberg (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 144-165.

kind of tuberculosis, while ignoring others . . . [those] suffering from lung infected tuberculosis.”⁵⁷ Tuberculosis afflicted countless Victorians in a myriad of forms, but it was deviation from the more plebian forms represented by the physically wasting variety that invested sufferers with otherworldliness.⁵⁸ Thus, it was the laying aside of earthly desires such as appetite and the resultant lightness of the female body that acted as a symbolic bridge to victims’ identification as “other.”⁵⁹ Besides dwelling on Siddal’s languorous beauty, Rossetti’s drawings also allude to the theme of the consumptive’s “otherworldly” quality. For example, in the drawing *Elizabeth Asleep* (1854) (Figure 37) the model is shown sleeping; Siddal’s long hair lies against the back of a chair and cascades around her, creating a celestial halo effect.⁶⁰ A candle illuminates the scene and a pillow is arranged to create angelic wings, imbuing her with an ethereality, suggestive of an already dead state. In a way, the image recalls *Beata Beatrix*, which suffuses the consumptive beauty with a similarly lambent glow.

Likewise, the medical community buoyed the spiritual aura of phthisis. For example, *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician*, a widely read 1885 book written by Samuel Warrens, a Victorian doctor, provides a detailed, and sensationalized, account of his most

⁵⁷Weisberg, 149.

⁵⁸Hirsh also emphasizes the notion of class and Victorian society, stating that “depictions of comely consumption also carried implications of class; it is the middle and upper classes, believed to be able to afford such spiritual leanings, which suffer quietly and so beautifully, not the working class.” Hirsh, 148.

⁵⁹This belief also aligns with the previously discussed idealized vision of the self-sacrificing “Angel of the House.”

⁶⁰The drawing also reinforces how images of sleeping women, death, and altered states were intimately related.

memorable cases.⁶¹ In one chapter, entitled “Consumption,” he reminisces with excruciating detail about the gradual decline and ultimate death of a young female patient, Ms. Eliza Herbert.⁶² In his initial meeting with the young woman, not yet in the throes of the disease but exhibiting its first symptoms, the doctor describes the patient’s physical delicacy and obliquely identifies her class: “Little Eliza Herbert inherited, with her mother’s beauty, her constitutional delicacy. Her figure was so slight, that it almost suggested to the beholder the idea of transparency; and there was a softness and languor in her azure eyes, beaming through their long silken lashes, which told of something too refined for humanity.”⁶³ As the disease progresses and the symptoms become more pronounced, Warren’s account links her dramatically thinning and wasting frame to spirituality. Visiting Eliza soon after their initial consultation, he recounts with great rapture the splendor of her new loveliness and appeal, describing her as a “martyr to that very disease, which commences by investing its victim with a tenfold splendor of personal beauty, to be compensated by sudden and rapid decay!”⁶⁴ He then continues to wax enthusiastically about her transformation into a rapturous beauty: “Miss Herbert’s eyes were as lustrous as diamonds; and the complexion of her cheeks, pure and fair as that of the lily, was surmounted with an intense circumscribed crimson flush. Perfectly motionless and statue-like lay

⁶¹These sensational and autobiographical essays were originally serialized in *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1835. They were subsequently translated into several European languages and also published in America. The essays proved to be so popular that in 1885 they were later compiled in book form.

⁶²Samuel Warren, *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician* (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1885), vol. 3, 59.

⁶³Warren, 60.

⁶⁴Warren, 65.

that fair creature, breathing so imperceptibly that a rose-leaf might have slept on her lips unfluttered!”⁶⁵ Warren’s shift to a description of Eliza’s body illustrates the cultural coding of body size and its link to consumption:

She was wasted almost to a shadow—attenuated to nearly ethereal delicacy and transparency. She was dressed in a plain white muslin gown, and lying on an Indian shawl, in which she had been enveloped for the purposed of being brought down from her bedchamber. Her small foot and ankle were concealed beneath white silk stockings and satin slippers—through which it might be seen how they were shrunk from the full dimensions of health. They seemed, indeed, rather the exquisite chiseling of Canova, the representation of recumbent beauty, than flesh and blood, and scarcely capable of sustaining even the slight pressure of Miss Herbert’s wasted frame. The arms and hands were enveloped in long white gloves, which fitted very loosely; and her waist, encircled by a broad violet-colored ribbon, was rather that of a young girl of twelve or thirteen, than a full-grown woman.⁶⁶

After a long, drawn-out decline and vigilant watch over the deathbed, the doctor grievously mourns over the young “martyr’s” body, recounting, “Again I saw her, to let fall tears over the withered petals, the blighted blossoms of early beauty! It wrung my heart to see her little more than a breathing corpse.” The doctor’s lengthy account focuses on the female body as regressing to an adolescent state, the female body seems to be fetishized and considered even more desirable in death. The corpse still “breathes,” as if the disease facilitated passage to eternal life. Thus consumption’s identification with extreme thinness, spirituality, and beauty suggests the disease also functioned as a symbolic purification elixir that returned the body to a state of innocence.

Warren’s literary construction of the purity and beauty of the disease vividly recalls the young female sufferer in Henry Peach Robinson’s photograph *Fading Away* (1858) (Figure 38). Comprised of five negatives, the composite offers a typical example of how tuberculosis was not

⁶⁵Warren, 70.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

only romanticized and aestheticized, but also invested with symbolic spiritual value during the Victorian era. In this widely popular photograph, the dying girl is the central focus of a series of contrasts between light and dark, between interior and exterior space.⁶⁷ The image deliberately conceals the ghastly symptoms of consumption, but rather focuses on the victim's innocence and celestial beauty, even as she succumbs to the disease.⁶⁸ The very title of the photograph, *Fading Away*, suggests the literal dematerialization of the victim as she drifts between the boundaries of the earthly and celestial. The image recalls Warren's description of "recumbent beauty," as is also dressed in all white gown, her wasted body consumed by the gown's massive fabric, which pools and falls off her frame. Like *Beata Beatrix*, the image combines consumption with an ethereal, idealized beauty. She, too, is bathed in light and raises her head slightly, lips parted with hair unbound, gazing into the great beyond. On the left, watchful and dutiful, sits an elderly woman, while the presumed mother stands over her expiring daughter, her hand raised with concern to her chest. A male figure—perhaps father, husband or lover—dressed in sober clothing turns away from the deathbed and stares out a window, the heavy curtain nearly sealing him off from the tragedy unfolding in the death-chamber. Like countless other works of the period,

⁶⁷Hirsh, 144.

⁶⁸To provide some perspective on the reality of this deadly disease, Lawlor provides a rare example from an 1860 novel that offers a more authentic description of the death of a female consumptive: "Her body was bent forward on her knees; the joints of this body so thin, that it was almost deformed, were swelled and red and painful. She labored and coughed for breath; each time that she breathed she coughed blood. . . . But while they were still gazing at her, they saw the colour fade from her cheeks, the smile from her lips. . . . Her face . . . became sallow and dusky; her lips and her finger-nails tinged with blue. . . . Long streams of perspiration ran down her face; her features assumed an expression of anxiety, her eye-balls protruded, and her heart throbbed savagely and loudly." Cited in Lawlor, 2.

Fading Away merely hints at consumption, but does not mention it directly, revealing how thoroughly this disease had become ingrained in the cultural psyche.

The harrowing plight of the female tubercular living on the razor edge of death and blossoming in beauty and spirituality resonated in both England and America. Inspired by the withering female consumptive, American poet William Cullen Bryant wrote a widely popular poem in 1854, emphasizing the spiritualism of the sufferer:

Ay, thou art for the grave; thy glances shine
Too brightly to shine long; another Spring
Shall deck her for men's eyes, but not for thine—
Sealed in a sleep which knows no wakening.
The fields for thee have no medicinal leaf,
And the vexed ore no mineral of power;
And they who love thee wait in anxious grief
till the slow plague shall bring the fatal hour.
Glide softly to thy rest then; Death should come,
Gently, to one of gentle mold like thee,
As light winds wandering through groves of bloom
Detach the delicate blossom from the tree.
Close thy sweet eyes, calmly, and without pain;
And we will trust in God to see thee yet again.”⁶⁹

In this poem, Bryant emphasizes the young woman's “gentle” transition and likens her delicacy to a “blossom from the tree,” which allows her to “glide softly” into the embrace of death.⁷⁰ The published poem was accompanied with an illustration (Figure 39) depicting a consumptive

⁶⁹William Cullen Bryant, *Poems* (New York: D. Appleton, 1854), 74. The illustration was included in this edition.

⁷⁰As modern scholar Beverly Seaton has noted in her study on the language of flowers, women are often identified with nature, and this was especially so during the Victorian period. As Seaton notes, “Flowers, in fact, were seen as the most suitable aspect of nature to represent women, or to interact with them, reflecting as they do certain stereotypical qualities of the female being: smallest of stature, fragility of mind and body, and impermanence of beauty.” Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 17.

woman.⁷¹ The image is strikingly similar to *Fading Away* in how the disease is depicted as a fashionable myth, emphasizing the weary yet wan beauty of the patient who is clearly depicted vacuous, listless and gazing vacantly through heavy lids. Like previous discussed images and literary descriptions of the female consumptive, the illustration also intentionally ignores and reconstructs the gruesome reality of consumption. In addition, the illness renders the woman/child both sexy and sexually useless, or celibate. Reminiscent of *Fading Away*, a young woman also rests comfortably, her unbound hair framing her peaceful face, while the white downy pillows and gown remains unsullied with blood stains, which were a common and grisly result of consumptives' hacking coughs. The young woman's slight frame lies in stark contrast with the ornate chair, whose large size overwhelms and intensifies her progressively wasting body. As in *Fading Away*, two women attend to the dying consumptive. One, presumably her mother, tenderly attempts to coax the afflicted from her near catatonic state by leaning over her with a drink, perhaps a medicinal tonic, as well as an orange, a rare and expensive treat. Meanwhile, her grandmother, or perhaps an elderly aunt, stands in the shadows, her hand raised to her face with heartrending dread while, meanwhile, at the feet of the patient a young child holds a book. Yet despite the domestic hustle and bustle activity occurring in the sickroom the patient remains oblivious, not even the young boy's feeble attempt for the patient's attention could coax her out of her trance like state. Close examination of the child's book reveals the outline of a winged angel, perhaps a premonition of the woman's "gentle" transition into heavenly realms and her ultimate destiny to enter into another world.

⁷¹Illustrated in Ott, 54.

This belief in the supernatural qualities of the female consumptive is also evident in the writing of the Goncourt Brothers. For example, in their description of the consumptive Madam Gervais, the very disease that destroys her also transforms her into a type of mystical character. She is described as embodying a “strange and exciting seduction . . . almost seraphic” that increases as the disease progresses. Consumption transforms her into a spirit of “supernatural . . . spirituality.”⁷² According to the Goncourts, “The progressive disembodiment carried her ever more toward the saintly folly and the hallucinated joys of religious passion. She was driven to it through another effect of her illness. In contrast to the diseases of the crude, baser organs of the body, which clog and soil the mind . . . phthisis, this illness of the lofty and noble parts of the human being, calls forth in the patient a state of elevation, tenderness and love, a new urge to see the good, the beautiful and the ideal in everything, a state of human sublimity which seems almost not to be of this earth.”⁷³

Too Late (1858) (Figure 40), by Pre-Raphaelite artist William Lindsay Windus, is an extreme pictorial example of the consumptive aesthetic and illustrates the manner in which Victorian women’s entire physical being could be inscribed with the disease. Begun in 1857, the work engendered this description by collector John Miller in a letter to Ford Madox Brown, describing the afflicted women dressed in white: “Mr. Windus is going slowly with his most charming picture and the head of the principal figure is full of that expression of agitated and inward thought at which he had aimed and tells the story of her ruined health and broken

⁷²Dubos and Dubos, 53.

⁷³*Ibid.*

heart.”⁷⁴ When exhibited in 1859 at the Royal Academy, the famous Victorian critic John Ruskin was disheartened by the painting’s morbid tone. In *Academy Notes*, he wrote, “Something is wrong here: either this painter has been ill: or his picture has been sent in to the Academy in a hurry; or he has sickened his temper and dimmed his sight by reading melancholy ballads.”⁷⁵ Later, Ford Madox Brown identified the cause of the affliction: the “poor girl [is] in the last stage of consumption, whose lover had gone away and returned at last, led by a little girl, when it was ‘too late.’”⁷⁶ As in *Fading Away*, a male figure turns away from the tragedy, shielding his eyes and casting his walking stick away. Though not in a typical state of recumbency, the young consumptive leans against a cane, almost in a state of collapse.⁷⁷ The reedy wood cane echoes the woman’s bony, death-like figure, and a female companion compassionately embraces the sick woman. The healthy young woman’s vibrant violet dress, fuller body, and rose-colored visage dramatically contrasts with the sickly frame and ashen pallor of the consumptive, intensifying the tragic moment that is unfolding. The sick woman’s expression is listless, and through heavy lids and downcast eyes she stares into space, as if her soul has already taken flight. The consumptive’s white gown enhances her otherworldly or enshrouded appearance and suggests that she is more of a specter than a human being. Likewise, it is interesting to note that when examined closely, the thin reedy cane is unfinished and does not extend to the ground. The

⁷⁴Leslie Parris, ed., *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1984), 173.

⁷⁵Quoted by Ruskin (1859) in Parris, 173.

⁷⁶Quoted by Brown (1859) in Parris, 173.

⁷⁷It is interesting to note that, when examined closely, the thin cane seems unfinished and does not extend to the ground. The cane, much like the consumptive, is immaterial and threatens to dissolve into air at a moment’s notice.

implication, it seems, is that the cane, much like the consumptive, is immaterial and threatens to dissolve into air at a moment's notice. Significantly, the white gown, which is also shown in *Fading Away*, can be viewed as both a metaphor for virginity and as a shroud of death, underscoring the recurring theme that adolescent girls, often on the brink of womanhood, are vulnerable to affliction. Much like Burne-Jones' *Sleeping Beauty, Too Late* depicts the young girl as arrested in a state of physical purity and perfection.

The popularity of images portraying female consumptives lingered well into the 1890s and flourished not only in the visual arts but in popular literature as well. For example, rather than establishing a new trend, George Du Maurier's widely popular novel *Trilby* follows the already established cultural and artistic preoccupation with the female consumptive. As the principal society illustrator at *Punch Magazine* from 1864 until his death in 1896, Du Maurier crafted popular cartoons that often satirized women's extreme fashion and beauty trends, providing an accurate barometer of women's perceived role in society. In brief, the heroine of the novel, Trilby, is initially a voluptuous artist's model teeming with robust health and vitality: "a tall, straight, flat-backed, deep chested, full-bosomed young grisette."⁷⁸ Trilby's vigorous health, coupled with her many sexual exploits and working-class status, immediately signals that

⁷⁸George Du Maurier, *Trilby* (London: Osgood and McIlvane, 1895), 40. It is also interesting to note that in the beginning of the novel, Trilby is the antithesis of the Victorian woman's idealized delicate beauty. To illustrate this point, Du Maurier invokes the Pre-Raphaelite model and suggests that Rossetti would have "evolved a new formula for her," perhaps alluding to the more "fleshy" types, such as Fanny Cornwith. The novel was written in the 1890s but takes place in the 1850s. As Byrne notes, this reference to Rossetti also reveals the influence he and "The Stunners" had in dictating and influencing standards of beauty. Here is Du Maurier's quote in its entirety: "Trilby's type would be infinitely more admired now than in the fifties. Her photograph would be in the show windows. Sir Edward Burne-Jones—if I may make so bold to say so—would perhaps have marked her for his own, in spite of her almost too exuberant joyousness and irrepressible vitality. Rossetti might have evolved another new formula for her; Sir John Millais another old one." Cited in Byrne, 107.

she is the antithesis of bourgeois femininity. It is not until she falls under the spell of the compelling Svengali, a musician who trains her voice through hypnosis and turns her into a singing star, that she begins to seek the approval of her new middle-class male friends and undergoes a gradual physical transformation. As Trilby's transformation continues, she develops a thin, waxen pallor and feverish eyes that, according to Byrne, "recall the traditional appearance of the consumptive."⁷⁹ However, throughout the novel the disease is implied, not explicitly identified, suggesting not only the cultural coding of the consumptive type so ingrained in everyday Victorian life, but moreover the perceived ethereal and otherworldly beauty of its sufferers. Byrne observes, "Her diagnosis is deliberately left mysterious to allow a Gothic, almost supernatural interpretation of her illness and death."⁸⁰

The many descriptions of Trilby's physical decline focus on the newfound beauty of her increasing thinness: "And week by week the friends noticed a gradual and subtle change in Trilby . . . she grew thinner, especially in the face, where the bones of her cheeks and jaws began to show themselves and these bones were constructed on such right principle . . . that the improvement was astonishing, almost explicable . . ." Significantly, classical consumptive symptoms highlight her gradual "decline" throughout the novel: her "increasing pallor and emaciation," "pure, white delicate skin," and hands that are "almost transparent in their waxen whiteness."⁸¹ The novel's accompanying illustrations of Trilby reinforce the dramatic physical transformation. For example, Trilby is introduced in George Du Maurier's drawing *Wistful and*

⁷⁹Byrne, 113. For further reading, see Anna Krogovoy Silver, *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁸⁰Byrne, 113; Ott, 71; Dijkstra, 36.

⁸¹Quoted in Du Maurier's *Trilby* in Byrne, 113.

Sweet (Trilby O'Farrell)" (Figure 41). Here she is depicted as a vigorous and vibrant woman. Trilby wears a military-like coat, lacks a corset and stands, jauntily, with her hands on her hips, her head titled slightly in a manner that commands attention. Epilates projects from the coat, creating an almost masculine silhouette, which is coupled with her pageboy haircut. She is, in many respects, the antithesis of the beautiful delicate Victorian woman and rather projects a sense of vigor and robust health. Likewise, her definite demeanor and manner of dress also points to potentially loose morals and modesty. The illustration, titled *This is Trilby*, depicts her final transformation into a beauty that recalls that of the female consumptive (Figure 42). The image presents a delicate fragile beauty that stands against a rose-like bush. Dressed in a Grecian-like garb, her long hair is pulled back and cascades down her back. The military jacket is replaced with a puffed sleeve dress that is gathering at the waist and emphasizes the silhouette of her breasts. Her hands fall languidly at her side and with great care she gathers the folds at her side of her cascading long dress. In the novel, Trilby's own remarks of her new invalid existence underscores the sudden transformation when she states, "I've always been weak and ill, and often so languid that I could hardly walk across the room."⁸² As she slips into a state of perpetual sickness and moves closer to death, her middle class friends become increasingly enchanted with her new beauty—"day by day she grew more beautiful in their eyes, in spite of her increasing pallor and emaciation—her skin was so pure white delicate, and the bones of her face so admirable."⁸³ Her wasted body not only increases her allure but also gains her entry into respectable middle class society, simultaneously elevating her status.

⁸²Quoted in Du Mauier's *Trilby* in Byrne, 112.

⁸³Ibid.

Trilby's metamorphosis from a "healthy" woman into a fragile consumptive coincides with a new ethereal glow and supernatural otherness: "And a new soft brightness came into her eyes that no one had ever seen there before. They were stars . . . the steady mellow light they gave out was not entirely their own."⁸⁴ This description emphasizes not only the traditional appearance of the consumptive body, but also the glittering eyes bright with fever, which also suggest enlightenment by something not of this world. Approaching the threshold of death, her wasted body has been purged of her transgression and in its final moment becomes a beacon of purity. At this moment, she becomes "more of a siren than ever—a quite unconscious siren—without any guile, who appealed to the heart all the more directly and irresistibly."⁸⁵ In his analysis of *Trilby*, Dijkstra compares her consumptive look to saintliness. Both angel and siren once she becomes sick, Trilby "ceased to be a direct sexual threat, Trilby is free to become the true sexless, high-Victorian feminine ideal: the woman who, in her very physical helplessness, makes no further overt erotic demands upon the male."⁸⁶ In this respect, the female consumptive, as embodied by Trilby in her weakened, helpless state, becomes the embodiment of ideal femininity in the Victorian imagination.

Trilby's journey through the aestheticization of tuberculosis and her transformation into a beautiful consumptive "type" recall Elizabeth Siddal, as well as other Pre-Raphaelite models, who experienced a similar "decline" as they rose through the ranks into the middle class. The subject of female invalidism as a means of acquiring social status is key and is discussed in the

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Quoted in Du Mauier's *Trilby* in Dijkstra, 36.

⁸⁶Ibid.

subsequent chapter on the cult of the female invalid. The images presented in this chapter, in summary, allude to how consumption, a form of female invalidism, functioned to both elevate the Victorian woman and distance her from others. The very nature of the consumption, which literally breaks down the internal body, symbolically functions as an alembic that purifies both the female soul and body, leaving in its wake an empty vessel made ready for the gathering of a spiritual otherness.⁸⁷ As this chapter has revealed, the symptoms associated with tuberculosis were manifold and the contemporaneous medical discourse helped nourish society's fascination with its victims. Chapter 4 builds upon this rhetoric casting Victorian women as inherently weak and expands the catalogue of images depicting women in altered states by examining the cult of the invalid.

⁸⁷This topic will be fully explored in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE CULT OF THE INVALID

When Pre-Raphaelite artist Ford Madox Brown married Emma Hill, one of his models, she was buxom, vivacious and a paragon of good health. Less than a year later, she succumbed to a mysterious illness and withdrew to the sickroom, a darkened haven often utilized in Victorian homes. On one particular day her husband opened his daily journal and recorded a typical evening spent with his young bride: “dined and then read the paper to Emma, the dear is poorly & nervous. This is the true & particular history of a day, a piteous thing to tell of.”¹ Like many of the cryptic entries found in the artist’s journal, these abbreviated lines allude to his wife’s debilitating health and her perpetual confinement to the sickroom. Yet his description of the failing health of his young wife was not unique. Hundreds of personal journals and diaries from husbands, mothers, and other family members expressed concern over a similar mysterious condition afflicting women in the mid-nineteenth century.² Ford Madox Brown’s *The Convalescent (Portrait of Emma Madox Brown)* (1872) (Figure 43) immortalizes the lengthy illness that plagued his wife. Significantly, there is no record of any pre-existing health condition. Rather, Emma Madox Brown’s entry into the middle class signaled her deteriorating health. In discussing the health of Pre-Raphaelite “stunners,” Isabelle William observes that while women like Emma Madox Brown, Elizabeth Siddal, and Jane Morris apparently never

¹Virginia Surtees, ed., *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown* (New Haven, CT: Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 1981), 103.

²Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), 93.

suffered from poor health while part of the “working class,” it was only after their official inauguration into the Pre-Raphaelite middle-class group that their physical well-being came under scrutiny. The societal equation of middle-class status and the onset of female invalidism was also referenced in my previous chapter in the discussion of Du Maurier’s novel *Trilby*. Indeed, to the bourgeoisie, a healthy, robust female body signified coarseness and lack of refinement; in contrast, a physically frail body epitomized ideal female beauty. Thus, like many women, Emma suffered from a mysterious illness that, though it became strangely “fashionable,” was difficult to diagnose and left her bedridden for days.³

Freighted with such important biographical and cultural background, this portrait takes on even more significance and presents a bewitching amalgam of feminine beauty and frailty in the guise of an enigmatic illness. Secured to the bedpost, florid curtains drape like a swag, as if primed to isolate the victim with her affliction, while pillowy bedding conveys a sense of comfort and the bedroom’s transformation into a sickroom. Emma’s flaxen red hair cascades and frames her deathly, green-hued complexion, which is all the more pronounced by her white chemise and bed linen. Her languid eyes scarcely open, and her bow-shaped lips barely part, revealing teeth that clench in the throes of pain or illness. Juxtaposed with Emma’s full, round face is her thin hand, which seems enervated as it emerges from the folds of her covers. Her bony knuckles clutch a posy of purple flowers, perhaps of violets, a Victorian sign of remembrance. The image is an exaltation of the otherworldly beauty ascribed to the female invalid, and her sickly appearance, suffering, and state of helplessness converge into an idealized image of Victorian femininity. This powerful image is a testament to the mysterious epidemic that seemed

³Isabelle Williams, “Elizabeth Siddal: The Health Issue,” *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 5 (Spring 1996): 53-70, at 53.

to be sweeping through the population of British and American women during the mid-nineteenth century. As modern scholar Ann Douglas Wood notes, literature read by both the medical community and the everyday layman consistently and adamantly assert that the majority of Victorian women were in some sense suffering ill health⁴. While it left lower-class women relatively unscathed, its victims were largely middle- and upper-class women who, for no apparent reason, grew increasingly pale, listless, and emaciated. Their demeanor became vacant and detached, and regardless of the ailment's duration, whether long or short, acute or severe, Victorian women increasingly withdrew to the sanctified safety of the domestic sphere, usually the bedroom, arguably a place of birth, sex, sleep and death.

At every turn, Victorian men and women encountered images of beautifully wasted invalids, hovering between life and death. As modern scholar Diane Price Herndl recently explains, several contradictory models of womanhood coexisted during this period, and no one model fit every woman.⁵ However, the “cult of female frailty” was the dominant model, and by the mid-nineteenth century it was the “cult of the female invalid” that brought this characterization to its most extreme manifestation.⁶ This chapter of my thesis focuses on the

⁴Ann Douglas Wood, “The Fashionable Diseases: Women’s Complaints and Their Treatments in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Clio’s Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974), 1.

⁵Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women, Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1949* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 25. To illustrate her point, Herndl cites Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868-1869) and the variety of “types” represented in the novel, such as the doomed but pious invalid Beth, the high spirited and robust Jo, etc. Ibid.

⁶Herndl asserts that the model of the “invalid woman” was the model adopted in mid-century writing about female health. This is even apparent in texts that were written to promote reforms in health care. Ibid.

representations of the female invalid within Victorian art and considers the medical conditions and general cultural mentality that led to the emergence of this very visible as well as culturally endorsed aesthetic. In these images the invalid routinely appears infirm, afflicted, and perpetually bedridden, her beauty and allure pivoting singularly on the vague disease causing her suffering, which imbues her with an ethereal, submissive quality. While these images appeared in medicine advertisements and popular journals, the most potent iterations of this theme could be found in the paintings of the period.⁷ The visual arts had always depicted the affliction of females to an extent, but beginning with the mid-nineteenth century and continuing well into the early twentieth, the presence of such images gradually increased and reached epic proportions and became their own unique and distinct category within Victorian art. This convention lasted well into the early twentieth century, and as Bram Dijkstra dryly observes, “Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, parents, sisters, daughters and living friends were kept busy on canvases everywhere, anxiously nursing wan, hollow-eyed beauties who were on the verge of death.”⁸ As scholar Jean Strouse notes, “a graceful languor, pallor, vulnerability even to the point of illness-were seen as enhancing the female form. ‘Refinement’ drew attention away from the base, ordinary body, illness delicately drew it back.”⁹ Often titled simply *The Convalescent* or *The Invalid*, these portrayals left Victorian viewers to imagine for themselves what the subject’s path to invalidism might have been, yet in each case the illness was clearly

⁷For an in-depth study of the representation of the female invalid in Victorian literature, see Hernd, *Invalid Women*, chapters 2 and 3.

⁸Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 25.

⁹Jean Strouse, *Alice James: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 100-101.

characterized as female. This chapter considers the unique social and medical atmosphere that may have prompted this outpouring of invalid imagery. The female invalid motif had a tremendous impact on mid-nineteenth-century British and American culture and emerged as a distinct new social category with its accompanying codes of behavior. Much like the female consumptive, invalidism was inflected with gender and class issues in both its diagnosis and treatment. However, there was an important distinction between the female consumptive and the invalid in that the affliction of the latter did not signal her imminent demise. While consumption was diagnosed by the medical community and sealed the fate of its victims, the source of an invalid's suffering was often a mystery conveniently attributed to gender-specific causes.

Within the broader framework of this obsession with female invalidism, there were arguable several key subcategories that helped shape the visual narrative of the bedridden convalescent. First, critical to this discussion are medical advances that occurred mid-nineteenth-century, a period that marked the beginning of the professionalization of medicine and also coincided with the noted increase in female invalidism. Medical doctors pondered and theorized about the possible causes and treatments of female invalidism, and their competitive, often contradictory dialogue did much to shape the cultural mentality that fueled the representation of female invalidism within the visual arts.¹⁰ This chapter will also consider how images of the female invalid reinforced both the medical and cultural discourse that identified invalidism as a “beautifying” agent, or cosmetic which enhanced and amplified traditional virtues of Victorian femininity. Just as the medical profession moved towards a more rational understanding of the

¹⁰For a discussion on the “romantic invalid” in American sculpture, see Joy Kasson’s *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

female body, it also emerged as a new mysterious terrain that only intensified the mystification of the Victorian woman. The female developed culturally and medically as an icon of disorder, a subject to be debated, theorized and rationalized. Images of the female invalid specifically depicted in the sickroom also suggest how the mysterious cycle of the female body and its hidden, “secretive” reproductive organs became an important part of the narrative. The sickroom was extolled and intensified as a spiritual sanctuary, and at its center lay the passive female invalid. This depiction of the frail, recumbent female forges her as an ethereal figure, one that remains unsullied and suspended, much like the dead and dying woman, in her idealized state. Taken together, the invalid as archetype and the exaltation of the sickroom reveal how mid- to late nineteenth-century culture defined illness, femininity, and normality. Moreover, according to the cultural perception of the period, invalids were privy to an elevated state of spiritual vision and insight. Several social and literary historians have researched the emergence of Victorian society’s fascination with the female invalid. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English’s *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* and *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert’s Advice to Women* examines mid-nineteenth-century medical thought and its tendency to confirm and perpetuate masculine privilege by defining women as predisposed to ill health and enforcing this definition through diagnosis and treatment.¹¹ Ehrenreich and English argue that “the boredom and confinement of affluent women fostered a morbid cult of hypochondria—female invalidism that began in the mid-nineteenth century and did not

¹¹Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973). This slim but groundbreaking study was then followed with *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women*, a book that more pointedly addresses the “Woman Question” and delves into the complex, and often troubling, advice doled out by physicians.

completely fade until the late 1910s.”¹² John Haller and Robin Haller have also explored this topic, focusing specifically on post-bellum Civil War America. They suggest that the physicians of this period exerted a tremendous authoritative power over trusting, and most often compliant, female patients.¹³ More recent scholarship—e.g., Maria Frawley’s *Invalidism and Identity*—has examined sickroom “narratives” to reveal the distinctive qualities that made it acceptable and possible, even socially encouraged or desirable, for Victorian women to assume the identity of the “invalid.”¹⁴ Diane Price Herndl’s *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness* discusses important literary texts from the period, providing ample evidence of how vastly different society and authors imagined and treated male and female invalids.¹⁵ This chapter is grounded in these key texts but also examines how visual representations of the female invalid, an often overlooked subject, were integral in the shaping and identification of the female invalid’s recurring characteristics

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed in both the United Kingdom and the United States a renegotiation of the social order and was a time of dramatic change politically, socially, and medically. Along with the rise of industrialism, there was a movement among Victorian women to break from their traditional role as guardians of the domestic sphere, while, despite much resistance, new educational and vocational possibilities were gradually beginning to emerge.

¹²Ehrenreich and English, *Complaints and Disorders*, 49.

¹³John S. Haller, Jr., and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1974).

¹⁴Maria H. Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹⁵Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

During this transitional period, most notably beginning in the 1850s, “The Woman Question” was much debated. Increasingly, the Victorian woman did not fit neatly into the traditional domestic sphere, nor did she fit into the busy world of commerce and industry.¹⁶ This contradiction is central to this study and refers back to previous discussions in the introduction and the chapter on tuberculosis. As modern scholar Lorna Duffin explains in the essay “The Conspicuous Consumption,” “Middle class women in the home were pure but sick; working-class women outside the home were able-bodied but contaminated and sickening. This classification further reinforced the boundary between home and work within the context of sex.”¹⁷ The threat of the dissolution of traditional patterns of femininity may have been one source of inspiration for artists, motivating them to create reassuring and nostalgic images of feminine characteristics that were exaggerated and idealized.

Determining the cause of this cultural preoccupation with Victorian women’s health has been the point of much debate. As Herndl notes, “Even modern historians of women’s health have had some difficulty explaining and accepting the power of the nineteenth-century stereotype. For every theory we come up with, there is a corresponding counter theory.”¹⁸ Thus, these images of the female invalid are complicated and full of contradiction and paradox, with no singular or definitive reason for the spread of this potent motif. This discussion was just as

¹⁶Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York, Anchor Press, 1978), 3. For an overview of the “Woman Question,” see 5-13.

¹⁷Lorna Duffin, “The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid,” in *The Nineteenth-century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, ed. Sara Delamont (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 31.

¹⁸Herndl, 23-24.

heated then as it is now, and several early feminists as well as some physicians of that period wrote and debated this pervasive crisis in female health.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the crisis in Victorian women's health led to calls of alarm by several British and American female advocates and health reformers. As early as 1855, Catherine Esther Beecher (sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe and a leading female health reform advocate) warned in *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness* that "there is a delicacy of constitution and an increase of disease, both among mature women and young girls that is most alarming, and as such as was never known in any former period."¹⁹ Throughout the mid-nineteenth century Beecher passionately documented this apparent decline in women's health and in 1866 conducted an informal survey which led to the following conclusion: "The more I traveled, and the more I resided in health establishments, the more the conviction was pressed on my attention that there was a terrible decay of female health all over the land, and that this evil was ...increasing in a most alarming ratio."²⁰ With an ominous tone she warned that the crisis was escalating at such a rapid pace that "ere long, there will be no healthy women in the

¹⁹Wood, "*Fashionable Diseases*," 2; Quoted by Beecher in Herndl, 20.

²⁰Beecher's "tour" of the United States covered a variety of cities and towns. It entailed asking hundreds of women to make a list of ten female friends and to rate their health as "perfectly healthy," "well," "delicate," "sick," "invalid," etc. In 1871, Beecher concluded her tour. Her notes from Milwaukee provide a typical example of her findings: "Milwaukee, Wisc. Mrs. A. frequent sick headaches. Mrs. B. very feeble. Mrs. S. well, except chills. Mrs. L. poor health constantly. Mrs. D. subject to frequent headaches. Mrs. B. very poor health . Mrs. C. consumption. Mrs. A. pelvic displacement and weaknesses. Mrs. H. pelvic disorders and a cough. Mrs. B. always sick. Do not know one healthy woman in the place." Medical and popular journals likewise confirm this general sentiment. For example, William Dean Howells remarked in 1872 that American society "seems little better than a hospital for invalid women." Wood, "*Fashionable Diseases*," 2; Herndl, 20-21; and Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 93.

country.”²¹ In *The Women of England*, Sara Stickney Ellis likewise similarly noted a dramatic decline in women’s health, sadly lamenting, “The number of languid, listless, and inert young ladies, who now recline upon our sofas . . . is to me a truly melancholy spectacle. . . . It is but rarely now that we meet with a really healthy woman.”²² Despite these dire warnings, the cult of the female invalid continued to rise, grow and flourish unabated, with the visual counterparts exaggerating and amplifying the idealized fragility of the Victorian female.

While the angelic invalid previously drifted on the liminal edge of society, it was during the 1850s that she moved swiftly into the very center of Victorian society and assumed a kind of unparalleled public visibility. This widespread cultural mindset not only inspired a new classification of Victorian womanhood within society, but also generated a new artistic type that consistently aligned femininity with illness, creating a virtual community of sufferers all afflicted by some mysterious and unnamed affliction. For example, British artist’s John Thomas Peele’s *A Prayer for Health* (1871) (Figure 44) is an idealized version of a young invalid in a simple white dressing gown, the scene’s sparse interior suggesting the woman’s working-class status. With little comfort save for two feeble plants, the setting amplifies the girl’s tenuous state. The bedframe is rickety and meager, the bedding thin and ruffled, with the mattress peering through an ill-fitting sheet. A chair, repurposed as a night table, is littered with an empty teacup, a medicine bottle, and a book, all suggesting a lengthy sickness. Objects in this paintings also suggestively point to futile attempts to continue the work of a seamstress: a spool of thread,

²¹Quoted by Beecher in Herndl, 20.

²²Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women in England* (Edward Walker, New York, 1850), 27. Also noted in Carol Bauer, Ph.D., and Lawrence Ritts, Ph.D., “The Little Health of Ladies’ An Anatomy of Female Invalidism in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the American Medical Women’s Association* 36, no. 10 (1981): 300-306, at 300.

scissors, what looks like a bobbin, a piece of fabric, perhaps some mending, cast aside. A background window is slightly ajar and angelic rays of light fall upon the figure's sweet face. Meanwhile, an open book, or Bible, graces her lap as she clasps delicate fingers in prayer and her eyes supplicate towards divine restoration.

A later example of this theme is American artist Irving R. Wiles' *The Convalescent* (1890) (Figure 45), which features two fashionably dressed ladies of leisure. A young woman reclines listlessly against a pillow, her chin resting on her hand and a fan idly set between her fingers. Passive and inert, the convalescent exudes affliction, which intensifies the contrast between herself and her patiently mindful female company. The companion, delicately perched on a thin chair next to the piano, sits properly upright as dictated by decorum and a stifling corset. Extravagant ruffles and a large bustle adorn the front and back of her skirt, respectively. Her hand firmly grasps the back of the chair, further conveying a sense of stability and security. In contrast to the light blue and peach gown of her companion, the convalescent is attired in a simple white day dress that enunciates her withdrawal from public life. The angelic white dress, similar to that shown in Henry Peach Robinson's *Fading Away*, also connotes purity as well as innocence. Her languid pose as she leans wearily against an enormous pillow suggests that she is uncorseted, further heightening her enclosure within the confines of domestic life. The women's facial expressions and coloring enhance the dichotomy between the healthy and the afflicted. While the companion gazes steadily, if not resolutely, her face flecked with subtle coloring and her lips a vibrant red, the convalescent stares vacantly downward, as if she resides in a permanent dream-state. Her pallid visage and lips correspond and harmonize with the whiteness of her dress and pillow, creating a vision of ethereal and fragile beauty. Interestingly, it was

Wiles' treatment of women that elicited praise from the period's writers, who declared, "He is most at home in the delineation of American interiors and pretty young women, whose ribbons and flounces, gauzy veils and laces, he indicates with as much character as he puts in the expression of their faces."²³

Wiles' image suggests the theme of passing time and idleness that many Victorian experienced. The lady of leisure had few acceptable options to pursue outside the domestic sphere, and during this period, invalidism was transformed into a type of lifelong occupation, a way of identifying and valuing herself that immediately signaled class, culture and refinement. Sarah Stage notes this contradiction: "woman's frailty, on the one hand, was feared as a signal of decline and a threat to the race, on the other hand it was applauded as an emblem of progressive refinement and civilization."²⁴ This equation of perpetual illness with moral superiority was duly noted by many physicians as a "a kind of occupation" and an "achievement of culture."²⁵ Alice James, sister to Henry James, exemplifies how for some Victorian women invalidism was transformed into a lifelong pursuit. A vibrant, intelligent young woman who struggled to identify herself in the wake of her brother's incredible fame, Alice was stricken at the age of 19 with a

²³William H. Burnham, "Illusions of Memory," *Scribner's Magazine* 11 (1892): 198.

²⁴Sarah Stage, *Female Complaints: Lydia Pinkham and the Business of Women's Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 74.

²⁵Stage, 75. During the 1850s, the notion that Victorian women were less healthy than their grandmothers and mothers and thereby more elevated and genteel was commonplace. Writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne adopted an almost boastful tone, tinged with a degree of pride, when describing this new breed of femininity: "Every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slight frame." As Stage notes, Hawthorne likewise reinforced the revealing equation that good health was crude and an indication, in Hawthorne's words, of a 'courser fibre,' 'morally, as well as materially.' Stage, 74-75.

vague affliction.²⁶ According to twentieth-century scholar Ruth Bernard Yeazell, “Alice retired permanently to her bed and took up the profession of an invalid.”²⁷ In this context, it is especially important to note the age at which Alice became an invalid. Many on the cusp of womanhood succumbed to this mysterious illness as a means of avoiding, or delaying, the inevitability of marriage and motherhood. Women of that time also may have felt overwhelmed by new opportunities, such as education. The theme of age becomes even more relevant in Chapter 7.²⁸

In Alice James’ diary, she repeatedly writes of “achieving” illness and of “getting herself dead” as a feat equal to or surpassing her brother’s writing.²⁹ At one point in her diary, she pointedly quotes a French philosopher as a way of describing her suffering, as if that could transform her life itself into a work of art.³⁰ Under the guise of sickness, her physical suffering

²⁶Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *The Death and Letters of Alice James*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 4.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸See Chapter 7.

²⁹Alice James, *The Diary of Alice James*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Penguin American Library, 1982), 211. See also Herndl, 126.

³⁰For the full and rather lengthy quote, see Herndl, 126. It is also interesting to note that Alice was engaged in a lifelong search to find a diagnosis for her sickness. Alice’s “illness” continued to remain a mystery, despite repeated consultations with several physicians. The inability to identify Alice’s “illness” was not at all unusual and suggests a much larger issue of how subjective and vague these conditions were, relying solely on the self-reports of the patient or the direct observation of the physicians. Finally, after nearly twenty years of invalidism, Alice was diagnosed with cancer. As her diary reveals, she welcomed the diagnosis with a sense of tremendous relief and vindication. In her diary she triumphantly exclaims, “To him who waits, all things come! My aspirations may have been eccentric, but I cannot complain now, that they have not been brilliantly fulfilled. Ever since I have been ill, I have longed and longed for some palpable disease.” Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 48-49.

became her career, and the one piece of writing she published was tellingly signed “Invalid.”³¹ Victorian women’s health therefore became the very cornerstone of her existence, a condition that determined her entire life and one that was doted upon daily.

Punch, ever attuned to Victorian trends, satirized the frequency and meaninglessness of women’s visits to their physicians in *Ladies of Fashion and Their Doctors* (1897) (Figure 46). The image recalls Ann Douglas Wood’s assertion that invalidism was, in many cases, a “fashionable condition” and “that women were not really more ill.”³² Wood argues that women of the nineteenth century may have been no healthier than their eighteenth-century mothers and grandmothers but “learned to think of themselves as unhealthy.”³³ The scene unfolds in the opulent waiting room of a fashionable doctor, the interior arrayed with artfully arranged decorations and plants. A copy of the statue *Venus de Milo* is silhouetted against the window, reinforcing the environment as one suited for the most cultivated of Victorian ladies. Two women greet one another with expressions of concern: “What—you here, Lizzie? Why, aren’t you well?” “Perfectly, thanks! But what’s the matter with *you* dear.” Indeed, feigned ill health became a sign of social status, increasingly deemed the very key of femininity. Dr. Mitchell, a famous Philadelphia physician, expressed this pervasive belief: “The man who does not know sick women does not know women.”³⁴

³¹Herndl, 126.

³²Wood, “Fashionable Diseases,” 27.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Silas Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1897).

Images of the female invalid not only connoted the sufferer's social hierarchy, but also reflected her husband's achievements and economic standing. The Victorian wives' fashionable delicacy, sensibility, and identification as invalids functioned as both a source of pride and a badge of honor. As Lorna Duffin notes, the social role of the rising middle-class woman was one of lethargy and inactivity, and in this state the Victorian woman was a "symbol of conspicuous leisure and the agent of conspicuous consumption."³⁵ American economist Thorstein Veblen's seminal 1899 social critique entitled *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* clearly outlines the role of the Victorian woman in relation to her husband: "She still quite unmistakably remains his chattel . . . for the habitual rendering of vicarious leisure and consumption is the abiding mark of the unfree servant . . . the women have been required not only to afford evidence of a life of leisure, but even to disable themselves for useful activity."³⁶ This equation of illnesses with moral superiority was succinctly quantified by one physician who cynically observed, "Illness is an achievement of culture."³⁷ Likewise, Victorian essayist Eliza Linton's "Girl of the Period," written in 1876, underscores the era's inherent association of eroticism and beauty in the female invalid.³⁸ For example, according to Linton, the female invalid's ill-health, when properly manifest in "fragility" and "the long, loose folds of falling drapery" could actually revive marital passion.³⁹ Linton explains: "Many a drifting husbands

³⁵Duffin, 31.

³⁶As quoted in Duffin, 26.

³⁷Stage, 75.

³⁸Elizabeth Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (London: R. Bentley and Sons, 1883), 22-30.

³⁹Linton, 26

has been brought back to his first enthusiasm by the illness of a wife who knew how to turn evil things into good, and to extract a charm even out of suffering.”⁴⁰

Representations in popular journals further underscore the myth of the female invalid. For example, the January 1888 issue of the *Ladies Home Journal* prominently features an illustration for Mrs. Mary J. Holmes’ widely popular serialized novel *Spring Farm* (Figure 47) on its front page. As modern scholar Rozinek notes, “Grace is presented as the ideal Victorian lady: beautiful, devoted, self-sacrificing, suffering, and pious.”⁴¹ The 1888 *Home Journal* introduces Grace as a woman who, despite suffering extreme physical pain and enduring hours of “languor and depression,” nevertheless puts the welfare of her fiancé first and knows “better than to inflict herself upon him. . . .”⁴² Confined to a wheelchair, the invalid is entirely helpless and dependent on the goodwill of her strapping male companion, who, outfitted in a business suit and stylish hat, grips the chair with leather gloves as he dutifully propels his beloved forward. The house at the far left of the illustration suggests that the beautiful invalid’s place is clearly within the domestic sphere and this momentary “excursion” has rendered her further immobile. Meanwhile, the sickly woman is ensconced in a mountain of blankets, making her immobility even more pronounced. She clutches a posy of flowers close to her face, while her other hand remains upturned and listless. With some difficulty, the lovely invalid looks upward, her vacuous

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Erika Ingelina Rozinek, “*We All Take Our Turn*”: *Invalidism in American Culture, 1850-1910* (Ph.D. dissertation, Winterthur, Ann Arbor ProQuest/UMI, publication Number 1413561), 20.

⁴²Quoted in Holmes’ *Spring Farm* in Rozinek, 20.

gaze lost in the distance. Meanwhile her male companion looks down at her with supreme reverence, as if viewing a fragile work of art.

The pervasiveness of this new and disturbing type of beauty was likewise noted by *The Bazar-Book of Decorum*: “There is a phase of fashion which doctors might call ‘morbific,’ characterized by the affection of the symptoms of disease . . . the vogue is [now] given to the pallid, wan, hectic and feeble. We thus find the florid and robust assuming ill health when they have it not, and resorting to all kinds of contrivances to give the face a cast of sickliness.”⁴³ As modern scholar Christopher Woods observes, Anglo-French artist James Tissot likewise seized upon the popular theme of sickness and invalidism. Throughout the 1870s, he painted what Woods describes as “gracefully ailing females,” who “never give the impression of being seriously ill, but . . . how to be ill in style.”⁴⁴ For example, in Tissot’s *The Convalescent (A Girl in an Armchair)* (1872) (Figure 48), illness becomes a beautifying agent, a cosmetic accessible only to the privileged lady of leisure. In this image, a young female invalid languishes upon a floral chair, though she appears to be kneeling beside it, an ambiguity created by her massive, obfuscating skirt. Regardless, her precarious position on the chair suggests that her illness may have led her to slip off, or nearly slip off, its ample cushion—a common hazard for the infirm. Like the conservatory she inhabits, which teems with lush vegetation, her beauty, charm, and allure blossom and swell under the plight of her physical suffering. Yet ironically, she will never

⁴³Robert Tomes, *Bazar Book of Decorum: The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870), 114. Stage also notes that the literary creation of this aesthetic “invalid” type emerges as early as 1852 with the delicate sickly heroine Priscilla, “whose impalpable, sickly heroine lay so singularly between disease and beauty,” in Hawthorne’s *Blithedale Romance*. Stage, 75.

⁴⁴Christopher Wood, *Tissot: The Life and Work of Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1836-1902* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), 76-78.

bear fruit, as it were. The image bears a striking resemblance to one physician's description of female invalidism as a mark of distinction and beauty. Invalidism, he writes, has "given this melancholy state the stamp of propriety, and thrown around it the charm of fashion. The suffering invalid is called interesting, and the pale faced, debilitated creature, scarcely able to crawl about, is styled invalid in which physical capability is termed coarseness and vulgarity."⁴⁵ Here, though she lies in the claustrophobic conservatory, confined by her unidentified illness, her cheeks are seductively flushed and her long hair gleams and retains its alluring luster as it cascades in thick, lush waves down her back. The brick-lined walls of the conservatory jut outward and simulate a low-lying fortress round the captive invalid. At the far right of the composition an open glass-paned door suggests the entrance from which a dutiful attendant likely carried her into the sickroom. The fabric of her handsome voluminous tea gown cascades around her, its vast circumferences exaggerating and intensifying her diminutive frame. Precariously reclining in the chair, she leans heavily on the armchair. Her posture suggests utter depletion and physical weakness, as if at a moment's notice the heavy fabric of her gown could pull her to the ground, creating a white, billowing pool at the foot of the chair. She is a "collapsing" woman who does so quite beautifully. Her vacuous gaze peers through heavily hooded eyes with a sense of passive compliance, as if beauty was blossoming under the plight of her physical suffering.⁴⁶

⁴⁵David T. Cartwright, "The Female Opiate Addict in Nineteenth-Century America," *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 10, no. 2 (March 1982): 164.

⁴⁶Her languor recalls, perhaps, that of a drugged woman. The subject of women's relationship to opiates, such as laudanum and morphine, will be addressed in Chapter 5.

It was, however, specifically Kathleen Newton, Tissot's true love, who was most often the model for the artist's many depictions of female invalidism. As twenty-first-century scholar Jill Berk Jiminez has noted, "She was the quintessential Victorian tragic heroine: victim of an arranged marriage, 'fallen woman,' mother of two illegitimate children, beautiful, consumptive."⁴⁷ Throughout the model's brief life, Tissot painted her with compulsive frequency—recalling Rossetti's obsession with Siddal—especially during the 1870s, when the fatal disease advanced.⁴⁸ Wood observes, "Tissot's obsession with Kathleen Newton, as with so many Victorian artists and their models, became neurotic, even tormented, especially as her illness began to gradually destroy her."⁴⁹ However, unlike Siddal, whose illness was vague and never substantiated, Newton suffered greatly as a consumptive and died tragically at the young age of twenty-eight. *Summer Evening (Soiree d'ete)* (1882) (Figure 49) is a painful, yet beautiful, depiction of Newton in the final stages of her terrible disease. In this etching, as in *Fading Away*, she is reclining in a wicker chaise lounge, supported by an assemblage of pillows. As Casteras has observed, "Tissot's image makes the consumptive creature both invalid and recumbent, languishing in a secret garden in which she too is a precious flower that is tragically wilting in the bloom of her youth."⁵⁰ Newton's entire head is cocooned in a heavy fur wrap, framing her feeble, sickly face, her eyes shadowy and etched with fatigue as she gazes listlessly through half-closed lids. Yet, in all of its tragedy, the image is also captivating, beautiful and alluring. Newton

⁴⁷Jill Berk Jiminez, *Dictionary of Artists' Models* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 398.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹Wood, *Tissot*, 87.

⁵⁰Susan P. Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), 48.

wears black gloves, as if already in mourning, and her hand is delicately contorted. A posy nestles in her bosom, which seems to be heaving with the pains of tuberculosis. This vision of her suffering is all the more poignant as Newton died soon thereafter, on November 9, 1882.⁵¹

As Chapter 1 revealed, strong class connotations permeated the cult of the invalid: while social perceptions defined affluent women as inherently sick, they hailed working-class women as naturally healthy and robust. Unlike upper-class women, who seemed to become even more beautiful and desirable when sick, women of the lower class became objects of disgust and potential contamination when they fell ill. For example, an engraving from *Harper's Weekly* (1860) showing conditions in Bellevue Hospital's female ward (c. 1860) depicts a sick working-class woman as an object of filth and putrefaction (Figure 50). In this image, rats not only circle the bedridden woman but even scurry upon bedcovers and perch upon a patient's shoulder, further intensifying her unsanitary state. Interestingly, however, despite the decay that envelops her, she is idealized with a delicate profile and long, curly hair cascading down her pillow, creating an odd mixture of beauty and depletion.

Several factors arose during the mid-nineteenth century that contributed to this ideal of debilitated yet beautifully angelic womanhood. As noted earlier, Victorian medicine was undergoing a dramatic shift as the practice of healing, once the domain of the Victorian women, was quickly becoming a legitimate, professionalized institution. It is specifically this rise of the medical profession, which according to Herndl, is so important in the depiction of the ill woman.⁵² The Victorian woman was swiftly dethroned as the household nurse and healer and

⁵¹Wood, *Tissot*, 120.

⁵²Herndl, 17.

replaced with the all-knowing, well-heeled male physician, who quickly became an important, and increasingly powerful, figure within the cultural landscape. Ehrenreich and English summarize this paradigm shift and struggle for medical authority as “an allegory of science versus superstition: On the one side, the clear headed, masculine spirit of science; on the other side, a dark morass of female superstition [and] old wives tales.”⁵³ Physicians spoke loudly and firmly to establish their authority and above all stressed the necessity of calling them for any and all ailments. For example, Victorian physician H. R. Stout, was adamant that women “above all . . . should follow strictly, the direction of the physician, and not take it upon herself to prescribe other remedies, or give other directions.”⁵⁴ This usurpation of the role of Victorian women healers by male physicians was not only facilitated by a more general cultural mood fueled by great leaps in scientific advancement but likewise persevered and protected the ideology of “separate spheres.”⁵⁵

One of the unique specialties to emerge from this burgeoning industry was the field of gynecology. As Ehrenreich and English contend, the rise of the “new science—gynecology” envisioned the female body as a new “frontier,” a “strange territory” that was “not only

⁵³Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 35.

⁵⁴Herndl, 17.

⁵⁵Herndl, 34. Herndl also notes that by the 1880s, the male physician's influence was being threatened by the emergence of female physicians. Ibid. Considered together, the medical profession's early strategies—appropriation of women's health and the conviction that their patients were indeed sick—was indeed successful. As Herndl states, “From the 1840s until the 1890s, women were increasingly defined as sickly and weak.” Herndl, 17. The subject of the codependent relationship between the Victorian doctor and female patients will be explored in the following chapter.

primitive, but deeply pathological.”⁵⁶ The medical discourse on the Victorian woman reveals an ongoing conversation between real science and the unknown of the supernatural. While the mid-nineteenth century was moving towards a more rational empirical approach to the body, the medical profession, and especially when considering the Victorian female body, was still very much influenced with Romantic preoccupation of the supernatural and the mystical. Modern scholar Gavin Budge discusses how the earlier Romantic preoccupation with the supernatural was still alive and well in early Victorian medical theories.⁵⁷ Budge observes, “The Romantic insistence on a dimension to human experience that transcended the everyday forms of visible nature persisted well into the mid-nineteenth century.”⁵⁸ Specifically, Victorians viewed the “supernatural body” as usually female, a mystery capable of hallucinations brought on by overtaxed nerves. This idea flourished in the context of Spiritualism, a subject that this dissertation examines in Chapter 7.⁵⁹

Ford Madox Brown’s *Convalescent* also suggests this interrelationship between sickness and a quality of the supernatural. While the image pays homage to the lengthy plight of her illness, the deathly waxen face and eerily out of place hand, emerging from the coverlet, imbue the work with a spiritual otherworldly quality. Rendered as a separate, ghostly appendage, the skeletal hand clutching the posy seem to anticipate death, even as it contrasts with Emma’s full

⁵⁶Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 18.

⁵⁷Gavin Budge, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1789-1852* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁵⁸Budge, 4.

⁵⁹Budge touches upon this topic as well; see 7 and 23-25.

round face. The violet's symbolic allusion transforms the scene from a mere "sickbed" to a potential deathbed.

As the Victorian medical community scrutinized and debated the natural courses and rhythms of the female body, it was increasingly deemed predisposed to a host of potential illnesses that could cause a swift descent into invalidism.⁶⁰ Physicians quickly branded the reproductive system as the cause of female invalidism, identifying the ovaries and uterus as the primary culprits.⁶¹ As Ann Douglas Wood notes, doctors "directed their attention to the womb in a way that seems decidedly unscientific and even obsessive to a modern viewer."⁶² For the medical science of this period, women's place in nature and society rested ultimately on biological laws. Physicians routinely spoke of the influences of the ovaries and uterus over Victorian women, suggesting that a woman's will and self-determination were useless against the power of the womb. With near-obsessive ardor, doctors discussed the female uterus and ovaries as highly perilous possessions capable of going awry at a moment's notice. This general cultural belief was succinctly quantified when one physician explained in 1870 that it seemed "as if the Almighty, in creating the female sex, *had taken the uterus and built up a woman around*

⁶⁰Herndl suggests that the appropriation of birthing and the establishment of gynecology as a specialty were important factors in this depiction of women. Herndl, 34-41.

⁶¹As Carroll Smith Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg note, "Physicians saw women as the product and prisoner of her reproductive system. It was the ineluctable basis of her social role and behavioral characteristics, the cause of her most common ailments; woman's uterus and ovaries controlled her body and behavior from puberty through menopause." Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings*, ed. Judith Waltzer Leavitt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 111-130, at 112.

⁶²Wood, "Fashionable Diseases," 3.

it.”⁶³ Thus, the Victorian woman was considered both product and prisoner of her reproductive system, and the resulting theories imagined women’s entire being—mind, body and soul—as dominated by the very thing that made her female, her reproductive organs.⁶⁴

As Ehrenreich explains in “Uterus Versus Brain,” physicians envisioned the human body as “an economic system, with various parts—like classes or interest groups—competing for a limited supply of resources.”⁶⁵ This general theory of “limited vital energy,” as it was called, placed paramount emphasis on the onset of puberty for young girls.⁶⁶ As Rosenberg and Rosenberg explains, it was believed that young girls’ highest intellectual development occurred prior to puberty because the beginning of menstruation required the diversion of “vital energy” and blood to the reproductive system.⁶⁷ Due to this limited supply, any further intellectual pursuits could potentially result in the degeneration and crippling of the reproductive organs, thus threatening the fulfillment of a woman’s true social roles as mother and wife. As it was impossible for the brain and ovaries to develop simultaneously, it was therefore deemed necessary for this energy to be directed to the woman’s reproductive system so she could assume

⁶³Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 13; and Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 108. Emphasis in original. Another Victorian doctor expressed with similar conviction, “The uterus, it must be remembered, is the *controlling* organ in the female body, being the most excitable of all, and is intimately connected, by the ramifications of its numerous nerves, with every other part. Ibid.

⁶⁴Paradoxically, male physicians assured Victorians that no parallel controlling force was evident in the male body. Ibid.

⁶⁵See Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 113-118.

⁶⁶Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 15.

⁶⁷For a discussion on the theory of “limited vital theory” and Victorian girlhood, see Rosenberg and Rosenberg, 15; and Haller and Haller, 60-61.

her proper place in society, nurturing children, serving her husband, and managing their home. This left no remaining “energy” for the development of her brain.

The cultural mindset of how Victorian girls were to be raised was directly affected and shaped by these pervasive medical biases. As Haller and Haller state, “For the good of the race, medical men proposed that girls complete their education by the age of sixteen or seventeen and then marry, rather than wait until they were in their twenties.”⁶⁸ Physicians ominously warned that higher education and delayed marriage rendered “wifehood and motherhood distasteful owing to defective developments of the sexual organs.”⁶⁹ The early inculcation of this kind of thinking in young girls was noted with a degree of frustration by Abba Goold Woolson: “We allow them to acquire a knowledge of the elementary studies taught in schools, take care to add to these a few graceful accomplishments, and if possible, some taste in dress and adornment, and then regard their education as complete.”⁷⁰

Images of young, sweet-faced invalids suffering painlessly through illness elicited warm and tender responses from the Victorian viewer and suggest how such strictures became part of a young girl’s social catechism. This subject was a pictorial offshoot and its tenacious popularity underscores how this prevailing ideology of female invalidism was indoctrinated within the culture of Victorian girlhood. For example, John Everett Millais’ *Getting Better* (1876) (Figure 51) is a sentimental image of a young invalid greeting visitors bearing gifts.⁷¹ Exhibited at

⁶⁸Haller and Haller, 60.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Woolson, 197.

⁷¹The number of images dedicated to this subject is vast. For example, see Millais’ *The Convalescent* (1875), Frank Holl’s *The Convalescent* (1865), etc.

Millais' solo exhibition in 1885-1886 at the Grosvenor Gallery, *Getting Better* provided Victorian visitors with a detailed narrative: "The invalid's face expresses the hunger of long-delayed hope, faint longing for air, companionship, and light, so long kept back as not to be quite heartily anticipated now that they are near. She is convalescent, and the friends come with fresh looks and cool hands."⁷² Significantly, this excerpt from the catalogue reveals how much more Victorian viewers saw and made of these symptoms. It was indeed the weary countenance on the young girl's face that garnered praise for its "wonderfully" truthful rendering—not only for its portrait of slow recovery, but also for its evocation of a young convalescent's timidity. In this image, a smartly dressed young girl, who is bearing gifts like a lady bountiful in-training, raises her gloved hand as if to guide and comfort. A young boy stands at the gift bearer's side, yet it is her presence by the bedside that dominates and positions her, even at this early age, as the nurse or helpmate to the female invalid. Like Wiles' *The Convalescent*, Millais' *Getting Better* enforces this ideology of a community, or fellowship, of female sufferers and comforters—a congregation of like-minded Victorian women who adopted the roles prescribed for them by the cult of the female invalid.

As male physicians analyzed and quantified the Victorian woman's body, they employed a language that was often veiled and rife with implications regarding female spirituality and otherness. Male physicians repeatedly expressed the mysterious quality of women's inner makeup and sensibilities in light of their role as governess of the domestic sphere. For example, in 1869, Dr. William H. Holcombe presented the Victorian woman as an elusive being who, by her very nature, was secretive and mysterious:

⁷²Quoted in a catalogue entry (1885-1886) in Agnus Trumble, *Love and Death: Art in the Age of Queen Victoria* (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2001), 150.

Mentally, socially, spiritually, she is more interior than man. Woman is to deal with *domestic* affection and uses, not with philosophies and sciences. . . . The house, the chamber, the closet, are the centre of her social life and her power, as surely as the sun is the centre of the solar system . . . another proof of the interiority of woman is the wonderful secretiveness and power of dissimulation is not fraud. They are intuitions or spiritual perceptions, full of tact and wisdom, leading her to conceal or reveal, to speak or be silent, to do, exactly at the right time in the right place.⁷³

This passage characterizes the female invalid as a paradoxical figure, at once weak and dependent on others, yet equally invested with a sense of power and influence. Indeed, just as her illness rendered her physically weakened, the protracted suffering of invalidism was believed to provide the Victorian woman with unique visionary capacity, an endowment that directly linked her to the concurrent Spiritualist movement. Critical to this study is the period's notion that female invalidism bestowed a power that led many to become Spiritualist. According to twentieth-century scholar Maria Frawley, "There was a conviction of the invalid's capacity to access spiritual truths unavailable to the healthy."⁷⁴ Chapter 7 will specifically address the Spiritualist movement as the context in which illness became a type of prescription, or right of passage, and even a haven for female mediumship.

Images that specifically depict the female invalid in sickrooms, such as Brown's *The Convalescent*, seem to allude to this otherworldly quality. The sickroom was a type of "spiritual sanctuary" within the Victorian home, a sphere in which extended periods of deep contemplation and insight could occur. The conferment of higher spiritual standing and self-awareness on the female invalid hinged on her recumbent pose and long hours of enforced immobility. This treatment was not only recommended but required by male physicians who enforced, often with

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Frawley, 13.

patriarchal tones, long sequestrations in darkened rooms with little or no movement. Thus, the specific experience of female invalidism was key to acquiring a level of insight and self-examination unattainable by more ordinary individuals.

This spiritualized aura was reinforced in narratives written by women like Harriet Martineau and Julia Duckworth Stephens, who identify the sickroom as a distinct and sanctified space in which the invalid acquires specific spiritual insight and stature unknown to the healthy, active and working. Harriet Martineau, in her famous and widely popular 1844 publication entitled *Life in the Sickroom*, perceived the sickroom as a place that defied earthly connotations and was rather “a separate region of human experience.”⁷⁵ As modern scholar Alison Winter explains, the female invalid, and by extension the sickroom, occupied a special spiritual place that vacillated between this world and the next.⁷⁶ The Victorian invalid Julia Duckworth Stephens, author of *Notes from the Sickroom*, particularly delighted in this unique perspective, writing in 1883, “What a precious privilege is afforded of importing knowledge, of elevating other, and inciting them to prepare for more extensive walks of usefulness.”⁷⁷ Likewise, Martineau effused about the revelations made available to her “in this one room” and encouraged

⁷⁵See Mariam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17. To read more on Harriet Martineau, see Maria H. Frawley ed. *Life in the Sick-Room: Harriet Martineau* (New York: Broadview Literary Texts, 2003).

⁷⁶Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 213.

⁷⁷Frawley, 38.

her readers to “look into the retired places” and the “least known parts of human life” to find similar sources and understanding of “moral beauty.”⁷⁸

The protracted periods of repose and inertia fed into the romanticized characterization of the female invalid as a figure spending countless hours in dreamy states of self-contemplation. Frawley’s inquiry into the self-identification of the Victorian invalid characterizes the prescribed recumbent states as imbued with a “subjectivity” and “level of insight unique” to the convalescent.⁷⁹ Frawley notes the emphasis on the “separation of the sickroom from the household and society more generally,” whereby Victorian society construed female invalids as figures whose solitude and perspective derived from “lives [spent] on one’s back in long hours of repose,” as one late nineteenth-century invalid wrote.⁸⁰ In turn, the solitary confinement of the sickroom and the invalid’s experience in it equipped them with “mental capacities,” “with unique powers of perspective and ‘range of vision’” that was “unknown to the healthy, active, and working.”⁸¹ Martineau’s narrative *Life in the Sickroom* particularly pinpoints the female invalid’s static position in the sickroom as a vantage point from which she is always watching and observing. For example, Martineau describes how invalids “lie on the verge of life and watch, with nothing to do but think, and learn from what [they] behold.” Martineau vests the gaze with a potent subjectivity, likening the female invalid to a “seraph, posed outside of the ‘real’ world,”

⁷⁸Winter, 221.

⁷⁹Winter, 201.

⁸⁰Winter, 202.

⁸¹Ibid.

and emphasizing her ability to “see further and visually defy distance and house-walls.”⁸²

Regarding the Victorian woman’s experience in sickrooms, it is important to note that it was also a potential catalyst for psychosis. For example, Charlotte Perkin Gillman’s *Yellow Wallpaper*, published in 1892, includes the same scenario as that of Martineau, yet here the female invalid’s confinement results in madness. In the book, the narrator provides daily journal entries that document her gradual descent into insanity.

The late nineteenth century’s fascination with female invalids’ confinement to the sickroom is evident in many pictorial representations that romanticized listlessness and, in particular, the vacant stare. Repeatedly, images such as Ford Madox Brown’s *The Convalescent* focus on the female invalid’s detached, vacuous gaze. Through half-closed eyes, Emma Brown, the model, stares feverishly outward, oblivious to her surroundings. British artist Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s *The Nurse* (1872) (Figure 52) likewise reflects this eerie fixation on the female invalid’s, perhaps the artist’s wife, and vacant yet penetrating gaze from the confines of her bed.⁸³ Here, the invalid’s fragile, diminutive constitution intensifies in its cocoon of bedding and lavish curtains, embroidered with chivalric male figures that threaten to seal her refuge from the outer world, yet ironically-if safely- “invade” her world. Here, the medieval setting selected by Alma-Tadema is suffused with an enchanted or mystical atmosphere, thereby further distancing

⁸²Winter, 230. In the context of this discussion, it is important, however, to note that a woman’s experience in the sickroom was also a potential catalyst for madness. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Yellow Wallpaper*, published in 1892, includes the same scenario. Given the scope of this chapter, I will not fully explore this pivotal piece of feminist literature. For further reading, see Herndl, 129-33 and 141-149.

⁸³According to Jill Berk Jiminez, the model for the invalid was Alma-Tadema’s second wife, Laura Teresa Epps. Epps was an accomplished artist and musician in her own right. She married Alma-Tadema shortly after the death of his first wife, Pauline Gressin Dumoulin. Jiminez, 41.

himself from his wife Laura. Lying on her side and cradling a pillow in her right arm, the sickened woman melts into the shadows of the vast bed curtain, her gaze fixated outward from the dark recesses. She is a diminutive figure, dormant and inert, yet with visionary eyes—all of which coalesce with her all-white chemise to create a sense of the female invalid transformed into an otherworldly being.

This general overview has demonstrated the period's fixation on the female invalid. On one hand, narratives such as those written by Martineau and Stephens suggest that invalidism granted enormous power, insight, and even a certain degree of influence. Conversely, some pictorial representations of the female invalid did not comply with this literary narrative; for example, images like Brown's *The Convalescent* repeatedly rendered the sufferer as helpless, feeble and depleted. The invalid's vacuous gaze and mental state did not necessarily reveal a sense of "special vision or insight." Even when invalidism was intentionally pursued as a means of acquiring social status, as exemplified by Elizabeth Siddal, this ascension paradoxically rendered her helpless, infirm, and "invalid," in the sense that she had no social validity. Significantly, it was not until the rise of the Spiritualist movement, the focus of Chapter 7, that pictorial representations emerged demonstrating this union of altered physical and mental states with an implied sense of power and insight. This chapter on the Victorian cult of the invalid has examined representations that laid the foundation for a new type of imagery depicting female sickness. The next chapter examines images that emerged in the 1870s as a continuation of these same central issues but that were more narrowly focused on a single ailment: neurasthenia.

CHAPTER 5

THE NEURASTHENIC WOMAN

The perception that Victorian women's health was declining persisted throughout the mid- to late nineteenth century, and increasingly illness was identified as the key—indeed, the very linchpin—to ideal femininity. In 1887, Dr. Mitchell, a famous Philadelphia physician, expressed this pervasive belief: “The man who does not know sick women does not know women.”¹ Even by the end of the century, both medical literature and popular culture continued to perpetuate an ideology that on the one hand deemed women as inferior to men, yet on the other elevated them to something celestial and angelic. In 1881, Thomas Higginson's *Common Sense About Women* poignantly expressed this ideology by advising the Victorian woman “to present herself as a being made to please, to love, and to seek support; a being inferior to man, and near to angels.”² All the while, the undercurrent of perplexing illnesses that turned a community of Victorian women into occupational invalids perpetually languishing on divans, complaining of fatigue and overtaxed nerves, continued.

This chapter examines the key characteristics affiliated with neurasthenia—primarily its association with women and the strong connection of its symptoms, perceived cause, and various treatments with the Victorian woman's transcendence into some form of altered states. Neurasthenia afflicted both genders, but Victorian society believed that women were

¹Silas Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1888), 10.

²Thomas W. Higginson, *Common Sense About Women* (Boston, 1881), 342. Also cited in John S. Haller, Jr., and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 48.

significantly more susceptible based purely on their biology. The causes of neurasthenia and its cures provide a framework through which Victorian culture can be viewed and reveals how female sufferers of its vague symptoms became a type of privileged interpreter and reflection of gender ideology. The medical and social discourse surrounding neurasthenia fostered a cultural attitude that perceived the afflicted Victorian woman as both beautiful and spiritual. Innumerable articles and essays devoted to describing female neurasthenia were laced with complimentary and even flattering tones. They routinely placed victims on a pedestal, in a situation where their forbearance and transcendence could be idealized and admired. Suffering from overwhelming listlessness and fatigue, female neurasthenics lived in a hazy cloud that cast their minds allegedly adrift. Their suffering evolved into a distinct type of femininity that both paralleled and enhanced the idealized frailty and delicacy of Victorian women already established with the female consumptive and the cult of the invalid. Yet, unlike previously discussed images of female consumptive and invalids, whose titles—*Too Late!*, *The Convalescent*—clearly indicate a sickened state, the works in this chapter are merely suggestive of neurasthenia. This condition and the culture that surrounded it ascribed the female sufferer with specific physical attributes that fit the broader concept of femininity as inherently frail and delicate. All three types—the female consumptive, the invalid, and the neurasthenic—encompassed and enhanced the period’s gender myths. In the grip of neurasthenia, these defining ideals and myths of Victorian femininity were exaggerated into a female neurasthenic “type.” With the deluge of literature and visual images dedicated to the condition, Victorians not only became familiar with its symptoms and nuances, but also developed an appreciation for the “neurasthenic type,” which bespoke both the upper-class privilege and propriety of idealized Victorian femininity.

Increasingly, medical accounts of women suffering from neurasthenia included terms and a type of language that connected them to works of art. Their bodies, inscribed with the physical and mental characteristics of the disease, were transformative, moving them from the earthly to the abstracted realm of “high art.” This association between female neurasthenics and the otherworldly is evident in numerous diaries, letters and medical texts in which the female neurasthenic’s plight is compared to fine art. For example, Dr. George Savage’s description of the neurasthenic incorporates some of the references to the gaunt, pale beauty of the Pre-Raphaelite Stunners: “The body wastes, and the face has a thin anxious look, not unlike that represented by Rossetti in many of his pictures of women. There is a hungry look about them which is striking.”³ Livy Langdon, the wife of Samuel Clemens (a.k.a. Mark Twain), was diagnosed with neurasthenia, which she developed in her late teens after a fall on an ice pond.⁴ According to modern scholar Resa Willis, Langdon “was living in the self-centered, sheltered world of the Angelic Beautiful Invalid The disease of frailty . . . became a high art in Victorian times that saw women as weak, childlike, to be lifted onto a pedestal.”⁵ In his colorful description of his future spouse’s most striking characteristics, Clemens himself adopts the well-known neurasthenic language: “She was slender and beautiful and girlish—and she was both girl and woman. She remained both girl and woman to the last day of her life. Under a grave and

³Quoted by Savage (1907) in Elaine Showalter, *Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press, 1987), 134.

⁴K. Patrick Ober, *Mark Twain and Medicine: “Any Mummery Will Cure”* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 125. Today, Langdon would most likely be diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome.

⁵Resa Willis, *Mark and Livy: The Love Story of Mark Twain and the Woman Who Almost Tamed Him* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1992), 24-26.

gentle exterior burned inextinguishable fire of sympathy, energy, devotion, enthusiasm and absolutely limitless affection. She was *always* frail in body and she lived upon her spirit, whose hopefulness and courage were indestructible.”⁶ Docile, compliant, and perpetually adolescent—these were the typical characteristics of both the female neurasthenic and the ideal Victorian woman.

The prevalence and influence of the “neurasthenic type” led to a complex and suggestive ideology that increasingly equated altered states with ideal Victorian femininity. The images of women enveloped in this neurasthenic languor, or vacuous demeanor, function as a kind of index inscribed with a code that was well understood and deciphered by the Victorian viewer. Often the neurasthenic woman is not overtly portrayed in a prostrate position, but rather her listlessness is conveyed through a distinct slouching or drooping of the body, as if she is on the brink of collapse. Significantly, a recurring motif is an upturned hand, which further suggests languor and mental disengagement. Neurasthenia, and the culture surrounding it, framed these female subjects with specific physical and mental attributes that conformed to the period’s broadly held imaginings of femininity. This chapter begins with representations of the neurasthenic type from America, where the subgenre originated, followed by British examples. The female subjects in these images display an inert, almost hypnotic demeanor that alludes to the languor associated with neurasthenia and contributes to this trope of the disengaged female intermediary who is susceptible to succumbing to the power of the spiritual realm. The manner in which neurasthenia was gendered is a vast and rich subject. Given its scope, this chapter discusses the subject only briefly in order to support my general thesis that illness in general was treated

⁶Ober, 125.

differently according to gender. This discussion also touches on the use of opiates, which were overprescribed to female sufferers of neurasthenia and many other afflictions associated with their gender.

It was with great fanfare in 1869 that medical science quantified and validated these cryptic ailments with a specific diagnosis: neurasthenia. As modern scholar Janet Oppenheim notes, the international medical community had long been familiar with the nervous debility, but “no one before Beard had so pertinaciously insisted on its status as a distinct disease.”⁷ The diagnosis offered by George Beard, an esteemed neurologist, not only provided a welcome quantifying term, but it also legitimized and validated a group of mystifying complaints and vague disorders that had come to torment the lives of an unknown but likely vast number of Victorians.⁸ Specifically, the diagnoses of neurasthenia provided the long-suffering Victorian female invalid with a way to quantify and legitimize her mysterious illness. In an 1869 article for the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, Beard introduced the word “neurasthenia” to the medical community. In “Neurasthenia, or Nervous Exhaustion” the esteemed neurologist explained a condition or state of nervous exhaustion which he believed was plaguing both men

⁷Janet Oppenheim, *“Shattered Nerves”: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (New York: Oxford Press, 1991), 93. As Oppenheim notes, “His was the name that became inextricably associated with neurasthenia because the New York neurologist tirelessly publicized its existence between 1869 and his death in 1883.” Ibid.

⁸F. G. Gosling, *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, 1870-1910* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 9. Gosling provides a comprehensive medical and cultural study of neurasthenia within the United States beginning in 1869 all the way through to the 1900s. As Gosling states, by the 1900s “the diagnosis had become a convenient catchall for nonspecific complaints.” Gosling, 161. For a more recent study of neurasthenia, specifically within the realm of art, see Katherine Williams et al., *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

and women of America's middle and upper classes.⁹ From the onset, doctors deemed it a class-specific disease that afflicted only the best and the brightest; thus, for the sufferer, neurasthenia became a veritable badge of distinction.¹⁰

The nineteenth century was considered the "nervous century" and Beard diagnosed neurasthenia as a direct result of America's rapid growth and industrialization.¹¹ According to him, neurasthenia was a condition with no modern or historical equivalent. In 1881, Beard's popular book *American Nervousness, Its Causes and Consequences* defined the condition as a lack of "nerve-force." In a modern twist, he compared the human body to an electric battery with a limited amount of electric force. Individuals who overspent their limited supply of nerve energy inevitably suffered from neurasthenia, also known as "nervous exhaustion."¹² Beard felt the disorder was becoming more common due to stress on the brain caused by industrialization

⁹Gosling, 9.

¹⁰Not only was this a class-specific disease, women in particular were considered more susceptible to this illness.

¹¹In the chapter titled "The Nervous Century," Haller and Haller summarize Beard's theories. "Neurasthenia had only accompanied the increased activity of industrialized man: the use of steampower, the press, the telegraph, the achievement of science, and the entrance of the alienated woman into the 'outside world.'" Haller and Haller, 6.

¹²Beard specifically writes, "The nervous system of man is the centre of the nerve-force supplying all the organs of the body. Like the steam engine, its force is limited, although it cannot be mathematically measured—and, unlike the steam engine, varies in amount of force with the food, the state of health and external conditions, varies with age, nutrition, occupation, and numberless factors . . . as modern civilization is constantly requiring us to do, there comes a period, sooner or later, varying in different individuals, and at different times of life, when the amount of force is insufficient to keep all the lamps actively burning; those that are weakest go out entirely, or, as more frequently happens, burn faint and feebly—they do not expire, but give an insufficient and unstable light—this is the philosophy of modern nervousness." George Miller Beard, *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881), 98-99.

and urbanization. The neurologist was adamant that the unique and rapid growth of civilization was the cause of neurasthenia, specifically noting the advancement in scientific learning, rapid transportation and communication, and the widespread education of women. For example, Beard asserted that the “chief and primary cause” of the rise of this illness in America was modern technologies such as “steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, sciences,” these presumably being linked more with men and the increasing “mental activity of women.”¹³ This, according to Beard, was the price paid for America’s booming growth as well as its luxuries and excesses. Moreover, he insisted that the ailment afflicted only the middle and upper classes who struggled to keep pace with civilization. Although neurasthenia was originally an American disease, the medical community in England quickly borrowed the term to describe English nervousness.¹⁴ As one English physician noted in the 1892 edition of *The Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, neurasthenia is “neither a modern nor an American disease but simply a new term for what had long been called neuralgic disease or simply nervous weakness.”¹⁵

As the diagnosis made its passage from America to England, the female neurasthenic took on a mystical identity already familiar in the female consumptive. Eventually, Victorians imagined both ailments to signify something spiritualized, incorporeal and pure.¹⁶ This interesting connection made by Showalter reinforces the idea that, for the Victorian woman,

¹³Beard, vi.

¹⁴Showalter, 136. George Frederick Drinka, *The Birth of Neurosis: Myth, Malady, and the Victorians* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 220.

¹⁵Quoted by Rudolph Arndt (1892) in Showalter, 136.

¹⁶Showalter, 140.

illness was considered a spiritualized state.¹⁷ Moreover, it also suggests how illness, spiritualism, and perpetual languor were imagined, both cultural and artistically, as an ideal, transcendent aesthetic. In fact, neurasthenia did have much in common with consumption. Although statistics reveal that consumption afflicted both Victorian men and women, it too came to be regarded as an essentially female condition both in America and England.¹⁸ For example, physicians firmly supported Beard's argument that "neurasthenia is a severer disorder in women than in men, for the reason that the nervous system of woman is naturally less stable and less under volitional control." Thus, it was Victorian women's supposedly delicate nerves and frailty that rendered them more susceptible and in need of a physician's care. Likewise, the symptoms of neurasthenia in women—ennui, languor, and fatigue—as well as the condition's general treatment closely echoed that of consumption. Both maladies required the patient to be isolated and inert, to assume a life of complete passivity and inactivity.

As modern scholar F. G. Gosling notes, Beard's identification of neurasthenia launched an onslaught of articles, and what began as a trickle became a flood by the mid-1880s, reaching its peak between 1900 and 1910.¹⁹ The condition quickly became part of the general mood and discourse of the period, inspiring A. D. Rockwell, in 1888, to declare neurasthenia "now almost a house-hold word." Neurasthenia, observed Rockwell, provided a convenient answer for physicians faced with a perplexing group of random symptoms as well as a comforting diagnosis

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Gosling, 46; Showalter, 136.

¹⁹Gosling, 78. Gosling observes that while no particular publication had a monopoly on the subject, the most prevalent were the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the *Medical Record*, the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, etc.

to patients who could proudly “allude to themselves as the victims of nervous exhaustion.”²⁰ The taxonomy of neurasthenic symptoms was an exhaustive catalogue that functioned more as an ideology than the classification of a single disease. Modern scholars Robin M. Haller and John S. Haller describe it as a late nineteenth-century “pathological dumping ground for moralists within and outside the medical world.”²¹ In general, the symptoms fell into two somewhat overlapping classifications: “mental” and “physical.” As Oppenheim notes, “the catalogue, it seems, was infinitely expandable, and any symptom, evinced by any patient considered neurasthenic, could be added as occasion demanded.”²² Indeed, the malady was deemed capable of producing a dizzying array of subsidiary pathologies, and Beard warned that “every case differs.”²³ The most prominent mental symptoms were lack of concentration, depression, and illusions, to name a few.²⁴ However, the physical symptoms became the primary signifiers of the disease: extreme languor and fatigue so acute that patients often complained they were either rendered entirely immobile or could arise only with extreme difficulty.²⁵

At nearly every turn, Victorians encountered images and accounts of women suffering from a depletion of energy caused by nervous exhaustion. A deluge of nostrum advertisements

²⁰Gosling, 50.

²¹Haller and Haller, 9.

²²Oppenheim, 93.

²³In *American Nervousness*, Beard included a two-page list of symptoms. The list, he cautioned, was “only representative and typical, for an absolutely exhaustive catalogue . . . cannot be prepared, since every case differs somewhat from very other case.” Beard, 8.

²⁴Beard, 7-8.

²⁵Gosling, 79.

that both reinforced and reflected this pervasive female stereotype filled popular journals. Modern scholar Samuel J. Thomas demonstrates how these ads were directed toward white middle- and upper-class women.²⁶ Advertisers hawking products such as Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and Dr. Green's Nervura employed a suggestive language that emphasized the perilous state of women's health and included the classic argot of the "neurasthenic type." For example, boldfaced phrases such as "Wrought-up Nerves," "Wasted," "Sallow," "Almost Crazy," and "Nervous Girls" did much to convince women of various ages that they suffered from this vague affliction.²⁷ Accompanying the advertisements were countless images of women succumbing to these ailments, their bodies fainting, collapsing and languishing in dramatic pose. In one advertisement for Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, a "noted society woman" who "Braved Death for Social Honors" stands up from her chair at the most "brilliant social function of the season," only to "fall insensible to the floor" (Figure 53).²⁸ Adorning the top of the ad, the fashionably dressed woman's body is shown in a state of unconsciousness, her lifeless arm and long gown framing the description. The faces of two women are depicted below: one whose tilted head cradles her hand and projects a thoughtful countenance, perhaps Mrs. Pinkham herself, and the other presumably the fashionably, and now conscious, consumer, socialite. Likewise in another advertisement for Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and with the headline "Nervous Breakdown," a woman is once again in a state of unconsciousness (Figure 54). The woman's thin attenuated body is swaddled tightly, infant like, in a bed sheet. She rests

²⁶Samuel J. Thomas, "Nostrum Advertising and the Image of Woman as Invalid in Late Victorian America," *Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 104-112.

²⁷Other terms employed by advertisers are "discontent" and "unstrung." Thomas, 105.

²⁸Williams, 12.

peacefully upon a chaise lounge and with a slight tranquil smile suggesting pleasant dreams. Below the figure bold letters proclaim “Nervous Breakdown” and hawk the medicinal “elixir” as a potion guaranteed to provide relief. Together, this visual alignment and its ominous counseling hint at a community of sufferers, a veritable network of like-minded women all suffering from the same “nervous” ailment.²⁹

Although Victorian men also succumbed to neurasthenia, it became, as noted previously, most profoundly associated with upper- and middle-class women who, by birthright, allegedly possessed a more delicate nervous system and more refined physiognomy that predisposed them to the ailment. From the tangled web of symptoms arose the image of the mystical, otherworldly woman who suffered, beautifully, the alluring stigmata of neurasthenia. According to Beard, the women who were sensitive to this condition had “fine, soft hair, delicate skin, nicely chiseled features, small bones, tapering extremities, and frequently . . . a muscular system comparatively small and feeble.”³⁰ Throughout the medical literature, physicians repeatedly identified the neurasthenic patient as “those women occupying the higher social plane,” imbuing the condition with a cachet of fashionable elitism.³¹ Furthermore, according to the Hallers, contemporary physicians argued that it was the middle and upper-class of Victorian society who saw in neurasthenia a “certain status and social accomplishment—a feeling of intellectuality and high

²⁹To read specifically on Lydia Pinkham, see Sarah Stage, *Female Complaints: Lydia Pinkham and the Business of Women’s Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979).

³⁰Haller and Haller, 6; Beard, *American Nervousness*, 26. Furthermore, Beard stated that American nervousness was alarmingly frequent “among the well-to-do.” Quoted by Beard (1884) in Showalter, 135.

³¹Haller and Haller, 29.

culture.³² Among the many “nervous” conditions that plagued Victorian women, neurasthenia was envisioned as an acceptable and desirable illness that enhanced cultural imaginings of the feminine ideal. Modern scholar Elaine Showlater’s study *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* identifies the three most prevalent “nervous” disorders to be labeled during this period: anorexia nervosa, hysteria, and neurasthenia.³³ Of the three conditions, physicians and society deemed neurasthenia in general “as the most prestigious and attractive form of female nervousness.”³⁴

Medical perception and writings on these three nervous conditions reveal how thoughts on neurasthenia enhanced pre-established notions of the ideal Victorian woman by appropriating a language that bordered on flattery. The cultural cachet of neurasthenia was in dramatic opposition to the female hysteric. Although the two maladies shared many of the same symptoms, the hysteric was considered selfish and disagreeable, a deplorable representation of femininity. Showlater notes how doctors “found their hysterical patients personally and morally repulsive, idle, intractable, and manipulative.”³⁵ The female hysteric ruffled the refined sensibilities of physicians, who discussed them with a tone that suggests utter disdain and contempt. For example, in 1892 the neurologist Horatio Bryan Donkin describes the female

³²Haller and Haller, 28.

³³Showalter, 135.

³⁴Showalter, 134. Showalter notes that it was believed that domestic servants and women of certain races would never suffer from nervous disorders. She notes, “The labors of domestic servants, the harshness of rural existence, the brutalities of savage tribes, were nowhere near as mentally wearing and exhausting as the refinements of civilization.” Showalter, 135.

³⁵*Ibid.* It is also interesting to note how paintings depicting Victorian women suffering from hysteria echo and reinforce this stereotype. However, given the scope of this chapter, I will not delve into this topic.

hysteric with traits of: “Exceeding selfishness, delight in annoying others, groundless suspicion, and unprovoked quarrelsomeness are of very common occurrence; and the instances of self-mutilation and wondrous filthy habits are numerous.”³⁶ Another doctor denounced the “moral perversion” of hysterical young women who, “believing or pretending that they cannot stand or walk, lie in bed . . . all day . . . objects of attentive sympathy on the part of their anxious relatives, when all the while their only paralysis is a paralysis of will.”³⁷ Physicians were also quick to differentiate the physical characteristics of hysterics versus neurasthenics. For example, Playfair’s bitter physical description in 1883 of the “fat, well-feeding hysterics who thoroughly enjoy their inert self-indulgence” suggests a threatening fleshiness and almost sexual vulgarity.³⁸ Physicians often contrasted this moral turpitude of the hysteric with the more docile female neurasthenic, who possessed a “refined and unselfish nature.”³⁹ While they vilified the repeatedly coarse, well-fed hysteric, they suggestively imagined the bodies of female neurasthenics as regulated, pure, spiritual divine, and controlled. Describing one of his patients in the latter category, the renowned American physician S. Weir Mitchell, for example, reports that she is “pale and thin, eats little, or if she eats does not profit by it.”⁴⁰

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Showalter, 140. Showalter notes that physicians felt an intuitive sympathy for the feeble neurasthenic invalid. These women were described by physicians as being “of high culture and refinement,” “who heartily long for good health if they only know how to obtain it.” Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), 93. Weir Mitchell was noted for developing the “rest cure” for women suffering from neurasthenia. One of the most notable patients was the feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who wrote the *Yellow Wallpaper* based on

Much like descriptions of the female invalid, these musings about the female neurasthenic allude to the suffering, or self-denial, that leads to a higher plan of existence and reinforces the long-entrenched ideology of the Victorian woman as “angel of the house.” In her delicate state of enervation, she is thus imagined as docile and the very picture of ladylike deportment. Rather than undermining or jeopardizing her femininity, the illness suggestively exaggerated her frailty in a way that hit the perfect pitch, so to speak. The angel of the house was sick, but not too sick or incapacitated to perform her duties as wife and mother. With effusive admiration, one Victorian physician noted that female neurasthenics are “just the kind of woman one likes to meet with...sensible, not overly sensitive or emotional, exhibiting a proper amount of illness . . . and a willingness to perform their share of work quietly and to the best of their ability.”⁴¹

While Victorian artists did not overtly identify images of women as suffering from neurasthenia, the pervasive and seemingly complimentary tone that surrounded neurasthenia fostered an appreciation of this type of listless, spiritualized femininity within the visual arts. Thomas Dewing’s *The Reading* (1897) (Figure 55) presents two women who sit in a sparse interior. Their attenuated limbs, languid postures and pallid complexions recall the vivid descriptions of female neurasthenics found in countless popular and medical journals of the late nineteenth century. Within this hermetically sealed interior, the subjects gaze downward—one contemplating the beauty of a limp flower, the other gazing at an open book. Each oblivious to

her horrific experience while undergoing the treatment. This equation between the Victorian female body as symbolizing a type of heightened spirituality is a subject discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

⁴¹Showalter, 135.

the presence of the other, the women convey a sense of elusiveness and deep introspection. This profound feeling of enclosure and interiority is echoed by Victorian physicians who argued that a woman's "natural" vantage point was an "inner view of herself and her worldly sphere."⁴² The thinly applied paint creates a translucent veil of shimmering gold and green that seems to remove the moment from the immediate present into some inaccessible dreamlike realm. Kathleen Pyne describes the work's atmosphere as a "vacuum," a "silence that confers upon the reading of a poem the tenor of ritual."⁴³ Devoid of any embellishments, the interior features little more than a tall Chinese vase and a small looking glass.⁴⁴ It is transformed into a type of sanctuary, complemented and echoed by the equally meager female occupants, who threaten to dissolve into its sparseness.⁴⁵ The two subjects' extremely gaunt and fine-boned physiognomies bespeak the privileged class of women whose delicate nerves render them susceptible to the fashionable disease.

⁴²Carroll Smith Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Women and Health in America, Historical Readings*, ed. Judith Walzer Leavitt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984): 15.

⁴³Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 177.

⁴⁴Pyne, 175.

⁴⁵The inclusion of the mirror is a recurring motif in many of these interiors. Cut off from the outside world, the mirror enhances the hermetic realm Victorian women occupied, far removed from the realities of life. This idea is discussed in the next chapter on the female Aesthete with such iconic works as Whistler's *Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl*, which prominently displays a large mirror, reflecting both the image of the model and Whistler's own painting of the Thames.

Dewing's work was appreciated for its "aristocratic feeling," and critics of the period described his representations of femininity as "the ideal American type."⁴⁶ Much as neurasthenia was associated with certain physical and mental characteristics, Dewing was noted for a distinct type that Victorian art critic and poet Sadakichi Hartmann described as "tall, languid girls of Puritan descent."⁴⁷ The allure of fine-boned women tinged with a bewitching otherworldly quality recalls Victorian feminist, and author of "Invalidism as a Pursuit," Abba Goold Woolson's description of this new breed of femininity: "A sweet-tempered dyspeptic, a little too spiritual for this world and a little too material for the next, and who, therefore, seems always hovering between the two, is the accepted type of female loveliness."⁴⁸ Beauty and spirituality were distinct elements of Dewing's paintings, and Pyne notes how the artist's patrons especially valued his images for their "refined, 'spiritual' qualities."⁴⁹ Dewing's images of femininity were greeted with a brand of reverence usually reserved for religious works of art and reflect the period's "worship" of the Victorian woman. This general mood of veneration for a certain type of femininity was also expressed when Victorian writer G. Stanley Hall discussed a "new philosophy which places the wife and mother at the heart of a new world and makes her the

⁴⁶Susan Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 14.

⁴⁷Quoted by Hartmann (c. 1915) in Hobbs, 61. As Hobbs notes, Hartmann often advised one of Dewing's foremost patrons, John Gellately, on his art acquisitions between 1893 and 1919. Hobbs, 60. To read more about Hartmann, see Jane Calhoun Weaver's *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁴⁸Diane Price Herndl, *Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 110.

⁴⁹Hobbs, 61.

object of a *new religion and almost of a new worship*.”⁵⁰ But such a philosophy was hardly new. Paradoxically, women were perceived as more spiritual and closer to the divine, yet less intellectual. Hartmann, a great admirer of Dewing’s work, likewise fervently expressed his infatuation with the women in the artist’s paintings: “I worshipped women as if they were supernatural creatures. . . . They were more like spirits consisting of fire and dew than damsels with corset and bustles.”⁵¹ Specifically, this identification of the Victorian woman as a “supernatural” being is key to this study and will be essential in facilitating women’s prominent role within the Spiritualist movement and the many representations of them accessing these alternative realms of being, as will be examined in Chapter 7. Thus, void of any obvious narrative, *The Reading* is suffused with a contemplative mood that commingles spirituality with the otherworldly female beauty reminiscent of the long-suffering neurasthenic. Moreover, the insubstantial physicality of Dewing’s women renders them as beings that are somehow supernatural and reveals the broader cultural modeling of femininity.

The American artist Thomas Eakins, who ironically suffered from this very condition, also created many portraits that convey the qualities associated with neurasthenia⁵² In the context of the period’s thoughts and theories on the malady, modern scholar Kathleen Spies examines Eakins’ portraits, specifically noting how gender altered the meaning, treatment, and depiction of

⁵⁰Emphasis mine. Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 108. This “new philosophy” was indeed hardly new at all, but underscores the almost zealous veneration of Victorian femininity.

⁵¹Quoted by Hartmann (c. 1915) in Hobbs, 61.

⁵²Given the scope of this chapter, I will not delve into the vast topic addressing Eakins as a neurasthenic. See Kathleen Spies, “Figuring the Neurasthenic: Thomas Eakins, Nervous Illness, and Gender in Victorian America,” *Nineteenth Century Studies* 12 (1998): 84-109.

the condition.⁵³ Spies suggest that many of Eakins' portraits of women point "directly to the symptoms of female neurasthenia."⁵⁴ For example, in *The Artist's Wife and His Setter Dog* (c. 1884-1889) (Figure 56), Susan MacDowell, who was known to be an energetic artist in her own right, nearly crumples into herself, slouching under the weight of her emaciated body.⁵⁵ Her light blue dress is rumpled and creased, contributing to what Spies calls "emotional disarray." The long, vertical folds of the dress hang heavily and accentuate her reed-thin frame. Her spindly neck bows with the weight of her head, and deep shadows are etched into her face as she gazes listlessly through watery, hollowed eyes. Modern scholars have noted that in the process of painting this portrait of his wife, Eakins progressively reduced the frame of her body so she would appear much smaller and more delicate.⁵⁶ Interestingly, previously discussed images such as Brown's *The Convalescent* showed the sufferer in near complete repose. Here, in contrast, the hand symbolizes the physical embodiment of this condition. Spies observes how "the most blatant sign of this weakness and weariness . . . lies at the very center of the painting, where the sitter's unusually large hand lies upward and open on her lap, impotent and useless."⁵⁷ This is terribly ironic considering the sitter was herself an accomplished and prize-winning artist.⁵⁸ This

⁵³Hobbs, 85.

⁵⁴Hobbs, 89.

⁵⁵To read more about Susan MacDowell Eakins' life and artistic accomplishments, see Susan P. Casteras, *Susan MacDowell Eakins* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1973).

⁵⁶Spies, 89. See also Ellwood C. Parry III, "The Thomas Eakins Portrait of Sue and Harry; or, When Did the Artist Change His Mind?" *Arts Magazine* 53 (May 1979): 146-153.

⁵⁷Spies, 89.

⁵⁸See Casteras, *Susan MacDowell Eakins*, 15-37.

focus on an enervated hand, whether upturned or dangling from an armchair, appears not only in Eakins' *Portrait of a Lady with a Setter Dog*, but also in subsequent images discussed in this chapter. Moreover, the template that Eakins and Thomas Dewing helped to establish had an enduring appeal and appears well into the early twentieth century. For example, John White Alexander's *Portrait of Miss Dorothy Roosevelt (Mrs. Langdon Greer)* (1901-1902) (Figure 57) bears a striking likeness in pose and demeanor to Eakins' *The Artist's Wife and His Setter Dog*. In this later portrait, a young woman sits comfortably in a chair of plush green velvet. Her posture is languid, a demeanor exaggerated by her left hand, which is idly turned upward. Her physical lethargy is coupled with a disengaged countenance as she gazes downward, as if consumed by dreams or distant thoughts. The shroud-like white dress is reminiscent of those worn by invalids, children, and dead bodies, and thus signifies her frailty, purity, and delicacy. Her long hair is loosely arranged away from her face and sweetly tied with a peach-colored bow. Her nightgown cascades down in long, soft folds, pooling at her feet, adding to the sense of lethargy. Similar to the portrait of Eakins' wife, a setter dog lies prominently at her feet, its sleeping body dominating the foreground. The emptiness of the interior and the placement of the chair in the corner of the room belie the sensation of constricting isolation. The work's status as a commissioned portrait alludes to how this "type" of femininity became fashionable, perhaps, in certain social circles and, even during the early twentieth century, was associated with refinement and elegance.⁵⁹ Victorian physicians generally agreed on the causes of male neurasthenia, which afflicted Thomas Eakins and others. Conversely, the condition in women had no specific etiology, and the works presented here highlight the incredible diversity of

⁵⁹There are several other examples, such as Thomas Eakins, *The Actress* (1903); Thomas Dewing's *Lady in Gold* (1912); etc.

physical and mental characteristics associated with the affliction.⁶⁰ Importantly, representations of male neurasthenic men, in comparison to women sufferers, did not, adhere to one standardized and recognizable model. While images of neurasthenic women conformed, for the most part, to a standard type, in contrast, however, images of “neurasthenic” Victorian men were varied. In Spies’ discussion on Eakins’ portraits, she attributes this infrequency and ambiguity to the “ambivalent feeling about male sickness and the biologically-grounded association of women and illness.”⁶¹

Very few within the medical community disputed that the Victorian man’s neurasthenia was caused by the greater intellectual brain force exerted in the attempt to keep pace with modernity. However, as Haller and Haller discuss, almost all were willing to conjecture, speculate and debate about the source of the ailment in women.⁶² The woman who dared to peek through her heavily curtained domesticity and move into the public sphere, either through education or employment, tempted fate and inevitably fell victim to neurasthenia. This New Woman, as she was called, shook the very foundation of Victorian society and threatened to disrupt the “natural” separation of these spheres. Neurasthenia was thus punishment for daring to dream for more independence.⁶³ The Victorian female physician Margaret Cleaves, who likewise tempted fate only to suffer from neurasthenia, warned her fellow comrades of the dangers

⁶⁰Herndl, 116.

⁶¹Spies, 46.

⁶²Physicians provided a vast array of reasons as to why Victorian women suffered so greatly from this illness. Yet all agree that her physical makeup made her more susceptible. Haller and Haller note it was “a division that went to the very heart of the women’s role in the society of the nineteenth century.” Haller and Haller, 42.

⁶³As noted by Casteras in a recent conversation, November 2014.

lurking in the exercise of too much ambition or too much striving for intellectual and financial success.⁶⁴ In her widely read *Autobiography of a Neurasthenic*, she depicts herself as a “mannish maiden” who was diagnosed with a “sprained brain,” which later became a euphemism for women who, through their desire to pursue education and employment, crumpled into a heap of nerves and succumbed to neurasthenia.⁶⁵

While Victorian men were convincing themselves that the delicate nature of a woman’s biology naturally predisposed her to neurasthenia, one of the most popular theories proposed was that the rise of industrialism and the barrage of new gadgets in the household brought on the condition. The notion of the housewife who toiled from dawn to dusk baking bread, canning food and making clothes was quickly fading as modern conveniences and the rise of the new science of home economics left women with a less slavish and more supervisory role.⁶⁶ The Victorian woman, it was now believed, had little to do but languish upon the couch, idly waiting for time to pass. While this cause of female neurasthenia may in some respect seem contradictory, it nevertheless suggests how incredibly varied, inconsistent, and paradoxical the diagnosis was when applied to the Victorian woman. This was in direct contrast to the consistent diagnosis that brain-work was the primary cause of neurasthenia in men.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Margaret Cleaves, M.D., is an interesting figure that defied odds by getting her medical degree, yet she too wore the “badge” of neurasthenia with a certain amount of pride and delight. See Margaret Cleaves, *The Autobiography of a Neurasthenic as Told by One of Them and Recorded by Margaret Cleaves* (Boston, 1910).

⁶⁵Cleaves, 28-29.

⁶⁶Haller and Haller, 32.

⁶⁷As Martin Berger notes, “In industrial America, working-class men were obliged to perform predominately physical work, while males of the middle and upper-class are engaged solely in labor that the physician and scientist S. Weir Mitchell call ‘brain work.’” Martin

Listlessness became the cornerstone of female neurasthenia and Woolson observed this alarming trend in the Victorian woman: “The greater number make no pretensions to physical ability, but sit in the parlors day after day, sunk in cushioned rocking-chairs, and pecking away at embroidery over which they are never in danger of losing breath. . . . With us, to be ladylike is to be lifeless, inane, and dawdling.”⁶⁸ Haller and Haller note how the Victorian woman “no longer spent hours over the stove or made her own clothes. Paid hirelings now nursed, clothed, and taught her children, and professional performers entertained her guests.”⁶⁹ S. Weir Mitchell, the well-known physician who treated countless neurasthenic women, fancied himself a novelist and wrote several popular books and short stories based on his female clients. Utilizing his experience, he created a group of “couch-loving invalid” characters and described them in exuberant and flourishing detail as lean, pale women, ever complaining and listless, yet free from any real definable disease.⁷⁰ In one story, he reminisces: “Some years ago I saw a woman who was like a half dozen any of you can recall—a pallid, feeble creature, who had menstruated irregularly until two years before, and then stopped at the age of thirty. She was the type of a class. Everything wearied her—to walk, to read, to sew . . . [with] a sallow face, with its look of languid inaction.” This sudden encroachment of industrialism into the domestic sphere pulled the rug out from under the once firmly planted feet of the Victorian woman. She found herself

Berger, *Man Made: Thomas Eakins and the Construction of Gilded Age Manhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 26-27.

⁶⁸Abba Goold Woolson, *Woman in American Society* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873), 192.

⁶⁹Haller and Haller, 34.

⁷⁰David M. Rein, *S. Weir Mitchell: As a Psychiatric Novelist* (New York: International University Press, 1952), 85.

uprooted and baffled about how to fill the hours of the day. What had once defined her womanly role, and was the very essence of her identity and being, had been supplanted by a bombardment of goods and services that doomed her to a life of boredom and idleness.

Corresponding images of Victorian women occupying empty interiors teeming with glistening new objects and decorations suggest the displacement and idleness that contributed to the listlessness associated with neurasthenia. American artist Walter Launt Palmer's *De Forest Interior* (1878) (Figure 58) depicts an artfully decorated Victorian home. The high ceiling and expansive rooms are beautifully appointed, each doorframe leading into another palatial interior space. The centerpiece of the composition is a young woman who sits wearily upon a richly upholstered rocking chair made of dark wood. Shadows obscure the right side of her face and inky pools seem engraved under her eyes. Conveying a profound sense of inertia, she gazes downward with a vacant sense of melancholy. Similar to many female representations of the neurasthenic, her hands are a bellwether that allude to her possible affliction. Here, both hands droop lifelessly on the armchair, and a fan, left unopened and disregarded, rests in her lap. Her pose and demeanor convey utter weariness, inactivity, and removal from her womanly duties within her home. The interior's expanse dwarfs her frame as she pulls her dainty feet inward. The vast array of art objects coupled with modern touches like electricity, suggested by the lighting fixture, bespeak wealth and status, recalling Lorna Duffin's argument that "the Victorian ideal of the perfect lady was the perfect symbol of status."⁷¹ Her idleness was a testament to her husband's wealth. As Claire Perry notes in her analysis of the neurasthenic female type,

⁷¹Lorna Duffin, "The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid" in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, ed. Sara Delamont (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 26.

“Conspicuously absent from such images were the domestic accouterments emblematic of the feminine sphere in the earlier paintings, including cradles, cooking pots, brooms—and well-tended husbands.”⁷² This presentation of perfected domesticity appears at first glance, but an undercurrent of neglect tarnishes its apparent harmony. The rug is rumpled under the woman’s feet, and near the window, light plays on the unused piano and long curtains appear quite worn. These hints of threadbare vitality suggest the woman’s loss of interest in her role as domestic keeper. Although the domestic sphere was perceived as the proper place for the Victorian woman, her presence there is ghostlike. The rich brocades of her dress merge darkly with the rugs’ ornate patterns, camouflaging her persona and suggesting that her presence is merely ornamental. Contrasting with this specter is the lush white calla lily, symbolic beauty and associated with the purity of the Virgin Mary in the Victorian language of flowers, resting on a nearby tabletop.⁷³ Moreover, its delicate shape is an apt and poetic surrogate for the drained luster of the Victorian woman. Perhaps the tiger rug under her feet subtly alludes to her absent, “well-tended “ husband. Its glittering eyes and yawning outstretched pelt powerfully asserts the male presence. Or, the tiger rug may allude to the draining away of her animal vitality.

The gender bifurcation of neurasthenia extended not only to the cause but to the treatment as well. Physicians asserted that men suffered from “cerebral” neurasthenia, resulting from the overuse of their brains, and advised patients to return to nature and physical exertion, the better

⁷²Claire Perry, “American Women, Neurasthenia, and the Art of Doing Nothing” in *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University, Iris and Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, 2004), 73.

⁷³Hale, 114.

to counteract mental fatigue and regain their balance.⁷⁴ Modern scholar Martin A. Berger discusses how in most cases, Victorian neurasthenic men, such as Thomas Eakins, “were advised to recover with a ‘camp cure’” of the kind commonly prescribed by Horatio C. Wood. Wood sent his patients out into the wilderness to sleep outdoors, eat simple food, and relax their brains.”⁷⁵ Berger notes that Eakins’ was also treated with “camp cure” and recuperated “by adopting the life of a cowboy” on a ranch in North Dakota.⁷⁶

Conversely, the female brain was subservient to the reproductive system’s menstrual cycle, resulting in spinal weakness, or “spinal congestion,” which likewise created the telltale lassitude of the afflicted. In 1873, Silas Weir Mitchell created the “rest cure,” which became the standard treatment for neurasthenia and was the only therapeutic formula systematically applied.⁷⁷ The “rest cure” sentenced the female patient to an indeterminable amount of time in bed. Swaddled like a baby or a mummy, she was forbidden to rise for any reason, even for the purposes of elimination. The room was to be dark, in order to prevent any possible stimulation and to let the mind wander into a twilight state. Likewise, her nurse was to feed her a steady diet

⁷⁴As Gosling notes, Beard distinguished two forms of neurasthenia— cerebral and spinal—that, in his view, occurred frequently along gender-distinct lines. Gosling explains, “Men were likely to acquire the mental symptoms of ‘cerebrasthenia’ that resulted from overuse of the brain and/or perversion . . . the spinal form . . . of neurasthenia more commonly afflicted women; women’s reproductive apparatus and menstrual cycles predisposed them to the spinal weakness and back pain that characterized spinal congestion.” Gosling, 97. Though one is hesitant to draw a direct correlation between the medical theory and images of “neurasthenic” women, the drooping posture evident in the works discussed is highly suggestive of the illness.

⁷⁵Berger, 108.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Gosling, 110.

of “soft foods” such as milk and pudding.⁷⁸ As Gosling explains, while the rest cure was preferred for the Victorian woman, the male patient was perceived as physiologically incapable of maintaining this reclining position.⁷⁹ Victorian neurologist Archibald Church duly warned of the possible harm the treatment could inflict on male neurasthenics: “We cannot put [men] to put bed with any expectation that they will stay there. I have tried to repeatedly and have nearly always failed. Men do not take to the recumbent position for any considerable length of time with equanimity. The fact of their being in bed constitutes an aggravation; and irritation is what we wish to exclude.”⁸⁰

Recent scholarship has focused on the complex relationship between Victorian doctors and their female patients, who typically received paternalistic and authoritative guidance from their physicians. Female patients were often safely cocooned within the home as doctors monitored them with special intensity and warned their attendants that any elements—e.g., reading, conversations, or overexcitement—could threaten or upset the patients’ delicate disposition.⁸¹ The success of the cure resided in creating a “womblike dependence” between the compliant female patient and the dominating physician. Madison Taylor, one of Mitchell’s colleagues, emphasized the importance of maintaining this sense of dependency in administering the rest cure: “The patient is, and should be, passive; in extreme cases absolutely so, all ‘doings’

⁷⁸For a lengthier and more in-depth explanation of the treatment, see Gosling, 110-116.

⁷⁹Gosling, 115.

⁸⁰*Ibid.* In contrast to female neurasthenics, who were confined to the home, their male counterparts were prescribed to reconnect with nature and partake in vigorous physical activity.

⁸¹Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 118.

being performed by others.”⁸² Isolation and sensory deprivation were key to the treatment, which emphasized the patient’s need to inhabit such an extreme state of passivity, such an abdication of both physicality and mentality, that it would encourage drifting off into a twilight state while her body absorbed the restorative.

The irony that the symptoms of female neurasthenia—listlessness and passivity—comprised the very condition on which the “cure” hinged was not lost on popular culture, which lampooned this vicious cycle of enforced rest. For example, in the cartoon *A Society Disease*, an imposing physician sits with his female patient (Figure 59).⁸³ Set against a large open window, the physician’s body is quite massive and commanding. He legs are crossed as he diligently takes notes. The cartoon likewise recalls Goodbody’s discussion of the entrenched “doctor-over-patient hierarchy” and the “glance” used by male doctors to “manage the patient’s body for her.”⁸⁴ Shrouded in darkness at the far right of the expansive room, the female patient is hunched over in her chair. Her waist is waspish and, dressed in all white, she gazes down through heavy lids. Her collapsing body is supported by a massive pillow, which overwhelms her diminutive frame. Her thin arms languish limply over the sides of the armchair, and at her feet, which delicately rest upon a pillow, lie several books strewn haphazardly on the floor. In the caption,

⁸²Gosling, 112. Showalter discusses how the implied misogyny of the “rest cure” has been the subject of controversy among contemporary feminists. Showalter, 139. In general, however, a recurring theme throughout is how Victorian physicians cultivated a dependency in their female patients, either by confirming their sickness or, in some cases, by prescribing certain medications, such as opium.

⁸³Illustrated in Barbara Ehrenreich and Diedre English, *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973), 38. The artist’s name is illegible.

⁸⁴Goodbody, 37-38.

Dr. Schmerz diagnoses his patient as suffering from “nervous prostration” and succinctly prescribes, “You need rest.”

The patient, Mrs. Aiken, exclaims, “Why, I do nothing but rest!”

“Well, try some light employment,” the physician sardonically replies. “Watch other people work.”⁸⁵ Daily visits by physicians who envisioned lifelong employment from wealthy female clients often created a self-perpetuating atmosphere of hypochondria, prompting one Victorian to observe that female neurasthenics “lived upon the sweet counsel of their physicians,” some of whom hovered like a “house fly” about their patients.⁸⁶

British artist John Atkinson Grimshaw’s *Dulce Domum* (1885) (Figure 60) presents a vision of upper-class wealth and enforced domesticity while also alluding to the identification of Victorian femininity with illness and half-conscious states. The interior is bursting with the trappings of luxury, but a somber, rather masculine wood panel, whose white border frames the top of the composition, almost threatens to suffocate its dainty inhabitant in this rather claustrophobic chamber. A female companion fills the chamber with piano music, while the young catatonic sits and stares into some impenetrable distance. The white flower to her right beams brightly, once again the only vibrant object in the room’s dismal darkness. This image of listless domesticity inspired T. W. H. Crosland to pen, “This house is full of strange memories, / Wondrously strange, God-wot- / Dim wraiths of woe and ghosts of tragedies, / But they disturb her not.”⁸⁷ The poem underscores the wife’s pristine, untouchable state; not only is she

⁸⁵Ehrenreich and English, *Complaints and Disorders*, 38.

⁸⁶Haller and Haller, 28.

⁸⁷Robyn Asleson et al., *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Masters: The Andrew Lloyd Weber Collection* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2003), 160.

physically inaccessible, but her mental faculties, as the poet intimates, are similarly disengaged. Much like the marble statue adorning the stairwell, the young woman is completely inert. With arms frozen at her side, it's as if she's sedated or bewitched by her companion's music, wandering into contemplation of the otherworldly or supernatural. Set against overpowering hues of brown and dark green, the young woman is a microcosm within the visually overwhelming parlor. The white of her dress is vivid, echoed by the ebullient orchid on the table. Both glow against the somber interior, imbuing the woman with an incandescent otherworldly quality. A spirituality suffuses the space with the sense that time is as disengaged as the woman herself. The music seems to have transported her into an amorphous realm somewhere between wakefulness and sleep.

American artist Irving Ramsey Wiles' *Song Without Words* (c. 1895) (Figure 61) depicts a similar scene in which music gently leads the collapsed female sitter into the unconscious or even supernatural realm. Like *Dulce Domum*, the music emanates a mesmerizing quality that appears to hypnotize the woman leaning against the piano.⁸⁸ The ability of music to induce trancelike states in women was a deeply rooted and well-known concept in Victorian society. According to this belief, music transfixed a woman by increasing "the waves of ether" as a penetrating source to her soul. Victorian women's ability to slip into altered states through hypnosis, or mesmerism, was a cornerstone of much of the period's medical literature. Modern scholar Athena Vrettos discusses how nervous disorders were invested with spiritual significance and simultaneously associated with both the visionary experiences of saints and the relinquished

⁸⁸Hypnosis will be a central theme in the following chapters. For the female Aesthete, this manifested in the "intense contemplation" of a piece of art, which induces a hypnotic altered state. In Chapter 7, on spiritualism, this condition becomes the gateway for Victorian women to access visions.

will of the mesmerized: “Amidst a variety of inquiries . . . mesmerism became the psychic experience most associated with nervous disease.”⁸⁹ Victorian physicians likewise observed the strong physical likeness in both neurasthenia and mesmerism, and the struggle to distinguish one from the other prompted one Victorian doctor to contend that “the mesmeric phenomena and the nervous disease fade into each other by imperceptible transition.”⁹⁰ Unlike the disruptive, much despised female hysterics, docile neurasthenics were described by their contemporaries as “denizens of Driftland and Mazeland” whose weakened mental organization and compliant bodies made for smooth passage into these therapeutically beneficial states.⁹¹

In Wiles’ *Song Without Words*, the drawn curtains behind the sedated woman inflect the scene with a sense of enclosure, sealing the female occupants from the outer world. Dominating the foreground is a massive piano, and seated upon a spindly chair, a young woman sits stiffly upright, playing softly to soothe the pitiable state of her charge. Sheets of music fall randomly upon the floor, suggesting the passage of time as mellifluous melodies pour from the player’s delicate fingers. Consumed by the music, a young woman in all white appears despondent as she slumps in her chair, her folded hands providing rest for her weary countenance and suggesting a state of near sleep.

⁸⁹Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imaging Illness in Victorian Culture* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 53.

⁹⁰Vrettos, 56. To read more on this subject, see also Phyllis Weliver, *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science, and Gender in the Leisured Home* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000).

⁹¹Quoted by Victorian doctor Joseph Mortimer Granville (1877) in Showalter, 136.

The treatment methodically employed by Victorian physicians functioned in large part on the perpetuation and continued inducement of altered states in the female patient.⁹² Going hand in hand with these treatments, the prescription of opiates for neurasthenia was used regularly to anaesthetize and sedate the patient, often times leaving the patient dependent and addicted to the soothing elixir of the drug. Recent scholars have discussed the rampant use of opium by neurasthenic women and note that opium addiction almost always originated with a physician's prescription.⁹³ Likewise, studies of this period reveal that opium addicts were preponderantly housewives and society ladies of the middle and upper classes.⁹⁴ Victorian physicians became alarmed at the sudden waves of addiction among their female clientele. In 1881, H. H. Kane wrote this foreboding assessment: "opium and morphine are most commonly used . . . in neurasthenic patients," and once a woman has experienced relief from opiates, she "insists upon the further use of the drug, sometimes feigns illness, in order to procure it, finally obtains some herself, and in guilty secrecy drifts rapidly into the habit."⁹⁵ Many admitted that physicians who sought to maintain their status as omniscient benefactors were largely responsible for the addiction of their female clientele. So rampant was the rise of this problem that, in 1895, one physician admitted that many of his colleagues knowingly overmedicated their female patients:

⁹²Stephen R. Kandall, *Substance and Shadow: Women and Addiction in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 27. The topic itself is vast. Given the parameters of my dissertation, I will touch only upon some of the main points.

⁹³Haller and Haller, 277.

⁹⁴Kandall, 14. Haller and Haller, 282.

⁹⁵Adding to this, in 1886 a contributor to Pepper's *System of Practical Medicine* stated, "To women of the higher classes, ennuyée and tormented with neuralgias . . . opium brings tranquility and self-forgetfulness." Kandall, 30.

“It may be unconscious on his part and he thinks he is pursuing his duty strictly, but the fact was that the physician had introduced the enchantment of the drug to the innocent victims.”⁹⁶ As modern scholar David T. Courtwright has suggested, it is the manner in which Victorian women suffered their diseases, as well as the frequency and type of diseases which led to disproportionate number of female addicts.⁹⁷ This startling epidemic ravaged some of the most prominent households in American and English society. Referred to in 1891 as the “bane of American women,” opiates were ingested by the lady of leisure with the frequency of today’s aspirin.⁹⁸ With their overwhelming fatigue readily diagnosed as neurasthenia, opiate medicines procured from the trusted family physician also offered a compelling escape from the discontent and monotony Victorian women often felt. Arabell Kenealy, a female doctor, supported this connection between neurasthenia and the asphyxiating life of upper-class women: “boredom, borne of modern conveniences, account for this nervous affliction in the ‘girl of today.’”⁹⁹ Furthermore, in 1905, Mary Wood Allen outlined a direct link between neurasthenia and drug addiction: “much of the neurasthenia . . . now so common in that portion of the female sex who have ample means and leisure to indulge in any luxury agreeable to their taste . . . is due to

⁹⁶Haller and Haller, 277.

⁹⁷See David T. Courtwright, “The Female Opiate Addict in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 10, no. 2 (March 1982): 161-171.

⁹⁸Quote from Dr. J. B. Mattison in Kandall, 39. Research shows that this was not only the bane of the American woman but was also an addiction widely shared by women in England. See, for example, Seymour J. Sharkey, “Morphinomania,” *Nineteenth Century* 22 (1887): 335-342.

⁹⁹Kandall, 31.

narcotics.”¹⁰⁰ As more and more “ladies of culture and distinction” became addicted to opium and morphine prescribed for the treatment of neurasthenia, their testimonies exposed the importance of these drugs in placating the pains of modern life. For example, one woman testified,

I am the last woman in the world to make excuses for my acts, but you don't know what morphine means to some of us, modern women without professions, without beliefs. Morphine makes life possible. It adds to truth a dream. What more does religion do? Perhaps I shock you. What I mean is that truth alone is both not enough and too much for us. Each of us must add to it his or her dream, believe me. I have added mine; I make my life possible by taking morphine. I have managed to prevent it from disfiguring my life, though I know of other women who botched it horribly. I am really morphine mad, I suppose, but I have enough will left not to go beyond my daily allowance.¹⁰¹

Likewise in 1811, leading opium-addiction expert Alonzo Calkin described the typical addict as a woman of “high place” and blamed the phenomenon on the very same claustrophobic conditions that led many Victorian women into the netherworld of neurasthenia: “the lady of haut-ton idly lolling hours that intervene ere the ‘clockwork tintinnabulum’ shall sound the hour for opera or whist, the quasi-lady of demi-monde as well.”¹⁰²

This candid depiction of a female drug addict, like the actual problem itself, was not a popular subject of either nineteenth-century British and American art. Nor did artists from either nation deem the subject appropriate in either public discourse or the visual arts. Yet the sheer number of women who became addicted to opium provides another frame of reference for understanding established norms of Victorian femininity and the near-catatonic states that seem

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Courtwright, 165.

¹⁰²Haller and Haller, 272.

to plague them in images of the period. In stark contrast, Continental art from the late nineteenth century provides numerous examples that clearly and boldly depict upper-class women either at the moment of administering the deadly narcotic or in the throes of the drug's effects.¹⁰³ For example, French artists M. Moreau de Tours' *Les Morphinees* (1891) (Figure 62) is a shockingly radical image. A refined, well-dressed woman stares brazenly at the viewer, her dress sleeve pulled up to her shoulder as she delicately holds a hypodermic needle and prepares to inject morphine into her arm. Beside her, another woman reclines upon a chaise lounge, her head resting on an immense pillow as she succumbs to the narcotic's numbing, euphoric effects.

Swiss decorative artist Eugene Grasset's *Morphinomaniac* (1897) (Figure 63) is even more horrific and reveals the sordid reality of morphine addiction. The lithograph depicts a frantic woman, in the throes of addiction, shaking with anticipation and desperation to inject the deadly substance into her thigh. Sitting on a green chair with the morphine bottle perched on the edge of a wooden table, her thin body, already ravaged by the addiction, leans forward, writhing and slightly bent over in uncontrollable agony. The woman is dressed in a thin white nightgown, which has been pulled up to reveal her dark stocking and a blue thin band, perhaps a tourniquet to make the veins more visible. Close inspection reveals a wedding band, a possible allusion to the fact that so many women, both married and single, found themselves addicts to the deadly opiate. In the print, the woman grimaces, her teeth gnashing and her brows furrowed, and she struggles to hold the flesh of her thigh. Her disheveled hair mirrors her desperate and wild state, and her hands appear mangled, tense and diseased as she prepares to inject the morphine.

¹⁰³This was the subject of a print exhibition titled "Tea and Morphine: Women in Paris, 1880 to 1914" held at the Hammer Museum (UCLA), January 26-May 18, 2014.

Another overrepresentation of the Victorian woman in the throes of e addiction is Santiago Rusinol's *Before the Morphine* (1890) (Figure 64) and *The Morphine Addict* (1894) (Figure 65).¹⁰⁴ In the first painting, a woman is shown sitting up in her bed, an open box lying open on her bedside table, as she examines, almost contemplatively, what appears to be morphine. Her demeanor is not the frantic horror shown of Grasset's print, but one that suggests a quiet ritual being enacted. The woman is dressed in a white nightgown, and the vast bed curtain and thick blankets provide the scene a sense of intimacy and solitude.

The aftermath of the addiction plays out dramatically and sensually in Rusinol's *The Morphine Addict*. Here, after presumably taking the drug, the subject lies in her bed, dressed in a similar white chemise Her body arches, in almost sexual ecstasy, as if waiting for the soothing balm of morphine to take effect. While Grasset's image shows the painful moment of injection, Rusinol's depiction conveys the moment after. Her body is taut and her right hand clutches the bed covers in a moment of anticipatory rapture. The strap of her nightgown falls around her shoulder, and her dark hair tumbles around the pillow. The mountainous white pillows she rests against frame her body, creating the allusion of white celestial wings, as if she is about to take flight into the transcendent realm of opium-induced haze.

While Continental artists were direct in their representation of the female Victorian addict, the most explicit perpetuation of the idea that altered states were a thing of beauty in Victorian women can be found in the period's opium advertisements. For example, the American advertisement for the patent medicine Mitchell's Belladonna Plasters (c. 1870-1890) (Figure 66),

¹⁰⁴As Gabriel P. Weisberg notes, Rusinol's painting *The Morphine Addict* not only examines the epidemic of women and addiction but also refers to his own dependency on the drug. Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 251.

a poisonous plant or deadly nightshade and an Italian pun, depicts an angelic young girl named for a flower made for nitrous oxide, a laughing gas not unlike opium in producing hallucinatory effects.¹⁰⁵ This tranquilizing drug was in vogue among many upper-class women, who used it for recreational purposes both before and after its introduction as a surgical anesthesia. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nitrous oxide “frolics” were the rage in England and America. In 1901, the *Boston Globe* reported that upper-class women were flocking to “oxygen parties: gatherings at which they inhaled a nitrous oxide mixture to liven up the festivities.”¹⁰⁶ In the advertisement a young girl stares hauntingly outward with enormous, dreamy eyes and enlarged pupils, a clear indication of the effects of the opiate.¹⁰⁷ The image shows the girl’s hair unbound, and she wears an unruly country hat with a peacock feather attached to its brim. The repeated personification of hallucinogenic drugs as youthful women suggests the ability of these drugs to beguile with a perennial state of adolescence. Indeed, while opium was intended to expedite the healing process, it in fact did the reverse, leaving women in a state of dysfunctional passivity.

It is interesting to note that in Britain and America, the vogue for Orientalist art ushered in countless depictions of women in various states of drug-induced stupor. Notably, these women

¹⁰⁵On the reverse of this trade-card, a bust of a man in the upper left corner is shown with the heading “Improved Perforated Belladonna Plasters, The Greatest Pain Alleviator Known.” It was used for “lame back, rheumatism, neuralgia, inflammation of kidneys, lung and throat afflictions, croup, . . . female weakness.”

¹⁰⁶Kandall, 37.

¹⁰⁷For further reading, see Barbara Hodgson, *Arms of Morpheus: The Tragic History of Laudanum, Morphine, and Patent Medicines* (New York: Firefly Books, 2001); and Cynthia Palmer, *Sisters of the Extreme: Women Writing on Drug Experience* (Vermont: Park Street Press, 2000).

were often dressed in revealing oriental garb and shown languishing in exotic settings, such as harems, and often depicted smoking hookahs.¹⁰⁸ One example is *Afternoon Siesta* (1884) (Figure 67), one of several Orientalist works that American artist Jean-Léon Gérôme painted early in his career. With listless sensuality, a European woman in the guise of an odalisque reclines provocatively within a claustrophobic interior teeming with opulent, exotic accouterments. Her attire is revealing and her extreme passivity imbues the painting with a scintillating eroticism. The odalisque's arm dangles from a red velvet divan as a fan of feathers slips idly from her hand. The rumpled gossamer veil settles around her receptive body, framing and highlighting her dreamy gaze as she peers through heavy-lidded eyes. At her side, a sinewy hookah—its mouthpiece discarded—reveals her intoxication. As twenty-first-century scholar Joan DelPlato observes, the hookah not only signifies sexual abandonment but, significantly, the fetishization of both the male and female bodies.¹⁰⁹

As one of the primary tropes of Victorian art, the image of the languishing high society woman obliquely references the idleness and psychological distance that were the cultural markers of neurasthenia. As demonstrated in this chapter, Continental art as well as advertisements were explicit in their coupling of the nineteenth-century woman with drug consumption and its resultant altered states. However, American and British continuously side-stepped overt references to woman and drug consumption. Rather, this interrelationship and coupling seems covertly implied. For example, Irving W. Wiles' *Green Cushion* (1897) (Figure

¹⁰⁸The literature dedicated to Orientalism is vast. However, to read specifically on the depiction of European women in the context of Orientalist art, see Joan DelPlato, *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁹DelPlato, 111.

68) depicts a socialite, fashionably dressed in a low-cut gown, sprawling on a dark green cushion. The figure epitomizes the upper-class woman who idly passes time in a state of careless oblivion. Her sallow complexion and protruding collarbone suggest a literal wasting away of her body. Her gaze downward conveys world-weariness, and she appears resigned to her fate as a decorative object. American artist John Singer Sargent's *Repose* (1911) (Figure 69) is another example of a painting that blurs this line, yet it also alludes to how these altered states became a type of idealized beauty. In this image, the subject gazes feebly outward through half-open eyes, withdrawn in her mood; with hair unbound, she lethargically rests her head on the cushions. Indeed, she is literally propped up; leaning into the couch's corner, she seems dangerously close to slipping off the piece of furniture. The viewer is left questioning, perhaps vainly, the explanation for her vacant stare. Her enervated state suggests possible invalidism, yet, conversely, her drowsy gaze could also suggest the transitional moment of slipping into deep sleep. Or perhaps more ominously, her dazed and anesthetized demeanor are due to the effects of drug consumption.

Some Continental artists created images of reclining women that also blurred this line between sickness, an anaesthetized state, and sleep. For example, in a painting attributed to Belgium artist Alfred Stevens, titled *Young Woman Resting in a The Music Room* (n.d.) (Figure 70), a woman is posed in nearly the exact same manner as the one in Wile's *The Green Cushion*. In Stevens' image, the woman's entire body is outstretched on a crimson divan. She is attired in a fashionable and elaborately ruffled white gown. The dress is tightly fitted and a blue bow is tied at the waist, drawing attention to the revealing low-cut bodice. The gown is extremely long and embellished with pleated ruffles, its train extending down the length of the sofa. Out of its

vast folds peeks the dainty toe of a shoe whose baby blue hue echoes the woman's headband and a shawl discarded atop a piano, which recalls those seen in Grimshaw's *Dolce Dumon* and Wiles' *The Convalescent*. In Stevens' scene, however, the piano stands vacant, though the sheets propped on its music stand suggest it has recently been played. A mandolin, also abandoned, rests upon an ornate footstool, and a rose lies next to the divan. Perhaps it is the source of the woman's distraction as she gazes downward, her pinky finger coquettishly placed near her mouth while, not incidentally, her left hand drapes over her erogenous zone. She seems absorbed in a reverie of love. But though her enigmatic insouciance appears driven by romantic longing, its precise source remains elusive, once again leaving viewers to devise their own interpretations.

The variety of images discussed in this chapter directly link Victorian femininity with the listless, altered states that the culture defined as neurasthenia. The condition's vague symptomology and its immense capacity to be all things to physicians, patients and society at large functioned as a unique bellwether that both reinforced and amplified Victorian ideologies of gender. This vision of female suffering was also one more fissure in the pervasive ideal of femininity that was beginning to fray as several cultural shifts threatened it. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how malleable and varied this type of femininity was within Victorian art, especially when considered alongside previously discussed types like the sleeping woman, the female consumptive and the cult of the invalid. The next chapter, Chapter 6, frames this type of femininity within an altogether different setting: the cultural and artistic movement of Aestheticism. Specifically, it discusses the representation of the female Aesthete, whose physical and mental characteristics also reflect the theme and characteristics of invalidism. However,

within the setting of Aestheticism these very same attributes take on a different meaning and become powerful cultural and artistic emblems of this important artistic movement.

CHAPTER 6

THE FEMALE AESTHETE

Exhibited in 1877 at the Grosvenor Gallery, a venue that catered exclusively to Aesthetic taste, Edward Burne-Jones' *Laus Veneris* (1873-1875) (Figure 71) sparked criticism and outrage from Victorians. Many, such as art critic Frederick Wedmore, felt compelled "to protest against and to bewail the prominence of the unhealthy type with which his work has familiarized us."¹ In his harsh critique, Wedmore focuses his seething disdain specifically on the languid figure of Venus, stating: "Laus Veneris is an uncomfortable picture, so wan and death-like, so stricken with disease of the soul, so eaten up and gnawed away with disappointment and desire. . . . The type is to many an offensive, to most a disagreeable, one, and the Venus is of that type the *most disagreeable, the most offensive example.*"² Clearly, this image of the languid Venus sparked outrage, antagonism, and suspicion. In this context, one is compelled to question how this representation of languid femininity differed from those mentioned in previous examples. And, moreover, what and why did this female "type," when associated with Aestheticism, provoke so much anxiety and utter disdain? Indeed, in previously discussed images of languid Victorian femininity- the female consumptive, invalid and neurasthenic- this "type" was largely accepted and even deemed appropriate to the general narrative of these paintings. For example, William Lindsay Windus's *Too Late!* (1857-1858) (see Figure 40) is described as a "charming picture" of

¹Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 169.

²Emphasis mine. Ibid.

“great grandeur.”³ However, when adopted by Aestheticism, this very same type of femininity received scathing reviews, thereby signaling a shift in how this paradigm of femininity symbolized culturally and artistically at the turn of the century.

Related to Charles Swinburne's lyrical poem "Laus Veneris," which was based on a German legend, the painting depicts Venus as listless and beautifully outstretched in a snake-textured scarlet robe lined with plum-colored satin.⁴ The gown clings sumptuously to her sinuous curves as her body seemingly writhes in anticipation. Apparently enfeebled, the queen rests her head in the crook of her extended arm, revealing a long, attenuated neck and sallow complexion as she gazes wearily at her companions. On the left, her handmaidens, each seen from a different angle, yet near clones of one another, prepare to sing and play for her, alluding to the work's title, which means "In Praise of Venus." A sense of enclosure and division from the outer world permeates, recalling the hermetically sealed interiors of sickrooms or death chambers. Compositionally, this quality is reinforced by a window, framed like a painting and located behind the maidens that reveals an earlier episode involving five shadowy white knights riding white horses.

Significantly, among this assemblage of women, it was recumbent Venus who was singled out and marked as the potential source of moral corruption. Wedmore, for example, abhorred the central figure. He called her "wan, and death-like . . . offensive. . . . The very body is unpleasant and uncomely, and the soul behind it, or through it, is ghastly. It is a soul that has

³Lisa Parris, ed., *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Gallery. 1984), 173.

⁴Wildman, 168.

known strange tortures; a body that has writhed with every impulse of sickness.”⁵ Henry James likewise deemed Venus as corrupted and associated her languid demeanor with some form of satiated sexuality: “She has the face and aspect of a person who has had what the French call an ‘intimate’ acquaintance with life.”⁶ By conflating the central figure’s inner and outer character, James thus managed to reinforce perceptions of the female Aesthete as degenerate and physically unhealthy. However, while Venus wallowed in her own ghastliness hyper-sexuality, Wedmore and others found the handmaidens more acceptable. Accordingly, their faces were suffused with “freshness and serene gravity” and they were praised as “very beautiful,” with “pleasantly rounded figures.”⁷

The appearance of *Laus Veneris* reinforces the enervated trope of Victorian femininity and its ubiquitousness during the Victorian period. The central figure is a kindred one to many previously discussed depictions of languid Victorian femininity, all of whom exhibit physical depletion, wanness, weakness and a sedated disposition that remains at the core of this dissertation. However, this archetype was far from static, and the outrage and controversy Venus provoked when linked to the Aesthetic movement underscores the cultural anxiety surrounding this trend. Towards the end of the nineteenth-century, with the emergence of the Aesthetic

⁵Wildman, 169.

⁶Susan Casteras, “Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle at the Palace of the Aesthetes,” in *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 84-85. See also Coleen Denney, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2000), 94.

⁷Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty’s Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 91. In this quote James states, “her companions, on the other hand, though pale, sickly and wan . . . have a more innocent and vacant expression, and seem to have derived their languor chiefly from contact and sympathy.” Casteras, “Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle at the Palace of the Aesthetes,” 85.

phenomenon in England and America, its meaning shifted. This chapter will therefore focus on this aesthetic of glorified lethargy and how it became the movement's signifying agent.

It is vital to specifically investigate the relationship between the female Aesthete and the widespread physical and mental “languor” she generated in British and American Aesthetic art at the time. Both the real and imagined female Aesthete exhibited this languid aura, and many women consciously aimed to create and cultivate the distinct look captured in Aesthetic art. The images in this chapter reflect the continuation of the idealized aesthetic of “female sickness.” While the women in these works of art often display consumption, neurasthenia or invalidism, these ailments were linked to a distinct type of artistic beauty associated with the Aesthetic movement. One of the most notable ways this was achieved was through the female Aesthete's personal style and dress, which was highly unconventional. One clear trait was the renunciation of the corset, an obvious affront to Victorian sensibilities. Unsupported, her body collapsed, and Victorians pronounced it limp and droopy. Not only did her dress enhance this languidness, but she also appeared pained, ill, or in a state of perpetual reverie, as induced by the contemplation of art, lily, a sunflower, or Aesthetic objects. The Aesthete's apparel was daring and evocative of dubious health and lax morals, both of which were deemed symptoms of the disruptive impact on femininity the movement embodied. But this aesthetic was distinct in that it was not acquired through acute sickness or some mysterious malady, instead, it was purposefully cultivated and appropriated by adoption of the Aesthetic lifestyle. There were myriad ways to engage with this lifestyle—through fashion, music, interior design, or the acquisition of “Aesthetic” objects. Yet one of the most powerful and expressive ways was the first option, to mimic the “look” of the female Aesthete. In previous works—e.g., Henry Peach Robinson's *Fading Away* (1858) (see

Figure 38), William Lindsay Windus' *Too Late!* (1858) (see Figure 40), and Ford Madox Brown's *The Convalescent* (1872) (see Figure 43) - the cause of the Victorian woman's physical and mental condition was usually exposed in the context of the setting, title, or mode of dress. However, for the female Aesthete, this demeanor was self-consciously constructed and achieved through a very distinct style of dress, hair, and posture.

This study thus puts forward several key images showing the female Aesthete and examining how she came to embody a cultural and artistic force that transcended the same physical listlessness and cerebral displacement that characterized so many other Victorian images. Examples included here focus on how this perceived "unhealthy" aesthetic was depicted both in high art and the mass media. It is important to note that past representations of this type—e.g., the sleeping woman, the dead or dying women, and the invalid—most often display this altered state in a somewhat obvious manner. Often, as previously discussed, the woman is entirely reclining or slumped over in a chair, a posture typical of the neurasthenic woman. In contrast, the female Aesthete conveys this quality in a less overt but nevertheless powerful manner, through a distinctly stooped posture, a vacuous gaze, or general facial expressions. A key theme in this chapter reveals the female Aesthete's purposeful cultivation of this look and the signal it sent to Victorians—i.e., the danger it posed of the potential abandonment of the home. Thus, this discussion considers such important Aesthetic sites as the Grosvenor Gallery, where women exerted a tremendous amount of influence both as founder matrons and artists.⁸

⁸To read more on Victorian women's influential role at the Grosvenor Gallery, see Colleen Denney, *At The Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 127-160. See also Paula Gillet's discussion in Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney ed., *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art: Yale University Press, 1996), 55-58.

This self-conscious posturing blossomed into a new, exciting marketplace directed specifically at Victorian women, who could readily purchase the Aesthetic “look” at stores like Liberty & Co. and many others.⁹ Recent scholarship by modern Kimberly Wahl has provided new insight into the world of the female Aesthete and the potentially empowering aspects of clothing in the self-fashioning of this “look” as Victorian women looked to Aesthetic paintings created by both male, and increasingly female artists.¹⁰ The Aesthetic Movement promoted not only high art, but also a lifestyle that could be purchased. It encouraged images of Aesthetes in deep contemplation of specific material objects, and it created a new “religion” of art for art’s sake. Symbolically reinforcing this link to consumer culture was the frequent coupling of rare pieces of Oriental pottery with images of the female Aesthete, a fad that the Victorians labeled “Chinomania.” Hence, this chapter considers works by American artists such as James McNeil Whistler as well as a widely disseminated *Punch* cartoon by George Du Maurier, in which the Victorian female Aesthete gazes hypnotically at various precious objects. The intense contemplative mood was considered a catalyst for accessing another world, and this undercurrent of mysticism anticipated another cultural phenomenon, the Spiritualist movement, which the final chapter of this dissertation addresses.

⁹Liberty & Co. and its important role within the Aesthetic Movement has been thoroughly discussed in several books and, given the scope of this study, will not be examined. See also Stephen Calloway, *Liberty of London: Masters of Style and Decoration* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992).

¹⁰Kimberly Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), xxii. For the emergence of female Aesthetic artists, see Denney, 127-160.

The current chapter is not intended to provide a detailed account of the Aesthetic Movement; rather, it is a general summary offering.¹¹ Originating in England, the movement offered a new degree of aesthetic liberation and gratification for the Victorian woman both in America and England. The essential role the female Aesthete played in the development of the Aesthetic movement has been the object of extensive discussion among recent scholars. In both England and America the primary signifier of the movement artistically and culturally was the female Aesthete. Modern scholar Kathy Psomiades has pointed out that representations of the female Aesthete were “neither merely incidental nor purely decorative, but rather played an integral role” in the movement and became the “linchpin” of Aesthetic symbology.¹² In addition, Anne Anderson recently examined the effect Aesthetic art, and culture, had upon the physical and mental state of woman during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century.¹³ In Anderson’s article, she states, “the Aestheticized woman was the most widely disseminated image of the movement, a recognized sign of the ‘aesthetics of femininity’ through which those who had never seen a painting by Rossetti and Burne-Jones might glean some notion of the aims of the painters. . . .”¹⁴ While research has established the critical role of the female Aesthete as

¹¹For a more thorough overview of the Aesthetic Movement, see Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), Doreen Bolger Burke et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), and Lynn Federle Orr and Stephen Calloway, eds., *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde 1860-1900* (London: V & A Publishing, 2011).

¹²Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty’s Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

¹³Anne Anderson, “Life into Art and Art into Life: Visualizing the Aesthetic Woman or ‘High Art Maiden’ of the Victorian ‘Renaissance,’” *Women’s History Review*, 10:3 (2001): 441-462, at 441.

¹⁴Anderson, 443.

the visual signifier of the movement as well as a cultural producer, the possible social implications of the female Aesthetes' trademark languor have not yet been thoroughly considered.

While physical and mental listlessness and malady were familiar representations of Victorian femininity, Aestheticism was a movement that transformed “sickness” into an integral feature of Victorian femininity’s visual construction. According to Psomiades, the “vocabulary of abnormality and unhealthiness” began to serve a new function; i.e., the practice of painting images that were “feverish, emaciated, nervous” elevated sickliness and made it the distinguishing characteristic of the female Aesthete as described and depicted in art.¹⁵ Likewise, Anderson notes how the cult of the invalid was generated in images of the female Aesthete, “creating an aura of virtuous inaccessibility whilst still preserving feminine allure. The female Aesthete was often consumptive or wasting away in a fit of disease.”¹⁶ Further evidence of this transformation is underscored when one considers that this language of sickness, languor, and suffering was used by both advocates of aestheticism, such as Hamilton, as well as its detractors.

The female Aesthete embodied the aesthetic experience, and her “style” and self-fashioning were the tools that authorized the transformation.¹⁷ For such a creature,

¹⁵Psomiades, 157.

¹⁶Anderson, 452-453.

¹⁷There are several books that specifically address Aesthetic and artistic dress. To clarify, artistic dress was a style adopted by the Pre-Raphaelites and was most often handmade. In contrast, Aesthetic dresses were different in that they could actually be purchased at such stores as Liberty & Co. For more on this subject, see Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art & Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century* (London: John Murray, 1974). For a more recent study, see Geoffrey Squire et al., *Simply Stunning: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums, 1996), Margaret F. Macdonald et al., *Whistler, Women*

“languorousness” not only became a trademark identity but also evolved into an empowering process by offering the opportunity for self-fashioning. Significantly, the most effective and accessible means of cultivating the languid, stooped posture was to don a very distinctive garment called an “Aesthetic dress.” This anomaly of fashion was the antithesis of convention. Its proponents insisted that women’s dress should be an artistic endeavor in harmony with the inner soul, not a fad the masses blindly followed. Key to this style was the use of natural dyes, which created a mélange of yellows, green (“often called pea-soup green”) and blue. This was diametrically opposed to commonly used aniline synthetic dyes, which created “natural” colors that were harsh and jarring, such as magenta and purples. Eschewing the artifice of mainstream fashion, which manipulated the female form in order to conform to a prescribed ideal, Aesthetes advocated a more “natural” or “timeless” look for women. Fabrics were intended to cling to the body’s natural outlines, and women were emboldened to doff fashionable understructures like heavily whale-boned corsets and vast crinolines. In order to complement and enhance the natural female body, Aesthetic dresses were thus either worn with a bone-free corset or no corset whatsoever.

As early as 1875, cartoons and satirical illustrations detailing the Aesthetic lifestyle, albeit with some exaggeration, appeared in *Punch* magazine. The wide circulation of *Punch* cartoons, usually by George Du Maurier, was key in defining a coherent set of affectations that could be labeled “Aesthetic.” These publications also firmly entrenched the general “look” of the male and female Aesthete into the Victorian psyche, reflecting the idea of Aestheticism as a media phenomenon. One of many examples is Du Maurier’s “The Six-Mark Tea Pot,” (1880)

and Fashion (New York: Frick Collection, 2003), and Patricia A. Cunningham, *Politics, Health, and Art: Reforming Women’s Fashion, 1850-1920* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003).

(Figure 72) which depicts a female and male Aesthete in deep contemplation of a precious piece of china. Both are visually focused on this art object, yet it is the female Aesthete who cradles it in her long, thin hands and who seems more transfixed by it. Interestingly, the female Aesthetes in Du Maurier's cartoons are repeatedly depicted as rather old and masculinized. This directly contrasts with one of this study's underlining themes of an association with youthful femininity, perhaps suggesting the anxiety that the female Aesthete provoked and/or the toll it took on her beauty. In this image, for example, the female aesthete's strong nose, heavy jaw, full lips and frazzled hair are meant to emulate and be an exaggerated version Jane Morris, the Pre-Raphaelite model. As Psomiades notes, her male companion bears a striking resemblance to the flamboyant public figure Oscar Wilde and his long hair, eccentric clothing and droopy posture is the antithesis of Victorian masculinity.¹⁸ Importantly, the female Aesthete in this cartoon looks like an Aesthetic painting, and as Psomiades notes, the pattern of the tea-pot is echoed in her dress as well as in the screen and vase in the background, creating a visual affiliation with aestheticism that is not shared by her companion.¹⁹

However the earlier adoptees of this style were Pre-Raphaelite "Stunners" such as Jane Morris, Elizabeth Siddal and Fanny Cornforth, who were noted for donning and creating unusual dresses that harmonized with the natural female figure and allowed for a degree of languor and

¹⁸Psomiades, 154. A key part of this discussion is the male Aesthete who likewise adopted this languor. This is a vast and fascinating subject, but given the scope of this chapter, I will not delve into this complex topic. See also Susan P. Casteras, "Aesthetes on Display: 'Not Masculine and Progressive but Recluse and Retrospective,'" in *Palaces of Art: Whistler and the Art Worlds of Aestheticism* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013), 107-120. See also Blanchard's chapter "Oscar Wilde, Aesthetic Style, and the Masculine Self," pp. 1-44.

¹⁹Psomiades, 154.

relaxation. Modern scholar Susan P. Casteras discusses the Pre-Raphaelites' early adoption of this eccentric type of beauty and notes how the artists were "attacked on various grounds during its early years, and one of its greatest vulnerability was its flouting of prevailing standards of beauty and decorum."²⁰ The Pre-Raphaelites and their models looked to early medieval and Renaissance paintings for inspiration, and their garments were often copied from these prototypes.²¹ One of the many examples of this style is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Silk Blue Dress* (1868) (Figure 73) in which Jane Morris sits in quiet contemplation in a claustrophobic interior. The painting demonstrates the Pre-Raphaelites' commitment to the strange beauty of femininity as emphasized by Morris's unique style of dress and pose. Hers is the quintessential style of artistic dress, which later evolved into Aesthetic dress. Morris displays the significant relaxing of posture that Aesthetic dress afforded wearers through its subtle flexibilities and absence of constricting stays. The lower cut armhole and full, billowing sleeves, all very flowing and loose, create an ease of movement. The dress, pose and atmosphere coalesce to create a mood of highly spiritualized introspection mixed with a strange and unique beauty.

In July of 1865, Rossetti hired the photographer John Robert Parsons to create a series of photographs of Jane Morris, Rossetti's primary model at the time. As modern scholar Debra N. Mancoff notes, Rossetti intended to have Jane photographed in several different poses and to use

²⁰Susan P. Casteras, "Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty," in *The Pre-Raphaelites in Context*, ed. Malcom Warner et al. (San Marino: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1992), 13.

²¹For example, modern scholar Leonée Ormond notes the influence of the long gauzy dress depicted in Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (c. 1482) on Pre-Raphaelite artists as well as on the Aesthetic movement in general. Leonée Ormond, "Female Costume in the Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s and 1880s," *Costume 2* (1968): 30-38, at 38.

these “images as memory aids for his paintings.”²² While Rossetti perhaps advised Morris regarding what kind of dress to wear on this occasion in the photos, Mancoff notes in this image Jane is clearly wearing her own day dress.²³ The resulting images reveal the labors of a working model who skillfully assumes unusual poses to highlight her unusual and unusual beauty. As Mancoff notes, Jane’s poses are in direct opposition to prevailing standards of decorum. Rather than “assume the ramrod-straight posture” in the photos, she allows her corsetless dress to “slump forward and her torso to slide lazily into her hip.”²⁴ Conventional undergarments would have enhanced the curves of Victorian femininity, emphasizing a tiny waist, rounded hips, and a womanly bustline. Rather, Jane’s loose dress emphasizes her lanky body, the very antithesis of the curvaceous but tightly drawn physique fashionable at the time. Moreover, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to “droop” in a rigid corset. In one of the most unconventional and striking Parson photographs, Jane’s entire upper body hunches over, thereby creating a long graceful line highlighting the curvature of her back and swan-like neck (Figure 74) Here, her body contorts in odd yet beautifully artistic ways and her head rests in apparent contemplation on what seems to be a painfully bent hand. Meanwhile, her right arm turns inward, almost gruesomely, forming a rather twisted angle. Jane exudes a self-reflective countenance, at once intense and morose, an effect which is heightened by her deep-set eyes, dark brows, and frizzy hair. This photo suggests how such poses, with their languid demeanor and unusual beauty,

²²Debra N. Mancoff *Jane Morris: The Pre-Raphaelite Model of Beauty* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 47.

²³Mancoff, 47.

²⁴Mancoff, 48.

helped to establish a prototype that would continue to play out, in even greater extremes, in artistic representations and in the real lives of female Aesthetes.

British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron's *Pre-Raphaelite Study* (1870) (Figure 75) also demonstrates how this drooping, languishing countenance and eccentric dress became the essential symbol of the movement.²⁵ The model for this photograph was May Prinsep, one of Cameron's favorites models and also her cousin.²⁶ In this photograph, Prinsep wears a billowing white dress that appears to be muslin.²⁷ An embroidered sash reveals her natural waistline and her jewelry, though minimal, is exotic and artistic. A long string of simple wooden beads hangs from her belt, and thin bangle bracelets adorn her right wrist, offsetting the massive sleeves of her dress. Darker fabric of an indiscernible color is tucked into the side of the belt and artfully arranged over the skirt. As Mancoff observes, "The full sleeves, tucked into the gown's shoulder, and the plain round neck of the bodice, finished only with a slim band, recall the cut of the dresses Jane wore when she posed for the suite of photographs."²⁸ In Cameron's photograph, the model's body leans gracefully against a simple draped piece of furniture. Her head is dramatically angled—posturally recalling photographs of Jane—and she rests her head upon a pillow, hair cascading down her back. Her slightly upward gaze conveys a weariness, a dreamy expression often seen in the female Aesthete.

²⁵Debra N. Mancoff, *Jane Morris: The Pre-Raphaelite Model of Beauty* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000), 86.

²⁶Mancoff notes that May was part of the Little Holland House, in Holland Park, a home where they often entertained artists such as Rossetti, Burne-Jones and Watts. *Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*

Amateur photographers, such as Melville, also sought to propagate this new breed of femininity. He photographed women dressed in a similar style and in a state of physical and emotional inactivity, either nearly collapsed or entirely reclining, comparable to that found in both the photographs of Jane Morris and Cameron's *Pre-Raphaelite Study*. Such female types are evident throughout Melville's album, and these images suggest just how forcefully this subject seized the imagination of not only professional artists, but amateurs as well. Reviews of Melville's photographs reveal that others picked up on the marked affinities with Cameron, a photographer who by then had achieved some notoriety, although her work was denigrated as "lady's work."²⁹ For example, the *British Journal of Photography* published this review of Melville's photographs displayed at the International Exhibition: "If Mrs. Julia Margaret Cameron has dropped her artistic mantle we congratulate the Hon. Ronald Leslie Melville upon having appropriated it and improved upon her manner. . . ."³⁰

In one untitled photograph by Melville (c. 1863-1870) (Figure 76) a young woman with soulful eyes has wearily descended the steps of a doorway, her inclined body barely sustained by a delicate vine that lingers against a tressed brick wall.³¹ Her listless pose suggests exhaustion, as she leans heavily on the vine for support. On the precipice of collapse, she rests her head on

²⁹Helen Smailles, "A Gentleman's Exercise: Ronald Leslie Melville, 11th Earl of Leven, and the Amateur Photographic Association," *The Photographic Collector* 3, no. 3 (Winter, 1982): 262-293, at 263.

³⁰The reviews continues: "This artist works somewhat in the same style as Mrs. Cameron, with this exception, that while his pictures possess all the artistic peculiarities of this lady's work, confessedly good in that respect, they are also good as photographs, possessing both artistic and technical excellence." *Ibid.*

³¹The exact date of these albums is unknown, but Smailles dates them from 1863-1870. Smailles, 264. This particular image is located at the Wilson Centre, London.

her arm, the fabric of her voluminous white dress pooling at her feet and hair cascading about her shoulders. Like the one depicted in Cameron's photograph, this dress is simply embellished and a belt draws the gown into folds, highlighting the model's natural waist. Positioned emblematically in the doorway of her home, with her virginal white dress still clinging to its domestic threshold, she emerges from the shadows in a somnolent state.

By the 1880s, the Aesthetic movement had become a powerful and influential force in both England and America. By extension, this style of avant-garde dress migrated from the rarefied spheres of the Pre-Raphaelites into more mainstream culture, where it evolved and became more refined. Like the Pre-Raphaelites, the Aesthetes sought a new kind of beauty. However, the Aesthetic Movement was dramatically different in that it did not originate among a like-minded group of artists but rather became a lifestyle that touched every aspect of daily Victorian life. Moreover, while Pre-Raphaelite women often had working-class origins, the female Aesthete was primarily either a middle- or upper-class woman. In 1882, at the height of the Aesthetic furor, Walter Hamilton published *The Aesthetic Movement in England*. This slim volume was the first to address this school of thought in a serious fashion, and it did so by emphasizing that it was not so much a "movement" as a "union of persons of cultivated taste to define and decide upon what is to be admired, and their followers must aspire to that standard in their work and lives."³² Hamilton associated the most popular and notable manifestations in "dress, furniture and house decoration" with the "apostles of the movement": Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Everett Millais and Edward Burne-Jones.³³ In doing so, Hamilton

³²Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1848), vii.

³³Hamilton, 7, 144.

confirmed aesthetics as both a high art and a mass cultural movement. This new focus on interior design, coupled with an increase in professional and public careers among female artists, led to a certain dissolution and disruption of the private realm, as it was no longer considered the only opportunity for a Victorian female, and, conversely, the public realm was no longer solely dominated by males. Modern scholars such as Colleen Denney, who discussed the emergence of women artists and audiences at the Grosvenor Gallery, as well as Charlotte Gere, among others, have noted how aestheticism created new opportunities for the Victorian woman. Gere, for example, notes how this “new decorating scene” led to “the involvement of middle-class women, both as arbiters of taste . . . and as practitioners of interior design in either a professional or amateur capacity.”³⁴ Central to aestheticism philosophy was the notion that a more refined lifestyle—indeed, a higher state of being—was attainable through intense contemplation of beautiful objects. Hamilton’s influential text drew significant attention to the Aesthetes, who were dedicating their lives to the “Cult of Beauty.” Twelve years later, Oscar Wilde, the central apostle of this movement, wrote in his essay “The Critic as Artist” that the “the mission of the aesthetic movement is to lure people to contemplate—not lead them to create.”³⁵

Not only did Aesthetic dress reshape the Victorian female body with a wilting profile and a nearly putrid arrangement of colors, but ideologically, it also functioned very differently compared to conventional Victorian fashion. For example, Victorians looked to turn-of-the-century academic Thorstein Veblen, whose theories understood women’s dress not as something related to their personae or their individuality, but rather as an item intimately symbolic of the

³⁴Charlotte Gere, *Artistic Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement* (London: V & A Publishing, 2010), 91.

³⁵Quoted by Wilde (1894) in Squire, 6.

economic success of their husbands. In Mary Warner Blanchard's discussion on Aesthetic fashion, she notes the carry-over of this theory that "denied the self-construction of female identity as early as the Gilded Age years."³⁶ The unique female Aesthetic "style" distinguished itself when women emerged as authoritative voices and writers of dress manuals dedicated to this cultural transformation. One of the most significant ways of doing so was through writings dedicated to aesthetic dress, decorating, and art appreciation. For example, the leading manual on Aesthetic dress was *The Art of Dress*, an 1879 publication by Mrs. H. R. Haweis that became extremely popular on both sides of the Atlantic. In it, Haweis advocates dress as an agent of revelation into the inner soul, something that could be elevated to a high art form. In the eyes of Haweis, the once "unattractive" Victorian woman could, through aestheticism, be transformed into a marvelous painting. Haweis contends that the "abused pre-Raphaelite painters" are the "plain girl's best friends": "There is a charm in low-coloring. In straight or irregular lines, in restful tame faces. . . . Red hair . . . is the rage. A pallid face with a protruding upper lip is highly esteemed . . . square eyebrows, whitey-brown complexions. . . . In fact, the pink-cheeked dolls are nowhere, they are said to have 'no character' and a pretty little hand is occasionally voted characterless too."³⁷ Here, as Psomidies notes, and as demonstrated in paintings such as *Laus Veneris* and lampooned by *Punch* and others, the language of ill health ("low-coloring" "pallid") and suggestions of a vacuous, "tame" countenance come together to create a strange and unusual beauty.³⁸

³⁶Blanchard, 139.

³⁷Quoted by Mrs. H. R. Haweis (1879) in Psomiades, 160.

³⁸Ibid.

The many satirical representations of the female Aesthete's idolization of Aesthetic objects reflect a mocking and ambivalent attitude towards this type of femininity. One example is Alfred Concanen's sheet music cover for "The High Art Maiden" (c. 1880) (Figure 77). This image exhibits a morbid and sickly sensuality in the female Aesthete who inhabits a room in which every corner seems to be filled with quintessential Aesthetic objects. A dado contains several carefully placed Japanese fans, and the woman next to them swoons before a William-Morris-style table whose shelves are filled, from top to bottom, with vases made of china. Discarded peacock feathers lie at her feet, and entwined in her emaciated arm is a long-stemmed lily, its length echoing the female Aesthete's own elongated figure. A corsetless dress accents her spindliness, and a long train of fabric trails down the steps before her. On the delicate table a large blue vase is filled with two sunflowers, one of which seems to arch toward the swooning Aesthete. The woman is as pale as her white dress, and her face evinces pain, as if pining over the Aesthetic objects has been deleterious to her health. At the same time, she appears androgynous. Her blondish, frizzy hair is bobbed, recalling Jane Morris, and her facial features and neck are almost masculine, like those shown in Burne-Jones's *Laus Veneris*. The woman's thin body bends almost reverently towards the Aesthetic objects. She gazes wistfully, her hand touching her breast, as if to emphasize her devotion.

Another excellent example that furthered the stereotype of the female Aesthete is Du Maurier's 1879 *Punch* poem and illustration "The Two Ideals" (Figure 78). The cartoon pokes fun at languishing maidens who appear plain and, perhaps, in need of a hearty meal. A gaunt female Aesthete stands with her hands clasped in front of her and eyes closed, as if in the throes of some reverie, while her forlorn companion appears almost consumptive or on the verge of

falling asleep. With heavy lids and deeply sunken eyes, she rests on the precarious support of her bent hand. As Casteras notes, “The disdain evinced for the unhealthy languor, oddly hued garments, and temptress intensity and passion are conveyed in these few stanzas of doggerel: “She stood as one from whom each garment slips, / Limp . . . drooping with pendulous lids and lips. / Her eyes were hollow, dusk, like fires outburned. / And to the earth in hopeless languor turned, / As they for restful death and darkness yearned. / Forlorn, and faint, and fatefully fordone . . . / As sick of passion, as unfit for fun.”³⁹ As Casteras has observed, the sickly, soulful and almost desperate intensity of such figures also aligned them with concurrent images of femmes fatales.⁴⁰

At the heart of Aestheticism lie an emphasis on the absorptive process and thoughtful, passive contemplation of art. Its ideology considered the female Aesthete innately predisposed to an inward, delicate sensitivity. However, as the female Aesthete became the definitive symbol of aestheticism, the movement’s central tenets became inherently fraught with contradictions. Just as the movement gave women the ability to assert some standards of artistic taste and participate in aestheticism’s discourse, the visual representation of them in paintings and cartoons perpetuated a certain stereotype of enfeebled, sickly femininity. This discrepancy is evident in *Laus Veneris*, for example, where physical monumentality and languid ill health merge to embody the female Aesthete. Here, Venus’s colossal body dominates nearly half of the composition, and her heavy jaw, thick, neck, and strong nose are distinctly androgynous. This

³⁹Susan P. Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), 161.

⁴⁰In addition, Casteras connects these caricatures of the female Aesthete with contemporary images of goddesses and femme fatales. *Ibid.*

“neutered” gender harkens back to early Pre-Raphaelite representations of women that, Susan Casteras has noted challenged prevailing stereotypes of Victorian femininity by creating an unprecedented physical “ideal” of a nearly “Amazonian” female body.⁴¹ Yet, despite this apparent exaggeration of the female form, the defining characteristic remained of a general countenance of malady and suffering. In *Laus Veneris*, for example, Venus assumes a posture of utter depletion. Draped over her chair, she has deep, hollowed eyes and an anemic pallor. She appears to be in a comatose state, much like images of invalids. Enveloped in an atmosphere of detachment, she provides stark contrast to her alert, more robust handmaidens. Critics immediately seized upon her sickly demeanor as a point of contention. For example, one of the core characters in Victorian writer Vernon Lee’s anti-Aesthetic Movement novel, Miss Brown is an unsympathetic individual viewed as a corrupting influence. Published in 1884 at the height of the Aesthetic Movement, this engrossing novel describes female Aesthetes as women “with hair cut like medieval pages, or tousled like maenads, habited in limp and stay-less garments. . . .”⁴² Later in the novel, an older woman notes Aestheticism’s mixture of beauty and strangeness with phrases like “bag of bones” and “*Loveliness in decay.*”⁴³ Such ironicisms are reminiscent of Baudelaire’s description of women afflicted with tuberculosis. He thought they exhibited a similar beauty in decay.

⁴¹Susan P. Casteras, “Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty,” in *The Pre-Raphaelites in Context* (San Marino: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1992) 29-30.

⁴²Quoted by Lee (1884) in Marilyn Castro, “Fashion Reform: Aesthetic Movement in Dress and Interiors,” in *Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothing in Literature, Film, and Television* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 130.

⁴³Castro, 132.

Victorian women looked to Aesthetic paintings as a source of inspiration. As Wahl notes, “far from being a passive style adopted by followers of art, Aesthetic dress was worn by women artists and patrons, as well as members of art audiences who actively engaged in the growing and participatory world of the Aesthetic movement.”⁴⁴ The Grosvenor Gallery was one of the most important venues in which Victorian women could learn how to adopt the Aesthetic style. Opened in 1877 by Sir Coutts Lindsay and Lady Lindsay, the gallery, quickly coined a “palace of art” by the London press, distinguished itself from the Royal Academy both through its exhibition reform and by championing the works of key Aesthetic artists—e.g., Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Sir John Everett Millais, and Edward Burne-Jones. From the gallery’s inception, Lady Lindsay’s position as co-director made the venue unique, and it catered both to Aesthetic female artists and an increasingly influential female audience. Colleen Denney has discussed the unique atmosphere there, for: “the Grosvenor Gallery acted as a safe haven for women artists and women consumers.”⁴⁵ Unique offerings such as a “Ladies’ Room” and special “Sunday Receptions” reflected the growing awareness, as Denney notes, of Victorian women as influential “arbiters of taste”: “These women’s role as audience in such a temple of commerce was to act as both worshippers and consumers.”⁴⁶ In a setting replete with opulent yet inviting furnishings, plants and Persian rugs, Lindsay created an environment in which Victorian women could contemplate and study aesthetic paintings. Opportunities for the female Aesthete to

⁴⁴Wahl, xiv.

⁴⁵Denney, 127.

⁴⁶Denney, 148. For the influential role of the Victorian woman at the Grosvenor Gallery, see Paula Gillet, “Art Audiences at the Grosvenor Gallery,” in *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University for British Art, 1996), 39-58.

glean some notion of Aestheticism's aims were also unique, as a primarily female audience viewed these iconoclastic images of lassitude, affliction and glorified otherworldliness. Burne-Jones' representation of aestheticism in key works exhibited at the gallery was widely deemed responsible for celebrating this vegetative type of womanhood. Edward Burne-Jones was considered one of the primary leaders and head of this 'sect of the cultivated.'⁴⁷ For many Victorians, such as the writer Henry James, his representations of femininity were 'weary', 'languishing', and in need of 'rest and refreshment.' At the same time, James noted the androgynous quality of Burne-Jones' femininity, calling the, 'creatures so mysteriously poetic...indeed like beautiful, rather sickly boys.'⁴⁸ Meanwhile, other Victorian critics labeled Burne-Jones as the painters of 'the diseased imagination.'⁴⁹ Edward Burne-Jones' *The Golden Stairs* (1876-1880) (Figure 79) exhibited two years after *Laus Veneris*, is a kindred image of female aestheticism and exhibits a similarly anemic ideal of femininity. An air of mystery, ambiguity and placid reverence permeates the work as young maidens descend, barefoot and in hushed conversation, down winding wooden stairs. The image initially baffled the uninitiated Victorian audience, who believed "every picture should tell a story."⁵⁰ Thus, they struggled to

⁴⁷Hamilton, 47.

⁴⁸This reference to the "boyish" physicality of the female body hints, perhaps, at either young girls who have experienced puberty or sickly invalid women. Quoted by James (1878) in J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Paintings, Poetry and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 154. For a focused study on Burne-Jones and his representation of the male and female Aesthete, see Bullen's Chapter 4, "Burne-Jones and the Aesthetic Body," pp. 149-216.

⁴⁹Quoted by James (1878) in Bullen, 95.

⁵⁰Wildman and Christian, 247.

understand aestheticism's devotion to "subject-less" paintings.⁵¹ Critics concluded the painting represented the conclusion of a marriage ceremony, which would suggest the young women, uniformly attired, are contemplating their own impending emergence into womanhood. The women are dressed in grayish-silver gowns that hearken to the soft, clinging fabric and subtle coloring of Aesthetic dress. Their bodies arch and bend, revealing the sinewy curves of maidenhood and clearly suggest the lack of any fundamental undergarments. Critics specifically noted the women's unusual attire, which they described as "tin-foil night gowns."⁵² The color of the garments is the antithesis of the chemically produced aniline dyes in colors such as electric blue and magenta, popular for modish outdoor and day wear. The description of the women's attire as night-gowns, as well as the harmonious blending of white and silver, recalls such images as *Fading Away*, *The Convalescent*, and others discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation. In those images, Victorian women dressed in white gowns are traditionally suggestive, on one hand, of purity or innocence, and on the other, of a potential for intimate relationship and sexuality. Nevertheless, a white gown was attire deemed appropriate in its association with the domestic sphere.

While the meaning of *The Golden Stairs* was purposely elusive, the women depicted were familiar to the Victorian audience. In 1879, when the painting was nearing completion, Burne-Jones decided to include portrait heads. While some of the figures were based on studies of professional models, Burne-Jones based many of the figures on close family and friends. For example, modern scholar John Christian has identified standing in profile at the top of the stairs

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

the artist's daughter, Margaret, while the daughter of a wealthy patron is positioned approximately two-thirds the way down.⁵³ The figures appear almost identical, as if clones, and their adolescent bodies are androgynous, much like the handmaidens depicted in Burne-Jones' *Laus Veneris*. The image took on particular contemporary significance with the inclusion of beautiful figures from prominent social and artistic circles,. As John Christian notes, "These likenesses helped to give the painting contemporary relevance and make it a key image for popular, fashionable Aestheticism."⁵⁴ Therefore, in this painting, the representation of the languid female Aesthete merges the real and the imaginary, comingling high art with the Aesthetic lifestyle.

Golden Stairs also suggests a fundamental shift in fashion ideology as women began to embrace the widely circulated Aesthetic images as a model for cultivating the distinct Aesthetic "look." Louis Jopling, who regularly exhibited her own works at the Grosvenor Gallery, keenly reflected on the influence of Burne-Jones' paintings: "The man of genius, Burne-Jones exhibited there, and his pictures became the rage. Fashion, always ready to adopt anything new, set all the town wild to copy the dress and attitudes of his wonderful nymphs."⁵⁵ One of the many influential groups to frequent the Grosvenor Gallery were the Souls, a small, intimate group of artistic men and women who preferred more intellectual and artistic pursuits, as opposed to the

⁵³For a full list see Wildman and Christian, 248.

⁵⁴John Christian in *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Gallery and Thames & Hudson), 236.

⁵⁵Squire, 14.

raffish sporting games practiced by the Prince of Wales social group.⁵⁶ It was, however, the women in this group, known to be aggressively intellectual, independent-minded females, who distinguished themselves by cultivating a conspicuous eccentric style of Aesthetic dress. Portraits of the Souls likewise demonstrate how this type of languid femininity took on new meaning within the rarified atmosphere of the Aesthetes. Within this circle of artistically minded individuals, the sickly aesthetic was not associated with a specific medical affliction, such as consumption or neurasthenia, but became a distinct mark of refinement. For example, Edward Poynter's portrait of *Mary Constance Wyndham, Lady Elcho* (1886) (Figure 80) a key member of the Souls, depicts a richly adorned Aesthetic interior. The room is decorated with several oriental vases and a Japanese screen is placed in the background. In addition, Lady Elcho holds idly in her hand a book containing, it appears, delicate Japanese drawings. Her gold Aesthetic dress is sumptuous, its fabric enveloping her as she collapses onto a couch covered with exotic Aesthetic looking blankets. Reclining heavily, and wearily, her eyes are deeply etched with dark shadows and her body is outstretched, molding itself to the curvature of the couch. Similar to Burne-Jones' *Laus Veneris*, her head leans to one side, and she gazes disconnectedly, absorbed in her own private world.

G. F. Watts, another prominent Aesthetic painter, regularly exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery and likewise counted among his close friends many female Aesthetes who adopted both the movement's unique fashion and its lifestyle. Watts was particularly fascinated by the ethereal beauty of Violet Lindsay, the leading member of the Souls and an accomplished artist who often exhibited her works at the Grosvenor Gallery. Watts' *Portrait of Lady Lindsay* (c. 1879) (Figure

⁵⁶To read more on The Souls, see Jane Abdy and Charlotte Gere, *The Souls: An Elite in English Society* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984).

81) likewise personifies the heady mix of beauty and strangeness that epitomized the female Aesthete.⁵⁷ In Watts' portrait the sitter eschews gaudy, elaborate jewelry and wears a simple dress with a gauzy scarf draped stylishly around her neck. The seemingly careless yet calculated simplicity of the portrait and dress speaks volumes about the sitter's character and artistic taste. Violet's gaze is vacuous and sedated, and she looks otherworldly. Her eyes are heavily shadowed, and Watts has softened the unruly curls around her head, creating a halo effect. These qualities of enervation and otherworldliness reflect the key characteristics associated with female Aesthetes.

In the rarefied atmosphere of the Grosvenor Gallery, which was filled with so many paintings depicting female Aesthetes, this type of femininity became its hallmark, blurring the distinction between the real and the imaginary. Many Victorian women became living, breathing embodiments of aestheticism, and reviews of the Grosvenor Gallery's exhibitions, for example, duly acknowledged this cultural transformation by referring to things like "the nondescript garb of maidens who call themselves 'intense,' and who walk about with a flower held in the listless fingers of one hand."⁵⁸ As previous chapters of this dissertation have discussed, this trademark languid demeanor had previously been located predominantly within the private sphere. Now, however, it had daringly moved out into the public sphere, transgressing the formal boundaries of the day. Sensing how this unique art form was reframing and expanding into a broader

⁵⁷G. F. Watts painted Lady Lindsay many times. As modern scholar Barbara Bryant notes: "There is some confusion over these various versions, not helped by Mrs. Watts' catalogue." Bryant notes that *Portrait of Lady Lindsay* (c. 1879), was sold from the Chapman collection. Bryant describes this portrait: "Watts first depicted Violet facing forwards in an oil where shadowy dark eyes lend a haunted quality to the face." Barbara Bryant, *G. F. Watts Portraits: Fame and Beauty in Victorian Society* (London: National Gallery, 2004), 161.

⁵⁸Newton, 85, and Squire, 12.

cultural ideology, contemporaries in England and America recorded the visual manifestation of this complex relationship. For example, critics noted that “Art has taken up a more decided position at the present moment in respect to the ordinary surroundings of our lives . . . there is now a class who dress after pictures.”⁵⁹ Likewise, the female Aesthete’s “high-cheek bones and straight lank shapes” were duly noted as having glided out of “picture-land” onto city streets.⁶⁰

Soon, department stores such as Liberty & Co., who were at the forefront of modern design and Aesthetic dress, offered ample opportunities for everyday Victorian women to acquire these garments, allowing them to flirt with the danger that this near-scandalous and bohemian model of femininity represented. Psomiades distinguished the female Aesthete as being rife with contradiction and paradox. Embodied in this enervated femininity is both representation of fine art as well as the troubling notion of the Victorian woman entering into the public sphere. Aestheticism, as Psomiades suggests transforms the Victorian woman into a ‘sort of live picture’ and: “Her appearance is the sign both of the dangers of feminine consumer desire . . . and the difficulties posed by the commodification of Aestheticism.”⁶¹ The audience for such imagery increasingly included well-educated Victorian women, who were swayed by advertising, fashion illustration, and other impactful print media. Watts’ portrait of Lady Lindsay underscores the analogy between painting and dress that evolved during the Aesthetic Movement. For example, in April 1890 the department store Messrs. Stephens and Co. published in their non-Aesthetic journal, *Home Art Work*, an illustration that demonstrated the reciprocal

⁵⁹Quoted in Blanchard, 162-163.

⁶⁰Written by the Victorian writer Justin McCarthy for the *Galaxy* (1876) and cited by Anderson, 442.

⁶¹Psomiades, 134.

relationship between fine art and the consumer market (Figure 82).⁶² Although this illustration portrays a young girl, it is arguably also an appropriate representation of the adult female Aesthete. The image, which was widely circulated, displays an artistic dress and demonstrates how the languid Aesthete “look” went far beyond mere dress. In this 1890 illustration, the young girl is shown in a simple Aesthetic dress with a bodice of squared-off smocking at the top and double-outfitted sleeves. With simple, straight skirt, she steps gingerly, carrying a leafy branch behind her back. Like the portrait of Violet Lindsay, she gazes with deeply cavernous eyes that, etched with thick lines, look slightly upturned, as if she is hypnotized or in a state of reverie. As Wahl notes, the young girl’s “languid pose . . . is reminiscent of the body language and pose of the standard Aesthetic maiden in myriad genre paintings of the period.”⁶³ As if sensing the strangeness of these designs, the journal praised the gown in an article aptly titled “A Fairyland of Fabrics,” which underscored the idea that the wearers of such garments inhabited some fantastical realm.⁶⁴

As Haweis’ important role of fashion advisor demonstrates, women were not only the subjects of Aesthetic painting; through the act of dressing, but they were also integral in creating the cultural apparatus upon which Aestheticism revolved—that is, the languorous manner of the female Aesthete. As Psomiades notes, “in the fashion manuals of Mrs. Haweis, the woman who looks like a painting by Rossetti or Burne-Jones indicates that aestheticism is being turned into

⁶²Wahl, 134.

⁶³Wahl, 136.

⁶⁴Ibid.

fashion.”⁶⁵ The Aesthetic movement’s central credo, as endorsed by Oscar Wilde, was the “gospel of intensity” and contemplation and Haweis’ manuals invite the female aesthete to delve deep within to select true Aesthetic colors. Here, the notion of “female nerves” transforms into a quality that lends the Victorian woman certain acumen in discernment and the appreciation of nuances. Haweis encourages the avoidance of such “unnatural colors” as magenta, and rather encourages the female consumer to locate taste within herself, as a type of meditative process, rather than locate taste from outside external dictates and trends.⁶⁶ Therefore, rather than looking to the almighty authoritative voice of such fashion houses as Frederick Worth, Haweis invests the female consumer with a new type of power that is located within herself and based on her own intuition. For example, Haweis writes, “When you see a colour which is moderately dull in tone, and so far indescribable that you question whether it is blue or green . . . grapple it to your *soul* with hooks of steel . . .”⁶⁷

Just as women’s innate sensitivity and delicate nerves gave them a selective eye, it also provided them with an inherent talent to ponder and contemplate key Aesthetic objects such as pieces of china. This propensity to “nervousness” is central to the chapter on the cult of the invalid, and within the context of Aestheticism it endowed the female Aesthete with an ability to embody the central credo of the movement. Within the mantle of Aestheticism, Victorian

⁶⁵Psomiades, 135-136.

⁶⁶For example, rather than looking to the almighty authoritative voice of such fashion houses as Frederick Worth, Haweis invests the female consumer with a new type of power that is located within herself and based on her own intuition.

⁶⁷Quoted by Haweis (1879) in Alison Victoria Matthews, “Aestheticism’s True Colors: The Politics of Pigment in Victorian Art, Criticism, and Fashion,” in *Women and British Aestheticism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 182.

women, already considered as innately prone to nervousness, were associated with an heightened sensitivity that facilitated an intensity and ability to become transfixed, or hypnotized by the Aesthetic object. Blanchard obliquely also touches upon this idea of Aesthetic objects inducing hypnotic states.⁶⁸ Discussing Victorian neuroses and opium use, Blanchard suggests how the domestic parlor was transformed during this period into a site for channeling and crystal gazing.⁶⁹ This notion of women overtaking the domestic parlor and transforming it into a venue for altered states and mediumship anticipates Chapter 7 on Spiritualism.⁷⁰ This state of being was widely represented in Aesthetic painting as depicting the female Aesthete as hypnotized as well as psychologically consumed by a piece of china. The Aesthetes' fixation with Oriental objects was nicknamed "Chinamania," and was an important aspect of the Aesthetic Movement and, in simplest terms, was based on the collection and admiration of pieces of china. The American artist James McNeil Whistler was at the forefront of this craze, and his "White Girl" series played an essential role in the construction and dissemination of aestheticism both in England and America. In Whistler's *Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl* (1864) (Figure 83), considered one of his most emblematic aesthetic statements, the artist addresses several key concepts fundamental in the construction of the cultural symbolism represented by the female Aesthete. Here, the model Joanna Hiffenan gazes upon a white and blue vase placed over the mantle. Her head is turned so that a mirror reveals a wan face consumed with deep

⁶⁸To read more on this subject, see Mary Warner Blanchard's chapter "The Aesthetic Parlor, the Object D'Art, and the Sedated Self" in *Oscar Wilde's America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 85-136.

⁶⁹Blanchard, 123, fig. 93.

⁷⁰See "The Aesthetic Parlor, the Object D'Art, and the Sedated Self." Blanchard, 85-136.

contemplation. Leaning heavily upon the mantle, she flaunts a conspicuously placed ring on her left hand, suggesting an implied narrative. Like *Punch's* "Six Mark Teacup," Hiffernan exhibits intense reverie induced by the precious vase, and the atmosphere is tinged with an air of mystery. Although she does not display a pronounced droop, per se, the style of dress, coupled with the Japanese vase, and her deep aesthetic contemplation links her implicitly to Aestheticism.⁷¹

The quintessential Aesthetic dress worn by Hiffernan is made of what appears to be sheer fabric, gathered at the bodice and waist with voluminous sleeves. In pose, dress, and general mood, *The Little White Girl* recalls Cameron's *Pre-Raphaelite Study*. In both examples, the women are shown in capacious, gauzy white gowns and convey some degree of physical languor, reverie or mental detachment. The fabric appears to be muslin, a sheer, plain-weave cotton that was associated with modesty and home life. Executed at a time in which the size of crinolines was expanding and corsets were considered mandatory, the painting presents Joanna without any rigid undergarments, giving her an ease of movement and the languid quality so familiar in the female Aesthete. The voluminous dress overwhelms the model's body and the sheer gauzy texture of the material seems to liquefy and dissolve into the claustrophobic interior. Meanwhile, the precious piece of china stands erect in contrast to the depleted and weakened female occupant. With her face turned toward the mirror, revealing a darkened shadowy reflection, her dress and deep aesthetic contemplation all coalesce to suggest an element of transcendence that renders her otherworldly.⁷²

⁷¹The pose, dress, and general mood of *Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl* also recall Julia Margaret Cameron's *Pre-Raphaelite Study* (1870). In both examples, the women are shown in voluminously gauzy white gowns and convey some degree of physical languor, reverie or mental detachment.

⁷²Psomiades, 109.

In this painting, the dress and the Japanese vase, the source of her quasi-hypnotic state, link her to the Aesthetic movement and serves as indicators of difference, or “otherness.” This implicit union between dress and the vase is further reinforced by the fan Hiffernan holds, its Oriental design vivid against her white dress. Modern scholar Rebecca N. Mitchell connects Aesthetic dress with “Chinamania” and examines how satires suggest that women who adopted the Aesthetic lifestyle and indulged in consumer culture through mode of dress or the acquisition of Aesthetic objects, “signal ruptures in the Victorian social order.”⁷³ According to Mitchell, these “external symptoms “ communicate that “the nascent modern or proto-feminist sensibility truly at work in the female Aesthete.”⁷⁴ When women partook of Aestheticism and indulged in one of its myriad consumer options, they were considered agitators and susceptible to corruption, and even possibly were promiscuous.⁷⁵ This recalls earlier discussion in this chapter on the burgeoning consumer market that catered to the female Aesthete. Recent scholarship has explored how the unfolding of this this new breed of progressive femininity sparked cultural anxiety. For example, Erika Diane Rappaport recently discussed how shopping as a pastime for enjoyment created a new type of femininity, yet also disturbed the Victorian social order. She states, “ During a period in which a family’s respectability and social position depended upon the idea that the middle-class wife and daughter remain apart from the market, politics, and public

⁷³Rebecca N. Mitchell, “Acute Chinamania: Pathologizing Aesthetic Dress,” *Fashion Theory* 14, Issue 1 (March 2010): 45-64, at 47.

⁷⁴Mitchell, 45.

⁷⁵Psomiades, 13.

sphere, the female shopper was an especially disruptive figure.”⁷⁶ In 1882, a writer for the *Nation* likewise duly noted that women were no longer sitting compliantly or docilely at home. Women, he observed, were now “in the streets, in horse-cars, omnibuses, excursion boats, railroad trains, and hotel corridors.”⁷⁷ There was a fear that ultimately, via self-gratification and the fulfillment of “misdirected” desires located beyond the hearth, the Victorian woman might abandon her duties to husband and children, which would threaten the entire sanctity of the domestic sphere. *Punch*’s “Acute Chinamania” (1875) (Figure 84) alludes to this newly awakened anxiety by depicting a mother who has adopted Aestheticism’s craze for collecting china. The woman sits hunched over and wears an uncorseted dress that looks like a nightgown. Unkempt hair frames her gaunt face. In contrast, her well-groomed daughter stands in front of her while numerous children peer cautiously, as if in dire fear of the unsettling scene and mother. At the figures’ feet, pieces of broken china lie on the floor, reflecting a domestic hearth gone awry—shattered and neglected, perhaps much like the mother’s dreams or aspirations—and ultimately void of any motherly care. Likewise, as Mitchell notes, the “destruction” that lies in smashed ruins “is linked with the mother’s own (self) destruction.”⁷⁸ This cartoon thus evokes long-existent iconography, for connections between intact china and sexual purity comprised a common trope in earlier British literature.⁷⁹ Likewise, the flowing dress, which resembles, a

⁷⁶Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.

⁷⁷Quoted by anon., writing for the *Galaxy* (1882) in Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 20.

⁷⁸Mitchell, 49.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

nightgown, reiterates a recurring theme throughout this chapter reflecting the duality, as both angel and temptress, and the potential sexually delinquent behavior of the female Aesthete. Unbound, uncorseted, and unregulated, the nightgown signals, on one hand her place within the domestic sphere, as well as her Aestheticism and engagement with consumer culture.

Indeed, in *The Little White Girl*, Casteras notes, “Dressed in white, she [Hiffernan] ironically functions like an Aesthetic bride waiting at an altar.”⁸⁰ This painting’s key role in establishing a prototype for the female Aesthete is again underscored by Casteras, who also points out how Hiffernan’s “dreamy expression and lethargic pose, like her blank white dress and trendy drawing-room setting, are visual components that link her not only to later figural works by Whistler but also to subsequent permutations of both the Aesthetic female and male and their enervated, seemingless emotionless inactivity—in *Punch* magazine and elsewhere.”⁸¹

Closely linked to this important painting is Whistler’s *Symphony in White, No. 3* (1865-67) (Figure 85), the final portrait of Hiffernan that also includes another model, Milly Jones.⁸² Twenty-first-century scholar Patricia de Montfort highlights the integral role the models’ costumes and fabric play within the painting’s composition, noting how the “unstructured style of dresses helps define the pose of the models.”⁸³ The dress worn by Hiffernan is the same as

⁸⁰Casteras, “Aesthetes on Display: ‘Not Masculine and Progressive but Recluse and Retrospective,’” in *Palaces of Art: Whistler and the Art Worlds of Aestheticism*, 108.

⁸¹Casteras, 109.

⁸²Richard Dormant and Margaret F. Macdonald, *James McNeill Whistler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1995), 80. Milly Jones was a professional model as well as the wife of actor Stuart Robinson. Ibid. Patricia de Montfort, “White Muslin: Joanna Hiffernan and the 1860s,” in *Whistler, Women and Fashion* (New York : Frick Collection, 2003), 90.

⁸³de Montfort, 90.

that used in *The Little White Girl*, a fact confirmed by Whistler when, describing the painting in progress, he stated that the dress was made “of very white material, the same dress that the white girl had before.”⁸⁴ While the domestic parlor of *The Little White Girl* is packed with Aesthetic objects; here, however, they have been reduced to a Japanese fan beside Jones on the carpet and the asymmetrical sprig of azaleas at the right, which balances the frieze-like composition.

Hiffernan languishes on a white studio sofa, or divan, her right hand cradling her head as red hair tumbles down her back. The dresses’ material appears almost transparent, and its folds cling to her torso, revealing the natural curve of her hips and thighs. She gazes wistfully outward, her left arm horizontally outstretched and the uncorseted dress gracefully draped over her body.

Meanwhile, attired in a similar flowing white dress, Jones collapses at the foot of the off-white sofa in an attitude of profound introspection. On the verge of sickness or sleep, she leans heavily against the sofa, her right arm outstretched while the other rests idly at her side near a discarded fan. Except for subtle punctuations of color in the salmon pinks, orange fan, and blue-flecked flower and rug, the painting is an “exercise in white on white.”⁸⁵ The two models, displaying their enigmatic insouciance, are part of the decorative scheme. Scholars, such as Robyn Asleson and Casteras, have noted that the figures, mood, and composition show the influence of Whistler’s friend Albert Moore.⁸⁶ In addition, the work is comparable to Albert Moore’s *Beads* (1880) (Figure 86). The two works clearly bear a striking resemblance in their lack of any clear

⁸⁴Quoted by Whistler (1865) in de Montfort, 90.

⁸⁵Dorment and Macdonald, 80.

⁸⁶Casteras, “Aesthetes on Display,” 109.

narrative, as well as their use of draped, “self-consciously feminine” figures positioned against a flat backdrop to achieve the best decorative arrangement.⁸⁷

As has been demonstrated, a recurrent theme of Aestheticism is that women who adopted the lifestyle were afflicted with some sort of “sickness.” This sentiment is not only evident in *Punch* cartoons, but is also apparent in *The Colonel*, a widely popular 1881 play. This satirical parody of Aestheticism, which nevertheless addresses cultural anxieties, features a mother and daughter who make their daughter’s husband miserable by adopting the Aesthetic lifestyle. They assume the familiar lassitude through dress, filling the home with strange décor and providing inadequate food.⁸⁸ Finally, the husband, The Colonel, flees: “He is — away from home — where there is brightness, movement, Offenbach’s music, and life, instead of die-away languor, broken harpsichords, Streyke’s poems, sickly lilies, draggled-tailed peacock’s feathers, and the beauty of decay.”⁸⁹

The husband’s dramatic “fleeing” from the “sickly lilies” (his daughter and wife) also suggest that the female Aesthetic was not only “sickened” but, frighteningly, contagious. *Judy’s* “The Sage-Green Sickness” (1880) (Figure 87) is a startling, and disturbing, representation of the “infectious” quality of Aestheticism. Similar to *The Little White Girl*, the cartoon’s setting is a

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Mitchell describes *The Colonel* as an often forgotten play which was extremely popular in the 1880s, the height of the Aesthetic Movement. Like *Punch*, she notes these “satires of the Aesthetes were more concerned with the danger of change than with the accoutrements of the ‘movement’ itself.” As Mitchell continues, at the center of the play are the female Aesthetes, where they are described as “washed out people in strange faded dresses, who flop and drawl, and sigh all over the place.” Mitchell, 56-57.

⁸⁹Castro, 133. See also online publication of play: <http://www.xix-e.pierre-marteau.com/ed/colonel/text-notes.html>

parlor replete and teeming with “China Maniacal.” Casteras notes this connection stating, “This image strikes a grim note in its variation on the Whistlerian Aesthete posed at a parlor mantel.”⁹⁰ For example, hanging fans spiral down the wall, wallpaper bears the symbolic Aesthetic sunflower, and an assemblage of vases and chinaware adorn a fireplace mantle; all crammed into a small corner, creating an intoxicating if dizzying array of extreme Aestheticism. Interestingly, but perhaps not coincidentally, the new opportunities afforded by Aestheticism to engage with consumer culture coincided with a new type of female sickness, or “mania,” which rendered the Victorian woman defenseless: kleptomania. In an attempt to console Victorian society and ameliorate anxiety, medical doctors rationalized shoplifting as a female behavior that was controlled by her biology.⁹¹ As previously discussed in past chapters, the Victorian woman was perceived as being governed by her biology as inherently delicate, both mentally as well as physically. Abelson observes that not all women shoplifted, naturally, but “all women shopping were seen as potential shoplifters.”⁹² The sheer abundance of material goods was considered as being too “overwhelming” and taxing to Victorian women’s nerves. The incredible profusion of choices, excitement, and sensory stimulation of department stores was believed to render them incapable of making sound decisions and left them thus unable to control themselves in such commercial setting.⁹³ In 1895, one woman explained her anxiety and loss of control in such public places, stating “It is not that we need so much more, or that our requirements are so

⁹⁰Casteras, “Aesthetes on Display,” 117.

⁹¹Abelson, 11.

⁹²Emphasis mine. Abelson, 8.

⁹³In Abelson’s study, she likewise discusses Aestheticism and Liberty & Co., all of which developed in conjunction with the rise of department stores.

increased...but we are not *able to stand* against the overwhelming temptations to buy which besiege us at every turn.”⁹⁴

In this cartoon, the androgynous female Aesthete loses her ability to stand and crumples to the ground in a twisted heap of bones, seemingly rendered helpless and sickened through the adoption of Aestheticism. As Casteras notes, here “Beauty, along with Aesthetic material, has taken a moral toll.”⁹⁵ The female Aesthete is feeble, emaciated and, as Casteras has asserted, “desexualized.” A gauzy scarf encircles her serpentine neck, while disheveled hair frames her androgynous face.⁹⁶ Crouched into a corner of the parlor, her posture painfully collapses as her body contorts and writhes. *The Sage Green* disease not only may allude to the shopping bonanza that Aestheticism represented, but also perhaps to the putrid colors associated with the Aesthetes. Interestingly, it also brings to mind the familiar “Green Disease,” or chlorosis, which likewise afflicted young girls on the cusp of maidenhood. Chlorosis was specifically linked to the onset of the menstrual cycle and was associated with lack of energy, appetite and its sufferers often had a weak heartbeat and pale skin.⁹⁷ Like *The White Girl*, she has been afflicted with Chinamanism and been consumed, to the point of death, with both deep contemplation and consumerism, the evidence resting innocuously, yet prominently, on the mantel of the fireplace.

In summary, this chapter demonstrates a key aspect of my study, revealing the flexibility and mutability of this type of femininity. Image, literature and criticism suggest that the

⁹⁴Abelson, 6.

⁹⁵Casteras, “Aesthetes on Display,” 117-118.

⁹⁶Casteras, “Aesthetes on Display,” 118.

⁹⁷See Helen King, *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis and the Problems of Puberty* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

Victorian woman who adopted this self-fashioning lifestyle could, potentially, trigger the downfall of home and hearth. Many Victorians were concerned that such transgressive behavior might threaten the moral center of the home and the longstanding status quo of gender relations. Pictorially, when a woman cast off the corset, her body collapsed, which contained the implicit threat of a wayward future. Thus, grafted onto the female Aesthete's body were troubling signals that the movement inherently promulgated. As Psomiades suggests, "the female aesthete's insistence on looking like art is seen as an insistence on looking strange and on gratifying the self even at the costs of giving up participation in heterosexual romance."⁹⁸ Even more troubling was Aestheticism's denial of any direct narrative for their paintings. The languid female Aesthete inhabited a world that was elusive, complex, and mysterious.

In this respect, Whistler's depiction of *The Little White Girl's* trance-like state functions as a transition into the final chapter, which delves into Spiritualism and its relationship with the Victorian woman. This symbiotic relationship between the female Aesthete and spiritualism is evident both pictorially as well as expressed by many authors. For example, in an article dedicated to Rossetti and published in 1882 in *Cornhill Magazine*, F.H. Myer described the artist's depiction of women as "sacred pictures of a new religion: a secular religion of Beauty and mystical spirituality of the feminine."⁹⁹ As this chapter has established, the female Aesthete embodied the main characteristics of this type—a generally sickly and languid physicality coupled with a detached mental quality portending communication with another realm. In *The Little White Girl* this mystique of physical and mental altered states is encapsulated within

⁹⁸Psomiades, 137.

⁹⁹Quoted by F. H. Myers (1882) in Casteras, "Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty," 31.

feminine aestheticism. The subject's gaze reflects a sense of enclosure and inaccessibility that, when coupled with her physical languor, infuse the painting with a potent aura of mystery and spirituality. Both of these qualities anticipate Victorian women's involvement with the Spiritualist movement, which is the focus of Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7

SPIRITUALISM AND THE VICTORIAN FEMALE MEDIUM

James McNeil Whistler's *Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl* (1864) (see Figure 83) was clearly identified with the burgeoning Aesthetic Movement, but the painting is also significant in revealing the period's fascination with spiritualism. The Spiritualist movement began in America in the 1840s, and by 1859, with the import of a second wave of mediums, the movement was fully launched in Britain.¹ Both Aestheticism and Spiritualism connected altered states of consciousness with Victorian femininity, and like Aestheticism, the pictorial representation of languid femininity in altered physical and mental states became the movement's key signifier.

This chapter examines the phenomenon of Spiritualism in America and Britain and focuses on the central role images depicting Victorian women engaged in some sort of spiritual channeling played in the movement. Spiritualism was based on the premise that select individuals had the ability to contact and communicate with the spirit world. Significantly, Victorian women were deemed the ideal vessels for channeling spirits. This perception of women as effective spiritual communicators was directly tied to cultural notions of what was innate both in the female personality and biology. The very same attributes that made women prone to chronic invalidism were, ironically, what also made her the ideal conduit for mediumship and channeling. The success of attempts to commune with spirits depended on mediums' ability to absent themselves both physically and mentally, to relinquish their own

¹Charles Colbert, *Haunted Visions: Spiritualism and American Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 127.

identity, and become an instrument of the “Other.” Beliefs that passivity, vulnerability, fragility, and lack of willpower were innate in women gave them putative authority in this realm. Spiritualism, much like Aestheticism, provided Victorian women with some degree of authority that allowed them to evade certain rigid nineteenth-century class and gender strictures. It is important to note that images depicting this supposed predilection do not necessarily conform with those portraying overt physical languor; rather, they show Victorian women in trance-like states that required abdication of both physical and mental faculties. Thus, these women appear as intermediaries between the celestial and terrestrial realms. Modern scholar Alex Owen, having thoroughly examined the relationship between Spiritualism and Victorian femininity, notes that while spirits initially made their presence known through a series of “knocks” or “raps,” it was specifically the “trance state” that “became the order of the day, she (the female medium) literally ‘spoke spirit’; that is, the spirit entered her and spoke through her.”² This transition from the physical, and perhaps more aggressive, act to one that required accessing an alerted states of trance, was, I assert, vital in moving the Victorian woman to the forefront of the movement. As will be shown, many séances were held within the home and the female role as spiritual authority provided her with a permissible right to exercise a degree of power in this respect. During the Victorian era, a woman performing in trance might be found in a number of different roles: as a professional theatrical medium, a Spiritualist trance speaker holding court in a séance, or a mesmerized female patient undergoing medical treatment. Victorians understood quite clearly

²Alex Owen, “The Other Voice: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism,” in *Language, Gender, and Childhood*, ed. Carolyn Steedman et al. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 35. Alex Owen’s *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* is also an important source for the study of women’s role within Spiritualism, providing an excellent, comprehensive and thorough examination.

the difference between a spiritualist “public” professional medium and a “private” medium.³ Owen provides a clear distinction between the two noting the “public” medium was a “working class” woman who received payment for her talents. Conversely, a private medium practiced within the home and was related to the middle and upper class “lady.” Therefore, the Victorian female medium “lady” was already assuming her established role as the angelic ideal creature within the domestic sphere. Inevitably, and not surprisingly, the entranced “private” female medium became the preferred pictorial representation of the spiritualist both in American and Britain.

This chapter begins with an examination of James McNeil Whistler’s *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (1864-65) and its association with the Spiritualist movement, followed by a brief discussion of mesmerism, an important precursor to the movement. The goal is to examine two distinct groups of Spiritualist women depicted in British and American art: the domestic medium and the sorceress, or witch.⁴

The domestic medium was one of the most popular images connected with the Spiritualist movement. She is often depicted as scrying, or crystal-gazing, one of the oldest methods of attempting to communicate with the deceased. Like the female Aesthete, this abdication of wakeful consciousness suggests a type of female agency and influence within yet another major cultural force, in this case, the Spiritualist movement. In addition, like the female

³Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 49. To read more on “public” female mediums, see also Owen, “Other Voice,” 40-51. For a comprehensive study of female “public” mediums, see Amy Lehman, *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists, and Mesmerists in Performance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009).

⁴Given the scope of this chapter, I will limit my discussion to key themes and images of female mediums and sorceresses.

Aesthete, these images repeatedly depict the female mediums as conveying a listless, sickly appearance and transcendent and hypnotized mental demeanor. Therefore, the female medium possessed a modicum of authority in these states, a quality not necessarily associated with the conventional Victorian woman. Yet at the same time, these vessels of the “spirit” exhibited an idealized physical and mental demeanor that is central to this dissertation: they were often portrayed as fragile, delicate, reclusive and dreamy.

This chapter concludes with a brief examination of images depicting the female sorceress. These popular images exemplify the archetypal femme fatale and reveal the powerful Victorian notion that women had a dark and destructive side. This discussion also touches upon Spiritualism’s role in the inception of women’s rights and shows how necromantic imagery alluded to the cultural angst of the period. All of the examples included build on the pre-existing medical and cultural ideology of femininity, as reflected in previous chapters on invalidism, tuberculosis, etc. but they also challenged notions of women’s inherent passivity and submissiveness. Youth, class and gender are themes essential to understanding the pictorial representation of the entranced Victorian woman.

The premise of the Spiritualist movement was the belief that select individuals were able to commune with the departed. The movement’s watershed occurred in America during the late 1840s via two unlikely figures: Kate and Maggie Fox.⁵ Together, these young girls, merely twelve and fifteen at the time, became the unlikely pivot of the Spiritualist movement, ushering in an American and European phenomenon that retained its popularity well into the twentieth

⁵Owen, *Darkened Room*, 49. See also Barbara Weisberg’s *Talking to the Dead* for an entertaining and interesting study on the two Fox sisters. Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead* (San Francisco: Harper, 2004).

century. They claimed they could communicate with spirits by eliciting a specific number of raps in response to their questions. As news of their talent spread, believers and skeptics alike clamored to hear messages from the other side, applauding as the spirits, in one early séance, seemingly predicted the Spiritualist sensation itself: “Dear friends, you must proclaim this truth to the world. This is the dawning of a new era; you must not try to conceal it any longer.”⁶ It was only much later that the “big-toe theory” revealed the full extent of the sisters’ deceit: the girls were gifted with the ability to crack their toes on command.⁷ However, by the time their elaborate scheme was exposed, the Spiritualist movement had captivated America, leading Ralph Waldo Emerson to list Spiritualist medium among professions emerging in the 1850s—alongside daguerreotypy, railroad man and landscape gardener.⁸

The Spiritualist phenomenon quickly spread to London, where the *Illustrated London News* reported on the regrettable “epidemic” of Spiritualism that gripped “not only the ignorant and the vulgar, but the educated and the refined.”⁹ The newspaper decried the fact that “people of the nineteenth century were plunged at once into the bottomless of Spiritualism. . . . Railroads,

⁶Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 18.

⁷Anthony Aveni, *Behind the Crystal Ball: Magic, Science, and the Occult from Antiquity Through the New Age* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 2002), 137. The young girls were subjected to rigorous and thorough physical examinations. They were at the time physically bound to chairs to ensure that they were not producing the taps; however, the sisters mysteriously outmaneuvered the doctors. The girls later disclosed that they would soak their toes in warm water to facilitate the toe-cracking dialogue.

⁸R. Laurence Moore, “The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalism in Victorian America,” in *Women’s Experience in America: An Historical Anthology* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980), 145.

⁹Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, eds., *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 26.

steam, and electricity . . . have not proved enough to supersede and destroy that strong innate love of the supernatural which seems to have implanted in the human mind.”¹⁰ Thus, the people of London as well as America contracted the Spiritualist “fever,” which swiftly and indiscriminately infected both middle and upper classes.

James McNeil Whistler’s move to England coincided with the 1859 “American invasion” of mediums that played a significant role in disseminating the Spiritualist doctrine.¹¹ While *The Little White Girl* is quintessentially Aesthetic, it also reveals how lassitude and femininity were strongly related to the Victorian cultural obsession of spiritualism. A poem by Algernon Charles Swinburne, for example, addresses the white girl’s reflection in the mirror: “Art thou the ghost, my sister, / White sister there, / Am I the ghost, who knows?”¹² Before exhibiting the painting at the Royal Academy, Whistler had the poem printed on gold paper and attached to the painting’s frame.¹³ Indeed, Swinburne was so bewitched by the painting that he also later wrote Whistler in praise of the “sad and glad mystery in the face languidly contemplative of its own phantom and all other things seen by their phantoms.”¹⁴ While the work is steeped in the period’s Aesthetic rhetoric, this allusion to “ghost” and “phantom” suggests the popularity of the Spiritualist discourse in both America and Britain. As modern scholars Kathleen Pyne and Charles Colbert suggest, Whistler’s *The Little White Girl* was not only a major Aesthetic painting, but the

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Colbert, 125.

¹²Colbert. 129.

¹³Richard Dorment and Margaret F. MacDonald, *James McNeill Whistler* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 79.

¹⁴Colbert, 127.

description of the figure as a “phantom” and a “ghost” is also significant.¹⁵ For example, modern scholar Kathleen Pyne states: “The spiritualist implications of *The Little White Girl* would also make it a central image for those American painters engaged in evolutionary rhetoric at the end of the century.”¹⁶ Therefore, this work reveals the painting’s incorporation of not only Aestheticism’s discourse, but also of spiritualist parlance. As Pyne notes, Swinburne’s description of Hiffernan’s image as a “phantom” or a ghostly or spiritual apparition “that appears to the sight but has no material substance—then referred to the contemporary practice of spiritualism.”¹⁷ In a discussion of the influence of Spiritualism on Whistler, Colbert suggests that, by noting the “face languidly contemplative of its own phantom,” Swinburne was alluding to materializations “conjured” by trickery in some séances.¹⁸ Furthermore, the hushed tone and reverential attitude required in the viewing of Aesthetic paintings approximated the demeanor of Victorians who immersed themselves in séances. Whistler’s involvement with spiritualism was well known and was typical of many middle- and upper-class Victorians who indulged in such pursuits.¹⁹ This group included, but was not limited to, influential and esteemed Victorians such as John Ruskin, Alfred Tennyson, Lewis Carroll, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who introduced

¹⁵See Colbert’s discussion on the Spiritualist implications of this work. Colbert, 125-140.

¹⁶Kathleen Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 94.

¹⁷In this same discussion, Pyne notes that Swinburne’s description also “underlines the way the painting is rooted in the fashionable spiritualist discourse of the 1860s and in the spiritualist practice of Whistler’s personal life.” Pyne, 99.

¹⁸Colbert, 127.

¹⁹For example, Whistler later called Spiritualism “a study . . . that would engross a man’s whole lifetime.” “I have no doubt,” he stated, “the very fact that man, beginning with the savage, has always believed in them [spirits] is proof enough of their existence.” Quoted by Pennell and Pennell (1921) in Pyne, 99.

Whistler to the practice.²⁰ By the early 1860s, Whistler was thoroughly engrossed in the practice of holding séances, and in attendance at one of them was Joanne Hiffernan, who also often partook in the conjuring of spirits.²¹

As explained in the previous chapter, one of the period's most widely circulated representations was the drooping female Aesthete in deep contemplation of an Aesthetic object. These images demonstrate how the Victorian woman was culturally perceived as prone to slipping into hypnotic states. For example, in *The Little White Girl*, Joanne is mesmerized, in “perfect self-containment” by a Japanese vase on the mantel, as if, as Pyne observes, it had the power to “stimulate the flow of consciousness.”²² This dichotomous representation of *The Little White Girl* could suggest a femininity posed between the conscious and unconscious, between this world and the next. Aesthetic and Spiritualist paintings drew from the same cultural and medical wellspring by linking the Victorian woman to hypnotic states.

One of the most significant influences on Spiritualism and its obsession with entrancement was the earlier practice of mesmeric healing. The two overlapped in some respects; however, there were also distinctions between the two practices. For example, Spiritualist mediums were overwhelmingly female. In contrast, as Allison Winters has recently noted, “most mesmerists were men,” while “subjects were more commonly women.”²³ According to Winter, “Men’s superior physical strength and intellectual power were often given as reasons why they

²⁰Pyne, 99-100.

²¹Colbert, 125.

²²Pyne, 97.

²³Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2.

were usually the mesmerists and women usually the subjects. . . .”²⁴ *The Lancet*, an esteemed Victorian medical journal, also considered mesmerism a treatment particularly suited for some Victorian women: “Mesmerism, according to its advocates, acts most intensely on nervous and impressionable females.”²⁵

It is also important to note that mesmerism was developed by and named for the eighteenth-century German doctor Franz Mesmer. It was considered to be a therapeutic healing system and was at least partially predicated on the theory of animal magnetism, as well as the idea of exerting one’s will over someone’s nervous system and mind in the promotion of healing. Its goal, in brief, was inducing an interior quieting of the patients without actually touching them. As Alex Owen explains,

organic magnetism was an emanation, vapor, or aura that flowed from a body or plant and which a trained operator could harness in order to produce a series of effects. Those who could intuitively detect the magnetic aura were called sensitive (or, in spiritualistic terms, mediums). . . . It [mesmerism] could be used to stimulate or soothe, and to produce refreshing sleep and insensibility to pain, as well as in the cure of disease and promotion of spiritual growth.²⁶

The medium placed the patient in a “trance-like state” then, in a series of “mesmeric passes,” gently swept his hands over the patient’s body to impart “healing.”²⁷ Actual physical contact or intimacy rarely played a role in the process. As Owen explains, “the palms of the hands were positive and had a direct magnetizing effect. Thus any particular pass could be

²⁴Winter, 215.

²⁵Although the article speculates on the validity of mesmerism, nevertheless it points to the strong connection between mesmerism and the female patient. Quoted by *Lancet* (1838) in Owen, *Darkened Room*, 110.

²⁶Owen, *Darkened Room*, 128.

²⁷*Ibid.*

reversed by turning the hands over and moving them in a contrary direction.”²⁸ Winter acknowledges that mesmerism was originally used as a method of “healing” any number of physical conditions or as a way of supporting traditional medicine. It was used initially by some “laymen” healers as well as physicians, which eventually led many of the latter to discredit the practice.²⁹ Although mesmerism did not require patients to disrobe, it was quite intimate by Victorian standards. At extremely close proximity, but never touching the patient, a healer would “pass” his hands down the entire length of the body.³⁰ According to Winter, it was therefore a therapy that focused on the body itself and the elicitation of unusual sensations.³¹ In direct contrast to the intrusive physical contact of the medical doctor, mesmerism relied upon this soothing therapeutic “touch,” a quality that appealed to many Victorian women. As Winter explains, it subsequently became especially popular within the protective intimacy of a sickroom.³² It is also worth noting that once the practice of mesmerism appeared on stage, the sickroom and in public view, it took on a different form. As twenty-first-century scholar Martin Willis explains, “While practitioners still operated within the fluid paradigm, the emphasis on the stage acts began to shift from medicine toward what we might now consider channeling.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹See Winter’s discussion on mesmerism and the Victorian body. Winter, 158-162.

³⁰Winter, 160.

³¹Ibid.

³²Winter, 213-245.

Eventually, such shows evolved into séances...the most famous of these spiritualist acts were those of Kate and Maggie Fox...³³

Indeed, mesmerism and Spiritualistic mediumship were superficially connected through the importance ascribed to the “trance state.”³⁴ However, as Sarah A. Willburn has recently noted, there is a fundamental difference in what caused subjects of the mesmerist and spiritualist to fall into a trance.³⁵ In the case of mesmerism, trance was induced by mentally overpowering and taking control of the patient’s nervous system to introduce positive healing thoughts.³⁶ In contrast, in Spiritualism an “invisible spirit” is “acting upon” or taking possession of the medium.³⁷ As previous chapters have noted, the Victorian woman was considered intrinsically weak with an inherently compromised nervous system, thus rendering her more susceptible to either trance state.

Interestingly, there are numerous “medical” images and “popular” prints depicting the male mesmerist inducing trance in women; however, the subject was very rare in fine art. Exactly why this was so has never been fully explained by historians; however, it is possible that female mediumship represented a certain degree of fascination with the fantastical, though it was also capable of provoking abhorrence. Given that mesmeric healers were predominately male, they certainly did not have the romantic appeal of the Victorian female medium. Victorian artists

³³Martin Willis, *Victorian Literary Meserism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 129.

³⁴Sarah A. Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 116.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*

usually depicted the female medium as alluring and beautiful, and there was something potentially dangerous and subversive in her gathering of knowledge through either the crystal ball or the state of trance. It was a gender-bending form of empowerment that some viewed as threatening, yet titillating.

However, in the realm of popular press and prints, there are many representations of male mesmerism. For example, a French print entitled *Extase Somnambulique* (c. 1850) (Figure 88), a male mesmerist stands amid a swooning group consisting of six women and a young girl. His left hand firmly at rest on his hip, he exudes confidence, power and authority as his right arm forcefully extends over a swirling mass of convulsive women. Each woman's arms gesticulate wildly and strangely. Some even fall to their knees and succumb to somnambulant "ecstasy" as vast folds of their dresses envelop their prostration. A young girl flails her arms in the background, echoing the older women's delirium. The frenetic commotion of the women starkly contrasts with the demeanor of the mesmerist, who orchestrates the women's cacophony with panache and equanimity. Meanwhile, the audience, comprised mostly of men, casually stand in nonchalant observance, their impassive facial expressions alluding to the frequency of such demonstrations and their apparently "unswayed" opinion of this performance.

Images of female patients treated by mesmerism proliferated throughout the nineteenth century. Another example is an untitled, but most likely, British print (c. 1890) (Figure 89) that depicts a female patient under the influence of mesmerism in front of four men.³⁸ To the left an older gentleman, the mesmerist, hovers intimately over the female patient, while on the right a

³⁸As Winter notes, "The original sketch that inspired this image was published c. 1890. This version was published in the early twentieth century, on the reverse side of an advertisement for a patent medicine." Winter, 351.

seated man carefully takes the recumbent woman's pulse. Lying in the shrouded white chair with her head leaning back and arms arranged lifelessly, the nearly comatose woman becomes a scintillating figure of lost inhibition and seductive languor. As Winter notes, this picture may be set within a medical context, but it is easy to read the experiment as "tainted by sexual opportunism."³⁹ This image also vividly recalls Goodbody's discussion on the medical gaze of the nineteenth-century male physician and its connection to the "perceived mastery" or dominance embedded in the "doctor-over-patient hierarchy."⁴⁰ Here, the doctors not only probe the languishing, nearly unconscious woman, but the mesmeric "healer" physically dominates the patient's body. His arms and hands, the source of his power, are poised over her lifeless frame. The gaze evident in this print is not only medical, therefore, but also recalls the sexual, voyeuristic gaze discussed in Chapter 2. Here, too, is the element of the "erotic": the woman's white shirt has been unbuttoned to expose her undergarment, which underscores her vulnerability.⁴¹ Outfitted in dark suits, two men sit expectantly. One rests his hands on a cane, imbuing him with a sense of distinction and authority. A sense of sexual opportunity pervades the scene as the man on the left, unable to contain his excitement, is poised to leave his seat. At the center is the "spectacle," the unconscious female. Therefore this image also recalls

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Bridget L. Goodbody, "'The Present Opprobrium of Surgery': The Agnew Clinic and Nineteenth-Century Representations of Cancerous Female Breasts," *American Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 32-51, at 37.

⁴¹Goodbody, 45.

Goodbody's assertion that the gaze reflects an "unconscious desire to touch the private parts of the female body."⁴²

Depictions of the Victorian female invalid, discussed in Chapter 4, and the mesmeric patient were intertwined and mutually evocative of one another. As Winter observes, the objects of mesmeric trance and female invalids were both "poised between consciousness and unconsciousness, between life and death, between this world and the next. The mesmeric subject and the invalid were reminiscent of one another: their weakness conferred an indirect kind of power, and access to an unusual kind of power."⁴³ Images like Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (1871-1872) (see Figure 26) and Sir John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1852) (see Figure 27), which both depict the well-known invalid Elizabeth Siddal, reflect this moment of transformation and access to the spiritual world. In each painting, Siddal is shown with her hands upturned, her face illuminated by a divine light and her lips slightly parted in anticipation. Writing in a letter to the first owners of *Beata Beatrix*, Rossetti explains, "She sees through her shut lids, is conscious of a new world, as expressed in the last words of the Vita Nuova."⁴⁴ The upturned face, closed eyes, and slightly parted lips emphasize the moment of transcendence and otherworldly vision. In *Beata Beatrix*, Siddal is transformed, through her protracted illness and eventual death, into an otherworldly being hovering between the earthly and the spiritual. The picture emblemizes the Victorians' romanticized notion of the spiritually elevated female invalid coupled with the idea that pain and suffering somehow endow higher power.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Winter, 213.

⁴⁴Elizabeth Prettejohn, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 80.

While the chapter on the cult of the invalid demonstrated how invalidism provided some women upward class mobility and social cachet, it also conferred an indirect kind of moral power that one might associate with a prophet or sage. In her study of mesmerism, Winter devotes a chapter to how this practice played out in the sickroom. She explores several case studies in which prominent female invalids used trance to position themselves as a type of prophet. Winter writes that the mesmeric subject, sequestered in a sickroom, a domestic sphere that lent itself to altered states, was able to “find authority in the trance state.”⁴⁵ The invalid, immobilized and suffering quietly, was believed to be preternaturally sensitized to the inner states of her body, mind and soul. While images of invalids did not always overtly portray such altered states, previously discussed images such as Alma-Tadema’s *The Nurse* (1872) (see Figure 52) seem to reflect this idea with eerie fixation on the female invalid’s vacant yet penetrating stare from the confines of her bed. In *The Nurse* the invalid’s fragile constitution is diminished in its cocoon of bedding and lavish curtains, embroidered with chivalric male figures that threaten to seal her refuge from the outer world. Lying on her side and cradling a pillow in her right arm, the young woman melds into the shadows of the vast bed curtain, her gaze fixated outward. Her diminutive figure, probing eyes, and all-white chemise transform her into an otherworldly being, one whose illness and physical weakness conspire to enhance her spirituality.

Indeed, female authors Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Harriet Martineau, to name only two women, both engaged in this type of mesmeric healing at various levels. While undergoing treatment with the phreno-mesmerist Henry G. Atkinson Mart, Martineau exclaimed that the

⁴⁵Winter, 215.

trance placed her “in a higher plane of existence” and bestowed “ideas and insight (religious and philosophical) [that] are to me worth more than any former experience.”⁴⁶ According to Winter, Martineau’s mesmeric treatment extended and accentuated the “authority of the ill.”⁴⁷ Accordingly, she likened her state to that of a “seraph . . . poised outside the ‘real’ world and looking on.”⁴⁸

The convention of the hypnotized Victorian woman as a type of oracle, a being freighted with spiritual authority, has ancient antecedents and would inevitably provide the framework for the Spiritualist movement. However, in a dramatic reversal of Victorian gender roles, it was the Victorian woman, not the man, who emerged as the undisputed leader to whom followers of Spiritualism flocked in droves. Mediumship is the critical linchpin of Spiritualism, and, as Owen, the leading scholar on this movement notes, the acceptance of women as powerful mediums was “built upon a nineteenth-century understanding of femininity.”⁴⁹ Mediumship required extreme passivity, a weakened, susceptible mind, overall mental and physical frailty, and abnegation of the will—all esteemed characteristics of Victorian femininity. Slipping into altered mental states, Victorian women, with precipitous speed, desired and enthusiastically proclaimed their newly acquired powers. Thus, the very traits considered to be innately feminine, and which ironically were considered negative attributes in opposition to masculine willpower, were exalted and

⁴⁶Winter, 223. Interestingly, Martineau was one of the strongest advocates of mesmerism. The Victorian writer, who suffered for years from a mysterious “illness,” claimed that mesmerism was the cure for her lifelong afflictions.

⁴⁷Winter, 233-235.

⁴⁸Winter, 219.

⁴⁹Owen, *Darkened Room*, 6.

revered within spiritualist circles. The “angel of the house,” a prevailing identification predicated on a model of femininity invested with moral superiority and uncompromising self-sacrifice, became the pivotal figure in the Spiritualism movement. Moreover, the Victorian woman, in many ways, capitalized on and leveraged the pre-existing notion of the spiritually refined angelic creature in order to assume the mantle of Spiritualism. Indeed, as noted above, throughout Spiritualist literature, followers specifically identify mediums as possessing the very qualities that constitute this ideal model of Victorian femininity. For example, one believer describing a séance notes that she was not a “strong minded woman—one of those bug bearers that men shun as they do long sermons. . . . On the contrary, she was a very womanly woman . . . possessed of that delicacy and fineness of feelings which forms the true beauty of womanhood.” Doctors likewise agreed with such descriptions but attached the following qualifications: “It (mediumship) requires a person of light complexion, one in a . . . passive condition, of a nervous temperament with cold hands, of a mild, impressible, and gentle disposition. Hence girls and female make the best mediums.”⁵⁰

So strong was this correlation between Victorian femininity and mediumship that even male mediums were described as “addle-headed feminine men.”⁵¹ Modern scholar R. Laurence Moore observes that essays about mediumistic powers in both sexes very often reported similar findings. Moore writes, “Mediums were weak in what were considered to be masculine traits of will and reason and strong in what were considered to be the female qualities of intuition and nervousness. They were impressionable (i.e., responsive to outside influence) and extremely

⁵⁰R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 120.

⁵¹Moore, 105.

sensitive. Above all, they were passive.”⁵² Yet male mediums did not slip into the deep trances associated with female mediums; rather, they maintained a degree of consciousness and used a “normal speaking” voice when channeling spirits.⁵³ That is, they remained firmly rooted in the material world and displayed a level of control and strong will that prevented mental hijacking by spiritual forces. Conversely, female mediums always entered a somnambulist state and displayed a complete abdication of self as spirits allegedly filtered through them and communed with the living.⁵⁴

Thus, underlying the interrelationship between nineteenth-century femininity and mediumship was the notion that these skills were innate and effortless, that they were gifts bestowed upon women, not the product of industry or hard work. The latter were prerequisites inevitably associated with Victorian masculinity. Female mediumship was rather something both natural and intrinsic, part of her of supposedly natural biology as well as the societal construct that determined Victorian femininity. Indeed, as one believer describes, the medium is “entirely passive and in truth, performs no work at all.”⁵⁵ Thus, with the “trance” as the cornerstone of the movement, images of women in various states of mediumship aligned with the overall genre that depicted them as languid and otherworldly.

⁵²Moore, 106.

⁵³Moore, 108.

⁵⁴Ibid. At the same time, this left her completely irresponsible for the voices, which spoke through her. Women were often seized by masculine forces, such as drunken sailors, etc. Moore, “Spiritualit Medium,” 110.

⁵⁵Quoted by *Spiritual Notes* (May, 1879) in Tatian Kontou, *Spiritualism and Women’s Writing: From Fin-de-Siècle to the Neo-Victorian* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 9.

While the spectacle of the public medium was stigmatized by some and became associated with actresses, private mediums operated safely within the confines of the home, and as long as there was no direct exchange of money it was considered a respectable, even admirable, pursuit for middle- and upper-class women. As Owen notes, Spiritualism stressed that public mediums were a comparative rarity.⁵⁶ In 1876, the Spiritualist journal *Medium and Daybreak* noted that public mediums were merely “one in a thousand,” while private mediums were to be found flourishing “in every rank of life, from royalty down to the humblest household.”⁵⁷ This growth of private mediums within the household occurred not only in Britain, but also in America, where séances were often conducted to contact the souls of countless soldiers who died in the bloody Civil War.⁵⁸ For the female private medium, one of the most popular means of inducing a trance-like state was scrying, or crystal-gazing.⁵⁹ The crystal ball played a prominent role in this movement, as Spiritualists considered it a facile vehicle for divining messages from the spirit world. Journal articles frequently described women consulting the device, always emphasizing the ease with which mediums conjured visions of the dead or future events. The plethora of accounts from Spiritualist literature suggest that scrying was a

⁵⁶Owen, *Darkened Room*, 49.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸In many ways, Spiritualism’s inception within American had much to do with the Civil War. Countless families mourning the loss of their sons, husbands, and brothers sought consolation in the Spiritualist practice, most notably Mary Lincoln.

⁵⁹Scrying is another term used to describe crystal gazing. In Theodore Besterman’s extensive study of crystal gazing, he notes that one can achieve the same results whether using a crystal globe, a pool of water, a mirror, or any transparent or reflecting object. Theodore Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing: A Study in the History, Distribution, Theory, and Practice of Scrying* (New York: New Hyde Park, 1965), 5.

medium practice most often associated with women, and their accounts received by far the most scrutiny. For example, in *The Study of Physical Research*, a vivid account was provided by a Mrs Thompson:

About 11:15 this morning I heard a little voice tell me to look in the crystal. I say a little voice, but I could better describe it as a very weak adult voice, which was quite strange to me; and I was very busy sewing, I must say I rather resented the suggestion of spending my time crystal gazing. The voice insisted—at least, I may say, commanded me. It said: “Put away that work and take for my a friend a message.” I did so, and taking up the crystal I saw perfectly the following.⁶⁰

In another account, Miss A. portrayed crystal gazing as “a perfectly normal condition,” likening it to attendance “at the theatre, [where one] is completely absorbed by the play.”⁶¹ In each description the crystal ball is a cherished object, a sure conduit to the other world and its secrets.

The Victorian woman as seer was a view of femininity deeply embedded in the Victorian psyche, and it was expressed in everyday periodicals. For example, a cartoon called “Medium and Re-Medium” (1864) (Figure 90) in *Punch* offered a biting commentary on the business of Spiritualism and the “idiots of fashion” who contributed to the quackery. In this cartoon, a stuffy butler serves tea to a “female medium” in a well-appointed interior. With ample body and a double chin, the woman is surrounded by the tools of her trade, all of which were useful in duping gullible clients. The table is covered with mountains of coins and a box full of money,

⁶⁰J. G. Paddington, “On the Phenomena Displayed on Mrs. Thompson’s Trance,” *Proceedings of the Society of Physical Research* (London, 1916), 157. The Society of Physical Research was just one of many groups and publications created in response to England’s growing interest in Spiritualism. The society sponsored controlled experiments and investigations that were thoroughly studied by “scientists” and later published in the society’s journal.

⁶¹Besterman, 117.

evidence of her con's profitability. An advertisement above provides enticing promises to commune with the dead. Meanwhile, on the right side, labeled "Re-medium," an old Irish "witch" is shown in a barren jail cell, sitting on tufts of straw, her meager meal of bread and water situated on a small wooden stool. A sign above simply reads, "Prison Rules, Dietary." Pointedly, her crime is described as "pretending to show apparitions to her ignorant dupes," a scathing commentary by *Punch* that suggests the cultural anxiety mediumship provoked.

Artists continued to explore the theme of woman as seers and prophetesses well into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. American artist Thomas Dewing's *The Fortune Teller* (1904-1905) (Figure 91) is a later example and depicts two women partaking at the dining room table in tarot card reading. To the right a red-haired woman gazes down at the cards on the table, her posture one of assuredness and authority. The woman's body dominates the composition: her body is angled directly towards the viewers and she boldly exudes an unflinching confidence in her craft as she rests her elbow on the table and hooks her left arm in the back of the chair. The medium's right hand rests on the table, her slender fingers uplifted as if caught in the very moment of reading and deciphering the card's meanings. As she leans toward the table, her left shoulder juts forward, the light mossy green collar of Aesthetic-like dress provocatively slipping past her shoulders, as she holds in her left hand the remaining cards. To the left of the composition, buttressed between the wooden table and the wall, a young brunette woman sits with her eyes closed, as if in a trance. In contrast to the gypsy's wavy, fiery red hair, the brunette woman's hair is embellished with demure floral accessories and she is outfitted in a sumptuously fashionable dress that falls slightly below her shoulders, exposing her long, delicate neck. The potted flowers with its spindly insubstantial stalks simulate the delicacy

of the semi-conscious woman. Her head is slightly angled, and with her hands resting upon the table, she seems to swoon and be lost in a half-conscious state. The table is folded down, covering the vast expanse of the woman's dress. This, coupled with the card teller's bold demeanor, further heighten the delicacy, remoteness, and inaccessibility of the somnambulate woman.⁶²

Victorian amateur photographer Lady Clementina Hawarden also often photographed her young daughters engaged in various medium-like practices. For example, in this photograph, one of the daughters is posed as a fortuneteller, with a deck of cards and dice on the table (c. 1862-1864) (Figure 92).⁶³ Swathed in a gauzy, toga-like robe, the girl puts her fingertips lightly atop the deck of cards on the table, gathering and channeling its message from the "other side." With her head and eyes tilted dramatically upward, the figure radiates a hypnotic intensity, recalling Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*. Her long hair falls dramatically onto her back and she animates the room with a powerful aura like a goddess of sorts. A headdress with a six-pointed star, often used as a symbol of witchcraft or magic, strengthens her ties to the other world.⁶⁴

⁶²There are several ways to read this intriguing image. For example, Susan Hobbs suggests that "trepidation" and "withdrawal" of the seated companion is caused by fear "at what she may hear or, perhaps, disdain for the occult procedure itself." Susan A. Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 171. Moreover, I would suggest that the figure of the fortune-teller conveys a certain coarseness and even sexual bawdiness that is in stark contrast to the delicate Victorian woman. Here, the fortune-teller's robust physicality also references her as a "working-class" woman.

⁶³Dodier notes that these photographs show her daughters Isabella Grace, Clementina, and Florence Elizabeth Maude at 5 Prince Gardens, South Kensington, London, from about 1862 to 1864. Virginia Dodier, *Clementina, Lady Hawarden: Studies from Life, 1857-1864* (New York: Aperture, 1999), 54.

⁶⁴The model of this photograph has been identified as the daughter Clementina. Dodier, 52. In addition, the "star" headdress is a prop repeatedly used by Hawarden. For another example, see Dodier, 68.

In another untitled photograph (c.1862-1864) (Figure 93), a woman sits with her eyes closed, leaning against the chest of this very same prophetess.⁶⁵ One woman sits next to an ornate table with a nearly empty glass of what appears to be wine next to a pitcher, perhaps the source of her unconscious state. Meanwhile, the “prophetess” stands above and protectively places her hand and pointy fingers on the woman’s shoulder, as if offering her guidance.

For Victorian women who dallied in the Spiritualist pastime, crystal-gazing became the most effective and acceptable means to enter a the trance-like state, and the pronounced association of the mysterious globe with the feminine realm is copiously apparent in the painting, portraiture, and photography of the era.⁶⁶ In both America and Britain, images of a woman hovering over a crystal ball became one of the most popular allusions to the Spiritualist movement. Crystal gazing was perhaps deemed acceptable as it was a practiced safely within the domestic sphere; moreover, the very device employed, a delicate, breakable and unblemished crystal ball, was a natural coupling for the equally delicate Victorian woman. In the realm of Victorian art, the crystal ball became more than a mere instrument of occultism; it became an important symbolic surrogate of femininity, simultaneously conveying the power of the female sitter as the seer of visions while paradoxically affirming her as an ideal—i.e., submissive and passive—Victorian woman. For example, Edward Burne-Jones’ *Portrait of Baronne Madeleine Deslandes* (1895-1896) (Figure 94) offers a clue regarding how Victorian society perceived this

⁶⁵Dodier identifies the seated woman as Hawarden’s other daughter, Florence Elizabeth. Dodier, 52.

⁶⁶Given the scope of this chapter, I will not include an in-depth discussion on representations of crystal balls in photography.

link between femininity and the crystal ball.⁶⁷ Nestled between the folds of her skirt and delicately cupped in her hands, the crystal ball is clearly an unlikely, yet intriguing, addition to an otherwise conventional portrait. Although the Baronne was a notably unusual figure within the Aesthetic movement, prone to grand entrances and known for dressing à la Botticelli, the crystal ball would have instantly linked her to the popular Spiritualist movement and its occult practices.⁶⁸ By the 1870s, London was witnessing the height of Spiritualism, and by the late nineteenth century, it was fully incorporated within the folds of Victorian society and had been employed by the most pre-eminent Victorian artists. Thus, the black crystal orb cradled in Madame Deslandes's lap was not an incidental, meaningless "prop" casually incorporated into the portrait, but an object that would have immediately held significant symbolic meaning to the nineteenth-century viewer as well as held a certain intriguing fashionable cache.

Baronne Deslandes was a Belgium heiress known for her panache in orchestrating dramatic social visits. It was rumored that male social callers often greeted the baroness as she reclined listlessly on a bed of lilies.⁶⁹ She likewise cultivated a unique sense of style. This is especially apparent in Burne-Jones' portrait. The loosely simple fitted gown is deep blue, a color linked to the Virgin Mary.

⁶⁷Burne-Jones was immensely popular with the Parisian Symbolists and the Decadents. He exhibited regularly at the Salons of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts and was even approached by the eccentric Peéladen to exhibit in the Salon of the Rose + Croix. The artist politely declined. Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 31-32. The Baronne Deslandes was also an avid fan of Burne-Jones and wrote the first French article dedicated entirely to the English master in the journal *Le Figaro*. Philippe Saunier, "Edward Burne-Jones et la France: Madeleine Deslandes, une preraphaelite oubliée," *Revue De L'art*, no. 123 (1999): 57-70, at 59.

⁶⁸Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1975), 221.

⁶⁹Saunier, 66.

Abolishing the corset from her wardrobe, she composed such elaborate ensembles that resembled the garb of either an extravagant goddess or a femme fatale. Despite Burne-Jones' desperate attempts to avoid painting the baroness, the French Aesthete was persistent and, much to the chagrin of Burne-Jones' family, regularly appeared unannounced on his doorstep. She would then be announced to Burne-Jones in this manner: "The French is here, sir."⁷⁰ To tight-laced Victorian society, Baronne Deslandes was a sultry socialite, a woman who only two years prior had waited patiently in her all-white salons for the annulment of her marriage, a scandalous event in a society that revered nuptial unions as sacrosanct.⁷¹

The portrait of Baronne Deslandes is striking for its otherworldly and ethereal qualities as conveyed by the magical orb she holds, even cradles, in her lap. In addition, the painting reveals scrying's class connotations as an acceptable and even fashionable pursuit. While "public mediums" were described as "charlatans," the very same pursuits practiced privately garnered the highest of compliments.⁷² As Owen notes, Spiritualist literature repeatedly extolled mediums as possessing grace, elegance, and charm and even revered them as paragons of virtue and morality.⁷³ For example, one "lady" who was well known for her scrying talent was described as

⁷⁰Fitzgerald, 222.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Modern scholar Diana Bashman observes that it was inevitably men who sought to detect mediumistic fraud, reflecting the "revolutionary gender politics at work" in the Spiritualist movement. Diana Bashman, *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 127.

⁷³Owen, *Darkened Room*, 8.

a “medium of probity and honor supported by peoples of like character.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, in Victorian writer’s J. Maxwell’s *Metaphysical Phenomena*, another female scryer is judged by the journalist to be a “sensitive,” “intelligent and well-educated lady.”⁷⁵ This association of the private female medium as being a “lady” led believers to therefore consider her as incapable of resorting to fraud.⁷⁶

In this portrait, the woman stares dreamily into the distance, her fingers delicately intertwined with one another. Her heavy lids suggest a semi-catatonic state, imparting to the viewer a mood of lethargy and melancholy. The otherworldly quality of the portrait is heightened by the crystal ball balanced upon Baronne Deslandes’ lap; its polished surface reflects the studio’s interior and reverberates with its own energy. The inclusion of this iconographical detail imbues the portrait with a mysterious quality and strong Symbolist overtones. The provocative placement of the crystal ball near the Baronne Deslandes’ erogenous zone conveys intimacy and familiarity. She cradles it, as if a fetus or embryo, and the inclusion of the crystal ball in the commissioned portrait suggests the presence of some hidden power.

A previous discussion of images depicting the female Aesthete in Chapter 7 has already established their predilection for showing enfeebled, languid women transfixed by a precious object. For example, in *Punch*’s popular 1880 parody of Aestheticism, the *Six Mark Teapot*, the female Aesthete is hypnotized by a teapot that she holds aloft with attenuated fingers as she

⁷⁴Katherine H. Porter, *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1958), 13.

⁷⁵Quoted in Besterman, 109.

⁷⁶Owen, “Other Voice,” 51. This, too, demonstrates the dissertation’s recurring theme of class.

cranes and bows her spindly neck and body in willful compliance. In the context of Spiritualist imagery, the aestheticized source of this trance-like state is replaced here and in other examples by a crystal ball.

Burne-Jones' allegorical figure *Astrologia* (1865) (Figure 95) represents the height of Edward Burne-Jones' dalliance with the Spiritualist movement.⁷⁷ Exchanging the crystal ball for the Aesthetic object possessed, if not fetishized, by the female Aesthete, Burne-Jones portrays the magical orb as a source of contemplation and inquiry in the delicate hands of a young woman. The model was Miss Augusta Jones, described by Burne-Jones' wife as "a noble-looking girl."⁷⁸ Augusta, with flowing Titianesque Pre-Raphaelite hair, is dressed in red. Her profile is turned to the left and she is shown looking intently into a polished black sphere. Below her elbows lies an ancient, ornately decorated book, shown open, as if used for visionary guidance. Indeed, this is a woman who is both spiritually and intellectually elevated as she gazes into the crystal. Yet, despite being described as "noble," the young woman exudes frailty with her long attenuated fingers, delicate features and cascades of unbound hair flowing down her back. The massive circular folds of the model's sleeves overwhelm her frame and accentuate the shape of the perfect crystal globe. Compositionally, the model and crystal ball become one large orb into which viewers themselves can gaze. Furthermore, the infallible crystal ball is held at the subject's eye level, mirroring the ideal beauty of a Victorian woman, who, like the crystal, is a vision of perfection. This arrangement reinforces the crystal ball as symbol of Victorian

⁷⁷Malcolm Bell, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Record and Review* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1898), 33.

⁷⁸Christopher Wood, *Burne-Jones: The Life and Works of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, 1833-1898* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1998), 10.

womanhood: delicate, breakable, and ideally unblemished. The transparency of the crystal ball as well as its fragility is heightened as the model's hands, which appear unusually long through the glass, create an inseparable, corporeal bond between woman and crystal. Interestingly, the crystal ball reflects not a sinister room laden with occult tools but, rather, a serene domestic interior. Barely discernible are two sunlit windows, each adorned with gauzy white drapes. Thus, the crystal ball engenders a complex set of contradictory relationships in Burne-Jones' *Astrologia*: on the one hand the images ennoble women as necromantic seers, while paradoxically, this same power renders them physically weak, frail, and removed from the everyday world.

The interrelationship between femininity and the crystal ball is also evident in British artist J. W. Waterhouse's much later version of this subject, *The Crystal Ball* (1902) (Figure 96). In this painting, a young, beautiful enchantress weaves her magical spell in a light-filled study whose arched window reveals a forest with a charming house. Despite her unblemished almost child-like beauty and calm demeanor, an ominous undercurrent is apparent: the arched window instills a profound sense of isolation, and the forest in the background seems dark, almost threatening. A shadow clouds the diviner's brow, darkened by her black hair, as she distills from the oracle what seems like a sinister message. As in *Astrologia*, the model is outfitted in an opulent blood red gown, but in this case, the dress is medieval in style with long, flowing sleeves lavishly decorated with intricate beading and coiling snakes, perhaps allying her with Satanic or occult powers. Several necromantic devices can be found in the room. A book illustrated with occult symbols lies open on the table, where a candle burner also lies. Either a magic wand or a taper rests on the book. Nearby, a skull leers at the towering sorceress.

In both *Astrologia* and *The Crystal Ball*, the women seem to be sorceresses and procuresses of knowledge set apart from the ordinary realm. Waterhouse's and Burne-Jones' representations convey a sense of introspection and quietude. The women gaze into their crystal orbs, their deep immersion reflecting active engagement and control over their unfolding visions. As in *Astrologia*, Waterhouse has compositionally emphasized the bodily relationship between the woman and crystal ball, which is intimately cupped in her hand. And, here too the painting emphasizes circularity; the window, the skeleton's dome, and the round table form a sweeping arch that suggests the self-containment of an embryo. The sorceress stands erect, poised, as she rests the orb against her breast, her neck gracefully bent toward it, evoking a sense of continuity between herself and its magic. Paralleling the portrait of *Madame Deslande* and *Astrologia*, the crystal ball is "fondled" like an egg, or fetus. Spiritualist journals describing the act of crystal gazing were similarly inflected with "intimate" intonations. For example, the *Monthly Review* suggested that to acquire the best result one should "go, alone, into a room, sit down with the back light, [and] place the ball, at a just focus, in the lap of a dark dress."⁷⁹ Miss A., another medium, gives a comparable description: "I place my eyes close to the crystal ball . . . [and hold it] in the hollow of my hands."⁸⁰ All of these accounts insinuate an intimate dialogue in the crystal's visceral, almost primordial kinship with the female body.

British artist Valentine Prinsep's *A Student of Necromancy* (1898) (Figure 97) is another painting reflecting the popularity of coupling the Victorian woman with the crystal ball. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1898, the work is compositionally similar to Waterhouse's

⁷⁹Besterman, 105.

⁸⁰Ibid.

later *The Crystal Ball*. In Prinsep's work, a young woman stands in an enclosed chamber, gazing into the necromantic vessel cradled in her hands. However, unlike Waterhouse's depiction, which shows a beautiful, youthful sorceress scrying in a light-filled library, the woman here is enveloped in darkness as a cauldron of fire blazes nearby, casting deep shadows over an ornate background. Indeed, unlike the setting of Waterhouse's *Crystal Ball*, which provides a glimpse of the outside world, the chamber here seems hermetically sealed, cloaking the woman in a furtiveness that makes her alchemy seem more potent, even deadly. The fire flames upward, drawing attention to the massive book strategically positioned near the eyes of the sorceress, which emphasizes her role as a procuress of knowledge. Perhaps it also alludes to the increased access to education that many Victorian women were experiencing. Once again, as in Waterhouse's *Crystal Ball*, a skull rests next to the book, yet not in profile, but rather turned outward so its eerie grin unsettles the viewer. The enchantress holds the crystal even closer to her face, examining its rondure, her right hand supporting her left, as she drinks in knowledge from its prophetic realm. Reviews of this painting note its intensity, describing the woman as "a damsel of serious, earnest demeanor" who is "obviously plunged in deep thought as she looks into the crystal sphere she holds above the flames. Much of the effect is due to her figure being half lost in the trembling shadows, whose transparent depths are most carefully and successfully depicted."⁸¹ While Waterhouse's sorceress exudes a delicate beauty, this woman's appearance is androgynous. She has a heavy jaw, a strong profile and somewhat severely styled hair, as if scholarly pursuits have diminished her femininity. Furthermore, she wears a heavy, shapeless robe reminiscent of those worn by academics or clerics. Its vast folds stress the strength of her

⁸¹Anon., "Royal Academy: First Notice," *Athenaeum*, no. 3679 (Apr. 30, 1898): 573.

hands and neck, the breadth of her shoulders. In images like these where women challenge traditional notions of Victorian femininity, there is the sense that this procuress of knowledge takes on a new shape, one that is decidedly less delicate, less beautiful, and ultimately, less sexually desirable.

Within the Spiritualist community, a distinct series of events predestined the cultivation of mediumship abilities. Because such abilities were the very cornerstone upon which spiritualist women's ascendancy depended, Alex Owen notes how some women "longed and prayed" for the gifts of mediumship while "others worked hard to attain them."⁸² For example, in 1870, the widely popular Spiritualist journal *Banner of Light* published an article written by a well-known medium in which she describes the "gift" of mediumship as accompanied by intense suffering. "Every pain we suffer helps unfold our medium powers . . . all suffering is friction to the material covering of the soul, that makes the gem within shine brighter."⁸³

Illness functioned as one of the defining qualifications for female mediumship or was one of the surest routes to its attainment. Female channelers often spoke in great reverential tones about leaving the material realm and transcending to a place they called the "Borderland," a shadowy, mysterious realm where the living communed with the dead.⁸⁴ A sacred place that existed between the material and the celestial, it was the medium's privileged refuge. Language like the hallowed "Borderland" echoes the description of female invalids as "borderers, denizens

⁸²Owen, *Darkened Room*, 40. The desire to achieve status through the cultivation of this "power" echoes, it seems, my previous discussion in Chapter 3, in which women like Siddal and others appropriated the state of invalidism to ascend to the ranks of middle-class Victorian society.

⁸³Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 121.

⁸⁴Quoted by anon. Spiritualist in Lehman, 1.

of Drift land and Mazeland.”⁸⁵ In the context of Spiritualism, these very same characteristics became the qualifications for mediumship and offered the Victorian woman who practiced scrying within the sanctity of her home an opportunity to break the monotony and drudgery of everyday life, as well as perhaps challenge the constraining ideology of separate spheres. As Owen reveals, “illness held a unique meaning for spiritualists. It was an important aspect of the mythology of mediumship and an obligatory *rite de passage*.”⁸⁶ Spiritualists described female mediums as “tender, sensitive, and frail as bark.”⁸⁷ Two mediums that were sisters were known as “very slight frail persons, suffering under the most pitiable conditions of ill health.”⁸⁸ As Owen notes, Spiritualists privileged illness “by interpreting it as cleansing of the temple” in preparation for higher gifts.⁸⁹ In 1856, Reverend William H. Ferris, a harsh critic of the movement, published an article in the *Ladies Repository* that declared, “I never knew a vigorous and strong-minded person who was a medium. I do not believe that such a one can ever become one.”⁹⁰

Illness therefore created a tabula rasa for the channeling of spirits. Illness and suffering were perceived as a kind of baptismal rite that wiped clean moral blemishes, providing a new

⁸⁵Showalter, 136.

⁸⁶Owen, *Darkened Room*, 206.

⁸⁷Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 122, Moore also writes, “Cold hands and a pallid skin, accompanied by a long record of illness and physical suffering, were the best possible signs of budding mediumship. Moore, 121.

⁸⁸Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 122.

⁸⁹Owen, *Darkened Room*, 206.

⁹⁰Moore, *In Search of White Crows*, 120.

beginning for the body and spirit. As Owen notes, “illness held a privileged position because it was seen as a kind of cleansing of the body in preparation for the reception of higher gifts.”⁹¹ For the Spiritualist, the preordained prescription of Victorian womanhood as self-sacrificing to the point of martyrdom made mediumship an honorable and natural calling, one that went hand in hand with the idealization of Victorian women.

However, one of the recurring themes etched into the biography of many mediums was the onset of youthful illness. As Owen observes, many blossoming mediums succumbed to illness “precisely at the juncture between childhood and womanhood.”⁹² Not surprising, it was “girlhood” sickness that carried with it a certain gravitas that seemed to legitimize their standing as female mediums. Twentieth-century scholar Diana Basham has addressed the supposed connection between Spiritualism and menstruation, stating that there is a clear “link between mediumship and menstruation.”⁹³ Recent scholars have investigated this claim and proposed possible reasons for it. One recurring theory is that the development of mediumistic powers during girlhood was a “crisis of adolescence,” a response to the “demands of adolescence.”⁹⁴ Basham also suggests that it was a way to put a “positive construct” on female suffering, which, in the Victorian mind, harkened back to the “curse of Eve.”⁹⁵ The Victorian medical profession

⁹¹Owen, “Other Voice,” 62.

⁹²Owen, *Darkened Room*, 207.

⁹³Basham, 129.

⁹⁴Quoted by Oppenheim in Basham and Owen, *Darkened Room*, 207.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

noted the phenomenon too, though their assessment was similarly convoluted.⁹⁶ For example, in 1874, *The Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania*, a book written by physician Frederick R. Marvin, described the archetype most prone to mediumship as “usually [a] young woman in whom the process of menstruation is interfered with. They are feeble and debilitated; they have pale faces and cold extremities; they have feeble and depraved appetites, and a dislike for animal food; they will eat strange and unwholesome things and will, frequently, refuse all kinds of food, pretending to their friends that they have eaten nothing for whole weeks.”⁹⁷ Not surprisingly, many of these young female mediums also suffered from anorexia nervosa, a disease that was first discovered in the 1870s.⁹⁸

Female mediums often provided elaborate accounts of their sickness, interweaving into their personal narrative heart-wrenching details ripe with debilitating disease, suffering, and extended stays in sickrooms. For example, Elizabeth d’Esperance grew up in a rather dreary London home where her sickly, unloving mother ruled over her.⁹⁹ As puberty approached and she was pressured to adopt a more “feminine way,” she began to experience problems with school lessons and at the tender age of fourteen had a complete nervous collapse, withdrawing

⁹⁶Although “mediomania” is unfamiliar to modern-day medical discourse, Owen observes that this term was often used by physicians when discussing spiritualism. Owen, *Darkened Room*, 149. Victorian physicians like Marvin and others associated mediumship with the natural pathology of female organs.

⁹⁷Quoted by Marvin (1874) in Basham, 130.

⁹⁸This is a fascinating subtopic and has been well researched. See, for example, Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

into an imaginary world of delusions populated by “shadow people.”¹⁰⁰ Something similar occurred to Mary Rosina Showers, who, around the time of puberty, had her first encounters with the spirit world and lapsed into “a partially cataleptic state of utter helplessness.”¹⁰¹ As Owen has observed, spiritualism for these young girls “offered more than attention, status, or recognition . . . spiritualist mediumship was both expressive of an inner struggle with the problem of femininity and instrumental in reconciling that tension.”¹⁰²

Images of young girls on the cusp of womanhood partaking in mystical practices reflect the period’s growing fascination with the relationship between youthful femininity and Spiritualism, as well as Victorians’ growing interest in the occult. Both American and British examples are intimations of Spiritualist leanings, either in the form of visions, clairvoyance, or sudden trance-like states. Sir John Everett Millais’ *Bridesmaid* (1851) (Figure 98) illustrates the susceptibility of girlhood to abilities simulating mediumship. In this image, a young girl tests a folk belief that passing a piece of wedding cake through a ring nine times will conjure visions of her future husband.¹⁰³ Caught in the rapturous moment of divination, the girl steals a glimpse of her future betrothed. As modern day scholar Tim Barringer observes, the bridesmaid’s massive flowing golden hair suggests that she is in a “private location, perhaps indicating that her meal is being taken alone in a bedroom.”¹⁰⁴ A corsage of orange blossom, a traditional symbol of

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Quoted by the Spiritualist journal *The Light* (1882) in Owen, *Darkened Room*, 207.

¹⁰²Owen, *Darkened Room*, 209.

¹⁰³T. J. Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 92.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

chastity, decorates her gown, which suggests an intoxicating scent capable of augmenting her exalted state.

Canadian artist Legh Mulhall Kilpin's *Crystal Gazer* (c. 1900) (Figure 99) recycles Millais' canvas and also reinforces the idea of crystal gazing as a purely female endeavor—in this case, reserved not only for the frail but also for the young. The Fox sisters, who were only twelve and fifteen, introduced the fascination with young girls' propensity for otherworldly communication. Their precocity was frequently emphasized. Kilpin's painting shows an adolescent girl emerging from parted curtains, hypnotized by a crystal ball that is revealing secrets to her eyes alone. The model's innocence and purity are pronounced. Her all-white gown, with its delicate ruche along the neckline and peach sash around her waist, recalls many images of female invalids—e.g., *Fading Away* (see Figure 38) and *Too Late!* (see Figure 38). Here, her virginal attire and brown hair, which cascades in face-framing ringlets, reminiscent of those in Millais' *The Bridesmaid*, imbue the image with prepubescent and angelic virtue. The drapes mysteriously part by some unknown force, revealing two flickering candles that intensify her trance-like state. Indeed, this image accords with nineteenth-century accounts of crystal gazing in which young girls suddenly discovered their power to conjure visions either through mirrors or some other reflective surface. Interestingly, for some this power often diminished or vanished altogether upon emergence into adulthood or marriage. Innumerable times Victorian women described how they accidentally discovered the visions. For example, in 1899, Miss Goodrich-Free reported to a journalist, “she was given, as a child, a glass ball in exchange for another object. She was told that she would see soldiers in the crystal, which she did.”

In the *Crystal Gazer*, as in all of the previously discussed images, the young girl focuses on the crystal ball, her eyes cast downward, thus averting any potential engagement with the viewer. However subtle and nuanced, the depiction of women staring at crystals eluded the male gaze and denied men access to the female body, as well as to their eyes, the mirror to the soul. In images such as this, the girl's eyes are downcast and her immersion in the crystal is impenetrable. Her "vision" suggests privileged insight, and she does not acknowledge the male gaze. For nineteenth-century viewers, images of scrying women provoked anxiety regarding women's potential inaccessibility, both physical and spiritual, for their visions unfolded to their eyes alone. These images not only disrupt the male gaze but also position a male viewer as an outsider, removed from the sanctity of Spiritualist vision.

Although there were many female public mediums working in both America and Britain, the vast majority of séances were performed within the privacy of the home. Spiritualist followers concurred, stating "Spiritualism is essentially a domestic institution. . . ." ¹⁰⁵ The domestic space was the dominion and sanctuary of the Victorian woman, with a man as a proverbial outsider or interloper.

This allusion to the sanctity of femininity in the domestic sphere goes hand in hand with the nineteenth-century view that women possessed innate moral and spiritual superiority. The Spiritualists, who promoted marriage, motherhood, and domestic virtue as the acme of the proper Spiritualist woman's life, likewise endorsed this orthodoxy. ¹⁰⁶ For example, in "The Domestic Department," an article published in 1878 in the British Spiritualist journal *Medium and*

¹⁰⁵Owen, "Other Voice," 52.

¹⁰⁶Owen, *Darkened Room*, 29.

Daybreak, Mrs. Burns writes, “I am not an advocate for theory and far-fetched philosophy, but for sound, practical wisdom, such as enable the true-hearted wife and mother, however humble her attainments, to do her duty in her heaven-appointed sphere, and bring up her family in health and moral purity.”¹⁰⁷ This quotation seems to suggest that Spiritualism was an accepted lifestyle, one that was sensible and not “far fetched.” In addition, Spiritualism was a calling for many, not a mere dalliance or hobby. It appears that Victorian women frequently likened it to a moral obligation aimed at upholding domestic sanctity.

Images of women partaking in Spiritualistic practices were extremely popular in both America and Britain, clearly reflecting the period’s fascination with women’s penchant for altered states. Overwhelmingly, these images placed the female medium within the confines of the domestic sphere, often in convocation with other women, thereby conveying the sense of community and shared experience. Significantly, although men did indeed attend séances, their presence was often notably absent in art. While Spiritualism was considered an offshoot of mesmerism and shared its fascination with hypnotized Victorian women, it disrupted gender relations in an entirely different way. As previously discussed, mesmeric healers were overwhelmingly male, and images reinforced their domination of compliant Victorian women. As explained, mesmerism was initially used as a healing method, and it was the male, either a physician or layman, who exerted his will in this realm by putting women into a trance-like state. In addition, mesmerism, unlike Spiritualism, never captured the imagination of artists and was only rarely depicted in fine art.

¹⁰⁷Owen, *Darkened Room* 29-30.

British artist Henry Siddons Mowbray repeatedly depicted women as seers and prophetesses in classical settings, reinforcing the Victorian association of femininity with altered states. In Mowbray's *Le Destin* (1896) (Figure 100), four women eagerly consult the large orb to the left. Modern scholar Carol Troyen identifies the painting as a classic depiction of the Fates.¹⁰⁸ However, she notes the representation is unorthodox, as the Fates are typically shown as three, not five, aged and unattractive women.¹⁰⁹ While typical paintings showed them spinning out the thread of destiny, Mowbray depicts them weaving the tapestry of life. According to Troyen, the floating figure on the right may be Fortuna, who is associated with the Fates in some accounts of the legend.¹¹⁰ She holds the golden threads from which the Fates weave, while at left a figure brandishes scissors as she consults the globe. This depiction alludes to the Greek Fates' three different roles: to spin, measure and cut the threads of life's allegorical tapestry.

With their refined patrician features and silhouetted grace, the three figures on the right convey striking intellectual curiosity intensity and as they lean, anxiously, towards the orb of divination at the table's far end. The faces of the sorceresses are quite androgynous, and their demeanor contrasts rather starkly with the upright comportment, restraint, and composure traditionally associated with the Victorian woman. The sorceresses appear aggressive and decidedly unladylike in their pursuit of knowledge. The woman at the forefront, for example, appears in rapt attention, her chin studiously at rest in her hands, while the middle figure outstretches her arms, fixated on the red-haired women consulting the crystal ball. Meanwhile,

¹⁰⁸Carol Troyen, *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914*, ed. Theodore E. Stebbins, (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1992), 373.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

the latter leans inward, hypnotized, as she accesses the luminous orb's message. Her scissors are poised to cut the threads of life as they unfurl as dispensed by the angelic golden-haired woman floating above in a diaphanous blue gown. The web emanating from the celestial figure suggests a divine force, and the woman closet to the balustrade in a pink head scarf mediates this force by guiding the spidery threads toward their destination. Here, once again, is a reversal of the gender hierarchy at play in the transfer of knowledge. The transfer is from woman to woman, not from male to woman, as in the case of mesmeric healers and their patients. While *Le Destin*'s narrative does not necessarily unfold within a typical Victorian domestic sphere, there is a sense of a bountiful garden setting. The ivory columns, coupled with the low, protective parapet, do provide the classicizing setting with a sense of enclosure. However, the lush grass, speckled with white flowers, may suggest a "vision" of a second level of the "unseen" reality, one akin to that proffered by Swedenborg, a philosopher familiar to some Victorian Spiritualists.

Mowbray's *Crystal Gazers* (1895) (Figure 101) is yet another example of this theme. This painting, like *Le Destin*, implies that scrying could also be performed with other females, and the images suggest a sense of community and intimacy shared by women. The setting is richly appointed, a Western domestic interior with a dark mahogany dresser and floral wallpaper. The two women are dressed much like the sisters in *Le Destin*; their gowns are Greco-Renaissance inspired, imbuing them with a certain degree of exoticism that contrasts with the conventional interior. The women stand close together, bewitched by the delicate orb, which an oval mirror echoes on the wall. A dark-haired beauty leans in closely, eagerly, and rests her chin and arm on her red-haired companion's shoulder. Coddling the crystal, they both share in its revelations.

The culture of Victorian women consulting crystal balls and holding séances is revealed through the popularity of cheap dream books.¹¹¹ The accompanying illustrations in these publications often depict women consulting crystal balls within conventional homes. For example, like *Le Destin*, the Countess of Blessington's *True Interpreter of Dreams, Visions, and Omens of the Wedding Day* (1861) is a fascinating example of the popularity of dream books.¹¹² This slim book, published in 1861, provided in-depth explanations of omens and astrologic signs and was a fashionable addition to any Victorian woman's library.¹¹³ The book promised many enthralling insights: "Her Ladyship's Wonderful Art of Showing Visions in the Crystal Explained!" and "With Knowledge for Mothers on the Ruling Power and Influence of the Twelve Celestial Planets at the Nativity of Their Children and the Fate They Are Born To!"¹¹⁴

The illustrated cover of the Countess of Blessington's *True Interpreter of Dreams, Visions, and Omens of the Wedding Day* (1861) (Figure 102) is equally intriguing and depicts a tomb-like interior. The columned doorframes are etched with strong geometric patterns that recall Egyptian hieroglyphs, and each frame is adorned with a symbolic talisman. The center door recedes into a shadowy corridor that leads to a mysterious, thickly curtained entryway. The

¹¹¹On Victorian "Dream Books," see Maureen Perkins, "The Meaning of Dream Books," *History Workshop Journal* 48 (1999): 102-112.

¹¹²The Countess of Blessington's *True Interpreter of Dreams, Visions, and Omens of the Wedding Day* (1861) is fifteen pages long. The National Library of Scotland owns the entire volume.

¹¹³Nicola Bown, "What Is the Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of?" in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151-172, at 158.

¹¹⁴This book was later published in the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, new series, 3 (1867): 141-143, 204-205.

scene unfolding in this shadowy interior shows an intimate, perhaps secret, coven of women in the thralls of a séance and, like *Le Destin* and the *Crystal Gazer*, reinforces the notion that divination could be a communal rather than an individual experience, although such possibilities never seem to have been explicitly stated by the proponents of Spiritualism. In this frontispiece, four women sit around a table and stare, aghast and in awe, at the enormous crystal, which is revealing some heavenly vision. Standing above them is a young attractive woman, perhaps the Countess Blessington, who dramatically and with gravitas waves a wand, decorously conducting the invisible power as she conjures the vision from the glowing orb. The women's husbands stand at the doorways, their remoteness and subtle smiles implying that the visions emanating from the crystal are privileged mostly to the female gaze. Their awkward, almost intrusive presence underscores the event as truly a female affair, and a young girl at the far right of the composition rushes to join the séance. While the setting for these images is the domestic sphere, there are certain elements that allude to more ominous surroundings, as evidenced in the drawing's architectural details.

For the most part, previously discussed images of the Spiritualist woman fell dutifully within the prescribed model of Victorian femininity. However, alongside the ravishing, hypnotized female medium was her aberrant sister, whose trance had apparently gone awry into the realm of magic, even black magic. Images of sorceresses and witches were some of the most powerful and popular images related to Spiritualism.¹¹⁵ Having examined this compelling trope, modern scholar Susan Casteras has observed that images of women displaying either intellectual

¹¹⁵Given the scope of this study, this final portion will limit discussion to include only select key British and American examples.

or creative aptitude are a relative anomaly in Victorian art: “the woman endowed with superior creativity typically found a visual equivalent in the witch or the sorceress.”¹¹⁶

For many Victorians, Spiritualism was a dangerous, anxiety-provoking movement that reanimated fears of witchcraft. Casteras cites *Malleus Maleficarum*, the fifteenth-century encyclopedia of demonology, as the “standard ‘bible’ of information on witches and witchcraft thought the nineteenth century.”¹¹⁷ The female medium represented a power-obsessed version of femininity, and the trance-like state was linked to hysteria. The perception of the Spiritualist medium as a modern form of witchcraft came from many different sectors of British and America society, but all concluded that Spiritualism was a new version of occultism. This prejudice was so strongly ingrained in the Victorian psyche that, in 1889, Dr. Hake described the Spiritualist trance phenomenon as “only the old witchcraft, restored, renovated and adapted.”¹¹⁸ Likewise, renowned American writer Henry James amalgamated the period’s disparate issues of women’s rights and Spiritualism when he likened the latter to “a rendezvous of witches on the Brocken.”¹¹⁹ Even *Punch* chimed in with this declaration about Spiritualism: “This species of revelation is derived from the mouths of soothsayers who are generally either nervous or epileptic youth, or females afflicted with hysteria.”¹²⁰ In her study on feminism and the occult

¹¹⁶Susan P. Casteras, “*Malleus Maleficarum*, or The Witches’ Hammer: Victorian Visions of Female Sages and Sorceresses,” in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. Thais E. Morgan (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 142-170, at 142.

¹¹⁷Casteras, “*Malleus Maleficarum*,” 143.

¹¹⁸Quoted by Dr. Hake (1889) in Basham, 121.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

sciences, Bashman asserts, “the deployment of occult imagery or motifs in these literary texts signals both the urgency with which the ‘Woman Question’ was being experienced, and the anxiety attendant on exploring a subject which contained its own deeply-situated taboos.”¹²¹

Bashman as well as Barbara Goldsmith have also examined the significance that the first stirrings over women’s rights coincided with Spiritualism. According to Goldsmith, the two were extensively intertwined in the public imagination. Goldsmith states: “At a time when women had no power to achieve equal rights, they relied on the “other powers” provided by Spiritualism to sustain their efforts.”¹²² While the private medium flirted with the boundaries of Victorian gender ideology, the female Spiritualist who was also a suffragist posed a direct threat to sacred views protecting the ideology of separate spheres. This type of Spiritualism did not remain safely and dutifully within the confines of the home; rather, it spoke out unabashedly through “spirit voices” at public assemblies where both sexes frequently gathered. As Goldsmith notes, at these events certain women fell into hypnotic trances and “channeled” the spirits of wise men like Benjamin Franklin and Socrates no less, who coincidentally voiced their strong endorsement for women’s rights.¹²³ Like all female mediums, they were uncensored because they were allegedly “performing” under the influence of altered states and were therefore not held responsible for such messages.¹²⁴ Yet, during this era of dramatic social, cultural and scientific upheaval, the

¹²¹Bashman, 122.

¹²²Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victorian Woodhull* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), xiii.

¹²³Goldsmith, 35. In many ways these “performances” recall those of female public mediums, but their motivation was political versus monetary gain.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

notion of the Victorian woman abandoning the home was a frightening prospect. Unruly feminist Spiritualism posed a direct threat to the sanctity of the home and triggered a harsh backlash from the male establishment. As modern scholar Anne Heilman notes, “The newly coined synonym for hysteria , ‘utromania,’ applied to the unruly female in her feminist or spiritualist configuration alike, reflecting the medical profession’s conflation of women’s agency, female sexual anatomy, monstrosity and insanity.”¹²⁵ In 1874, American physician Frederic Marvin warned that this type of woman “becomes possessed by the idea that she has some startling mission in the world. She forsakes her home, her children, and her duty, to mount the rostrum and proclaim the peculiar virtues of free-love, elective affinity, or the reincarnation of souls.”¹²⁶ Significantly, but not coincidentally, this terminology emerged at the same time the female Aesthete was also being excoriated for abandoning her home. The previously discussed 1875 cartoon “Chinamania” depicted a female Aesthete woefully neglecting her domestic duties and forsaking “proper” feminine pursuits for the sake of Aestheticism. Just as women were afflicted with “utromania,” this comical depiction underscores the general anxiety of the period as more women discovered alternative pursuits outside the home.

Images of entranced witches performing evil acts reflect the period’s general panic with the changes wrought by Spiritualism and women’s rights. Twentieth-first-century scholar Deborah Cherry, in her discussion on Victorian representations of the “learned woman in the 1860s,” notes “the preponderance of such imagery (i.e., sorceresses) in the 1860s, a decade

¹²⁵ Anne Heilman, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and Mona Caird* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), 92.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

which saw the effective organization of the women's movement on a national scale."¹²⁷ The previously discussed *A Student of Necromancy* by Prinsep, which depicts a practitioner of the "black arts," also belongs to this category. Another noteworthy example that emerged at this pivotal period was British artist Frederick Sandys' *Morgan le Fay* (1862-1863) (Figure 103), which also depicts a dangerous enchantress, albeit in a very different manner and with an altogether different mood. As this witch conjures a deadly potion, her lips twist to intone the requisite incantation, and her body arches in hysterical reverie, a dramatic foil to the calm demeanor of Prinsep's sorceress. This image is a stark contrast to the restrained, self-possessed, almost serene demeanor of Victorian women shown scrying. The latter depictions are of languid vessels submerged in the depths of unconsciousness. The trance in Sandys' *Morgan le Fay* has reached a much more feverish pitch. Breaching the codes of Victorian propriety, her body has become unregulated, out of control. As Casteras summarizes, "she seems to move violently and to be on the verge of becoming a whirling dervish."¹²⁸ Her magical powers appear maniacal and on the brink of overpowering her. Her hysterical abandonment is apparent in her swinging mulberry cape, her unbound, bright red hair, her clenched teeth, and the cauldron blaze that threatens to engulf a mysterious black cloth unfurling nearby. A leopard skin swings erotically at her waist and the undulating edge of her skirt is embroidered with occult motifs, charging the image with an almost bestial sexuality.¹²⁹ As Casteras observes, "She and her 'sisters' are not

¹²⁷Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain, 1850-1900*, London: Routledge, 2000), 160.

¹²⁸Casteras, "*Malleus Maleficarum*," 154.

¹²⁹To read more on the symbolism of Morgan le Fay's skirt, see Casteras, "*Malleus Maleficarum*," 154-156.

merely possessed by the irrational and overwhelmed by the quasi-orgasmic rapture of magical visions; they also have the capacity for self-fulfillment through their power over their own states of being as the well as the destinies of others. Their ‘hysteria’ is therefore empowering.”¹³⁰ This image depicts the utter abandonment of the Victorian hearth. The source of Morgan le Fay’s trance is not a crystal ball, but rather an archaic lamp that seems to be animistic in form. In contrast to the crystal ball, which emanates psychic energy to entrance the female gazer, le Fey is the controller here. She holds the lamp in one hand and with the other orchestrates her spell over a flame-spitting talisman.

The enduring popularity of sorceress images during the Victorian period is also evident in British artist Evelyn Pickering de Morgan’s *The Love Potion* (1903) (Figure 104). Strong advocates for women’s rights, both de Morgan and her husband experimented with Spiritualism, so she would have been keenly aware of female mediumship and scrying.¹³¹ In a recent survey of Morgan’s work, Elise Lawton Smith describes the woman in *Love Potion* as a “learned and civilized scholar.”¹³² The witch’s calm focus also brings to mind the demeanor depicted in Prinsep’s *The Student of Necromancy*, and both paintings are foils to the wild and maniacal sorcery of Sandys’ *Morgan le Fay*. Smith describes *Love Potion*’s setting as a study containing numerous books, some of which are stacked atop each other such that their titles are legible.¹³³ As the witch deftly concocts the magical brew, her intentions are presumably both ghastly and

¹³⁰ Casteras, 154.

¹³¹ See Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn de Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 41-53.

¹³² E. L. Smith, *Evelyn de Morgan and the Allegorical Body*, 107.

¹³³ For identification of the books, see E. L. Smith, *Evelyn de Morgan*, 107.

insidious. According to Casteras, the witch in this work is “endowed with the power to mutilate, paralyze, or destroy men.”¹³⁴ In the background, framing the silhouette of the witch, a window reveals a couple embracing on the far side of a terrace, oblivious that they are, or were, the likely victims of the conjurer’s diabolical magic.¹³⁵ Red hair tumbles down the sorceress’s back, and a fiery golden gown hugs her sinuous body. The sleeves of the gown are like a spider web draped down her robust arms. Meanwhile, a ruby red slipper emerges from the golden gown’s folds, pointing to the taut purpose in her work. The witch’s eyes are slightly darkened underneath, and she appears slightly older than other similar images, implying advanced experience in the dark arts. Indeed, her languorous pose and sirenlike appearance align her with several sickly female Aesthetes portrayed in *Punch* as well as the figure in the previously discussed “High Art Maiden.”¹³⁶ A black cat rests at her feet, its serpentine tail curled, and its golden eyes, though unflinching, almost seem to glitter. Smith describes the cat as an “unassuming house pet,” but it does arguably contribute to an eerie and unsettling atmosphere beyond its traditional symbolism as an evil familiar of witches.¹³⁷

Another example is Frank Dicksee’s *The Magic Crystal* (1894) (Figure 105), a painting that depicts a sorceress gazing intently into a crystal ball. She sits regally on an immense,

¹³⁴Casteras, “*Malleus Maleficarum*,” 152.

¹³⁵Smith outlines theories proposed by scholars as to the exact nature of the potion, both in its intent and as to who was the implied recipient. She concludes that sorceresses’ brewing of the potion reinforces “the idea of the woman as manipulative and destructive.” E. L. Smith, *Evelyn de Morgan*, 107, n. 119.

¹³⁶Susan P. Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987), 161.

¹³⁷E. L. Smith, *Evelyn de Morgan*, 108. Casteras also describes the cast as “ominous.” Casteras, “*Malleus Maleficarum*,” 152.

ornately carved throne of “burnished copper and brass,” as *The Times* described it in 1894. Its armrests are decorated with statuesque winged creatures that look like demonic beasts.¹³⁸ A byzantine canopy acts as her crown, one whose source could be demonical rather than celestial. Its design echoes the arched cropping of the painting, framing and intensifying the chamber’s claustrophobic atmosphere. To the left, a richly decorative curtain is pulled to one side, while on the right, deep green foliage invades her labyrinth, imbuing it with a sense of wildness. The woman sits before her altar, a metal table surmounted by a shallow bowl that contains, what appears to be, a thurible, its intoxicating aroma wafting upwards. The sorceress is dressed in a pleated Aesthetic gown described by *The Times* as “a robe of peach-blossom hue, over which falls a semi-diaphanous material as splendid in hue as the wing of an exotic beetle.”¹³⁹ The gown amplifies her breasts and highlights her sensual curves; meanwhile, ropes of amber-red beads adorn her neck like drops of blood. The painting recalls Waterhouse’s *The Crystal Ball*, but this sorceress is older, overtly seductive, more akin to a femme fatale, and certainly more sinister than her young compatriot. Her bearing is imperious. Rather than nurturing the orb with cupped hands, this sorceress wields the vessel confidently between her fingertips, while the other arm rests on her throne with assurance and authority. Moreover, the orb is directly before her eyes, its revelations forming an almost devious smile on her lips. She is the master of its oracular purpose. On the other hand, the sorceress herself drew mixed reviews from Dicksee’s contemporaries. Some of the critiques were banal and others rather scathing. For example, the *Athenaeum*’s review suggests disbelief in the authenticity of the moment depicted, noting that while the

¹³⁸Quoted by *Times* (1894) in Edward Morris, *Victorian and Edwardian Paintings in the Lady Lever Art Gallery* (London: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1994), 27.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*

sorceress is “magnificent. . . . She does not look as if she saw anything in the crystal or even tried to do so, *but only cared to look as if she was looking.*”¹⁴⁰ Other critics noted her unusual beauty, and, in 1894, *Munsey Magazine* compared her to the “weird, unearthly, maidens of Burne-Jones.”¹⁴¹ Indeed, much like Burne-Jones’ *Laus Veneris*, this woman exudes a sensual strength, and she, too, physically dominates the enclosed space.

As demonstrated in the paintings of Prinsep, Sandys, de Morgan, and Dicksee, Spiritualism’s popularity extended well into the early twentieth century. For example, *The Geography of Witchcraft*, an early 1900 British publication, observed, “In our towns never was Witchcraft more openly and more unblushingly practiced than at the present time, for what is Modern Spiritism with its mediums and materializations but Old Witchcraft writ Large?”¹⁴² Paintings by British fin-de-siecle artists—e.g., John Collier’s *The Witch* (1893) (Figure 106) — explored the theme of young femininity and supernatural powers in a much more sinister way. In *The Witch*, a teenage girl lies on a bed as her tangled mass of red hair cascades down its side. Her body is inert, and she is completely unconscious. Her right arm is upturned and lies dangling on the side of the bed. The girl’s peaceful countenance and immaculate white nightgown intensify her youthful innocence. Yet the image is tinged with an ominous tone by the large black cat, recalling that included in De Morgan’s *Love Potion*, perched on her chest, its intense stare contrasting with the young girl’s halcyon slumber. Symbolically linked to witches, the cat

¹⁴⁰Morris, 26. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴¹Anon., “Artists and Their Work,” *Munsey’s Magazine* 11, no. 4 (New York: Frank A. Munsey & Co, July 1894): 344.

¹⁴²Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 119.

disrupts the image and conveys anxiety as well as other unsettling sentiments about girlhood spirituality.

Collier repeatedly explored this theme. In Collier's *White Devil* (1909) (Figure 107), we see a version of the young witch grown into a seductive and dangerous woman. Here, in a hypnotic state, the black magic symbolized by the cat has taken over and the young girl has transmogrified into something more demonic. Her cascading red hair has become a sacred, and dangerous, flame that punctuates the startling white-marbled throne, while the wallpaper creates an illusion of maleficent arched horns. The deceptively pristine white gown, that symbol of youth and innocence seen in Collier's *The Witch*, has also become the fiendish dress in *White Devil*. As Casteras notes, the white gown "alludes to necromancy for it is embellished with painted herbs and flowers that are essential for casting spells and enacting forbidden rituals."¹⁴³

Whereas earlier depictions alluding to Spiritualism and trance often included a crystal ball, here, the sorceress gazes deviously outward. In a startling reversal, it is, perhaps, the white devil who exerts hypnotic power over the male. Indeed, close examination of this femme fatale reveals that her hand grasps an amulet. Casteras observes, this talisman has "a human skull on one side and a male face on the other; although this "goddess" or Amazonian queen remains unfettered, her male victim has his destiny controlled by her." Indeed, perhaps one can say that *Morgan le Fay* and the *White Devil* have exchanged the crystal ball for other equally potent props.¹⁴⁴ Staring cunningly and heartlessly outwards, this oscillating skull recalls some sinister device of hypnotic control. Her medusa-like gaze entraps the viewer and pulls him into her

¹⁴³Casteras, "*Malleus Maleficarum*," 161.

¹⁴⁴As suggested by Casteras in conversation, November 2014.

deathly lair. Yet the viewer is initially beguiled by the woman's beauty, resplendent dress, and jewelry, rendering her all the more sinister and fiendish. As Casteras observes, her stare is "magnetized" and "smugly condescending," allying her with the "mesmerizing eyes of Medusa, witches, and enchantresses."

While the *White Devil* is laced with villainous undertones, in a unique twist the magical orb became, on occasion, a female sitter's stylish accessory. For example, American artist William McGregor Paxton's *The Crystal* (1900) (Figure 108) depicts a young woman sitting upon a sand-colored chaise, gazing pensively into her crystal ball. Her bright saffron gown suggests an evening ball has recently come to an end; or perhaps she's about to depart. Slipping sensuously past her shoulder, gauzy sleeves highlight her ivory décolleté. The mood is of languid meditation, yet a delicate foot, much like the red slipper in Pickering *Love Potion*, is not quite obscured by the ample folds of her dress presses the floor with subtle anticipation.

Just as paintings of scrying remained popular well into the early twentieth century, the same was true in the realm of photography. For example, Gertrude Kasebier's *The Crystal Gazer* or *The Magic Crystal* (1904) (Figure 109) shows a woman in a white dress bending down to gaze into the glass sphere that rests upon a wooden table. Her upper body is turned towards the viewer, displaying her intricately laced dress as she leans forward with hands entwined in the folds of her skirt. Kasebier, one of the founders of the Photo Secessionist movement, manipulated the print to emulate a painting or etching.¹⁴⁵ The scene has a swirling intensity, akin to a vortex, that seems to draw the inquisitive woman. The enchanted woman is shown in profile,

¹⁴⁵For a discussion on Kasebier and the Photo-Secessionists, see Barbara L. Michaels, *Gertrude Kasebier: The Photographer and Her Photographs* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992) 87-110. Other photographers who included the crystal ball in their photographs are Clarence White and Anne Brigman, to name just a few.

her tussled brown hair swept loosely away and casting a veil that obscures her face as she consults the crystal ball.

As one of the few examples to depict a man in a state of physical and mental collapse, Edward Burne-Jones' *Beguiling of Merlin* (1870-1874) (Figure 110) represents a dramatic reversal of the gendered narrative found in the works this dissertation has examined. The painting recounts an Arthurian legend in which Viviane, Merlin's lover, betrays him by using her own magic to shackle him into the hawthorn tree for eternity.¹⁴⁶ Much like the figure in Burne-Jones' *Laus Veneris*, Viviane dominates the canvas. She is a femme fatale, casting her spell from the large folio in her hands. Casteras notes that like "other witches, she has a fiery temper, and her railing approximates the divine madness of Morgan le Fay and other dark sisters."¹⁴⁷ A clinging gown entwines her powerful body, and snakes coil throughout her hair, creating a monstrous crown that recalls Medusa. Though exuding power, Viviane looks anxiously over her shoulder at Merlin, who lies withering and powerless. Ironically, this painting depicts the male in a state of utter physical and mental depletion. The hawthorn tree cradles Merlin's languid, prostrate figure like an infant. His head droops and his hands are limp and lifeless, echoing previously discussed depictions of neurasthenic women. Merlin's face is cadaverous, the wan skin stretched over his hollow cheeks suggests starvation and is eerily reminiscent of a female consumptive's pallor. His eyes are the only hint of life as they fixate on his dominatrix, who, ironically, was Burne-Jones' lover, the artist Maria Zambaco.

¹⁴⁶For a more detailed description of this story see Christine Poulson, *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art, 1840-1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 146-149.

¹⁴⁷Casteras, "Malleus Maleficarum," 163-164.

The exaggerated size of the book held by Viviane, possibly alludes to her increasing access to formal education. As Mancoff notes, though art historians have also interpreted the work in the context of Burne-Jones' biography, *The Beguiling of Merlin* "juxtaposed two attributes that popular discourse represented as naturally incompatible and therefore doubly threatening in combination: the power of female sexual allure and the power of women's book learning."¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the *Beguiling of Merlin* simultaneously accentuates both the "dangerous book and the dangerous body" by exaggerating and accentuating the sorceress' thighs and erogenous area.¹⁴⁹ This image, she asserts, as well as that of *Morgan le Fay*, therefore subtly hints at the rise of the New Woman.¹⁵⁰

Paralyzed by Viviane's spell, the once formidable magician is engulfed in a claustrophobic tangle of branches and blooms. Ironically, as modern scholar Christine Poulson notes, the hawthorn flower is a symbol of love.¹⁵¹ Although Viviane does convey a sense of hesitancy in wielding her power, she is nevertheless, much like Sandys' *Morgan Le Fey*, an emphatically threatening force, a vigorous combination of knowledge and sexuality. Poulson also connects this image to Spiritualism and certain women who employed mesmeric healing.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸See, for example, Fitzgerald, 150. Debra N. Mancoff, *King Arthur's Modern Return* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 75.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰Given the scope of this study, I cannot delve into the vast topic of the New Woman, who is arguably more related to the assertive female medium than other figures examined in this dissertation. To read more on this subject, see Holly Pyne Connor, ed., *Off the Pedestal: New Woman in the Art of Homer, Chase, and Sargent* (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum, 2006).

¹⁵¹Poulson, 148.

¹⁵²Poulson states, "There are a number of elements here that are reminiscent of accounts of mesmeric healing." She goes on to note famous Victorian trance mediums who "employed

As Poulson suggests, Merlin is “not just trapped” but “entranced.”¹⁵³ “The twisting, sinuous line of the tree and the drapery seem actually to recreate for the spectator the sensation of being hypnotized.”¹⁵⁴ The hypnotic chanting of the sorceress leaves Merlin incapacitated, perhaps even emasculated.

As this chapter has shown, images of Spiritualist woman are varied and do not necessarily conform to one standardized type. Two opposing representations coexisted: the domestic medium and the dangerous sorceress. The synchronicity of these two conflicting images of Spiritualist femininity sheds light on the changing roles of Victorian women and, perhaps, reveals the anxiety these changes provoked. Much like all of the images in this study, these examples demonstrate the malleability of Victorian femininity as it shaped itself into new iterations. The conclusion of this study will summarize its findings and highlight key points.

their powers to beneficent ends, but in doing so they nevertheless exercised a control over their patients, male as well as female, which could be regarded as dangerous, or even sinister.” Poulson, 148-149.

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴Poulson, 149.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined a significant number of images depicting females in various altered states and has demonstrated the broad popularity of such images in Victorian art. These images flourished in predominantly seven categories: the sleeping woman, dead or dying woman, the female consumptive, the female invalid, the female neurasthenic, the female Aesthete, and the female medium. In each example, the woman exhibits noticeable enervation and debility coupled with a pronounced state of disengagement. As the period's medical and cultural discourse has revealed, such images were indicative of a pervasive societal perception of femininity that pathologized women as inherently weak and prone to slipping into altered states. This perception was mutually informing and deeply embedded in the collective Victorian psyche. At the same time, however, Victorian women's attributes were viewed as mysterious, elusive and at times even supernatural or ethereal, thus paving the way for their involvement in Spiritualism and mediumship.

This female archetype did not develop in a linear manner, nor was it localized within a single region or limited to one specific group of artists. Rather, the examples discussed reveal that these depictions were part of a much greater cultural and artistic fixation that emerged in several forms, not only capturing the interest of artists, but also germinating, in many ways, from within the scientific and medical communities at large. This dissertation has focused on the complex interplay between medical "fact" and pictorial interpretation or outright fiction. The range of fields referenced in this dissertation—from psychology, medicine, and fashion to the occult—underscores how pervasive and ingrained these cultural perceptions were. Evidence of

these areas abounds in disparate Victorian sources, from esteemed medical journals like *The Lancet* to cartoons found in *Punch*, and all reveal a similar framing of Victorian femininity.

As this dissertation has demonstrated, these cross-referential Victorian evocations were wide-ranging and often enigmatic. Representations of women in altered physical and mental states defy any one simplistic categorization, and this alone points to their significance and the period's fixation on such portrayals of femininity. These images are varied and malleable, conforming and encapsulating, and they represent a multitude of culturally and medically gendered constructions in ways that are often quite complex. For example, Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (see Figure 26) simultaneously embodies several key themes—sleep, death, invalidism, and Spiritualism. It is emblematic of the comingling of these motifs and the richly nuanced complexity that characterized this type of femininity.

Therefore, the depiction of Victorian women in physically and mentally altered states was paradoxical, imbuing their subjects with both virginal and demonic powers. These representations do not easily conform to one standard or derive from a single prototype. Their broad spectrum of categories suggests the period's fascination with women's roles as well as shifting cultural constructs. Images of pale, sickly women simultaneously exaggerated and enhanced the Victorian ideal of femininity, yet they also alluded to an evolution of gender roles considered much more dangerous and threatening, especially towards the end of the century as women were progressively gaining access to educational and employment opportunities.

As noted, the chapters were ordered to underscore a gradual progression from the most obvious examples, such as women shown sleeping, dead or dying, to the more nuanced—images that depict female Aesthetes and female mediums. Each chapter's subject matter reveals that

these iterations were neither exclusive nor self-contained, but rather in constant dialogue with each other, a dialogue that became mutually informing.

Chapter 1 examines one of the clearest examples of this model of Victorian femininity, the sleeping woman. In the vast majority of representations analyzed, the women are portrayed completely recumbent and, for the most part, in an unconscious state. The sleeping woman introduces the idea of the female's body and state of consciousness as a locus of speculation and debate. One excellent example is William Shakespeare Burton's *Sleep* (see Figure 1). The earliest inklings in the field of psychology reflected an interest not only in the female unconscious, but also a specific concern and interest in dream states as associated with Victorian women. What women were dreaming was a matter of conjecture in the visual arts and was even addressed as a kind of secret female activity. This chapter also introduces a related and equally important theme: the representation of Victorian women as seers or visionaries and their use of dream books. It also considers how fairy paintings and the supernatural intersect with perceptions of Victorian femininity.

The second chapter focuses on images of dead or dying women and draws analogies with similar portrayals of sleeping women. Like the examples examined in Chapter 1, these images depict women as immobile and unconscious, or expired, and demonstrate a strong sense of male voyeurism. Here, too, the female body is shown as vulnerable and trapped in a complete state of abandonment, where death itself symbolizes ultimate passivity. This is clear in Gabriel Von Max's *The Anatomist* (see Figure 30), which includes a male interloper gazing at a dead woman. In addition, paintings like Burne-Jones' *Briar Rose* (see Figure 20), for example, attest to the popular blurring of distinctions between these states of being. Moreover, examples such as

Collier's *Death of Albine* (see Figure 33) and Burne-Jones' *Rose Bower* (see Figure 20) confirm the disturbing theme of the female body as young, beautiful, yet overcome by death. Unlike other categories, the images in this chapter posit their subjects as arrested at the moment of physical perfection. They are arguably the most unthreatening and submissive version of the general model and invoke Baudelaire's belief that the most beautiful female was dead or dying. *Death of Albine*, for example, evokes the feeling that the subject's body will not decay but rather remain perpetually youthful and pure. Even more important, their sexuality will never blossom into a potentially threatening or disruptive force. Such placid death depictions are in dramatic opposition to the unconventional images of female Aesthetes and mediums discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

The medical discourse in both Victorian Britain and America has been central to this dissertation, for physicians played a vital role in articulating and constructing the cultural myth of the chronically invalid but beautiful female. This study has thus examined the complex interplay between what was perceived as medical "fact" and the artistic construction of female illness. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 trace the history of images depicting several illnesses—especially tuberculosis, invalidism, neurasthenia—and employ nineteenth-century medical writings to explore their significance as symbols—i.e., as states of being.

In each category, I discuss the metaphorical power of the disease, as represented in key British and American paintings, photographs and the popular press, along with its cultural impact in relation to Victorian femininity. Works such as Ford Madox Brown's *The Convalescent* (see Figure 43) and Thomas Eakins' *The Artist's Wife and His Setter Dog* (see Figure 56) are just a few examples that echo, and sometimes exaggerate, nineteenth-century physicians' descriptions

of these illnesses. Just as these representations embody the medical discourse of the period, enfolded into this very same narrative is the power of each disease, in varying degrees, to act as a metaphor for mystery and the supernatural. Thomas Peach Robison's *Fading Away* (see Figure 38) is one example that embodies the Victorian woman who experiences an illness that connects her with the spiritual realm. It is also apparent that illness was a type of leveraging tool that facilitated ascension to the middle class. This is demonstrated in the discussion of the Pre-Raphaelite stunner Elizabeth Siddal, whose movement into the artistic class coincided with the onset of illness, though there is no concrete evidence to support any apparent affliction. Nevertheless, drawings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti depict her as both a sickly and spiritual being. Another example discussed is Emma Madox Brown, another Pre-Raphaelite "Stunner."

Likewise, medical accounts of women suffering from illness included terms and a type of language that connected them to works of art and also associated them with otherworldliness. Their bodies were inscribed with the physical and mental characteristics of the disease and moved them from the earthly to the abstracted realm of "high art," as in Thomas Dewing's *The Reading* (see Figure 55).

Regarding the final classifications, the female Aesthete and the Spiritualist medium, it is clear that the contemporary medical discourse was integral in their artistic and cultural construction. However, as Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate, a languid demeanor became the essential symbolic characteristic of the cultural and artistic movement known as Aestheticism. Burne-Jones' *Laus Veneris* (see Figure 71) stands out as an excellent example of the multilayered and nuanced associations embodied in this type of Victorian femininity. This work is considered a major Aesthetic painting, yet the period's criticism of this work continually

returned to the theme of illness as a decadent malaise. *Punch's* cartoon "The Two Ideals" is one example of how listlessness and illness were associated with the female Aesthete and how the languid demeanor became the hallmark of this elite group.

At first glance, images of the female Aesthete, as well as the female medium, appear to embody the passively weak and sickly aesthetic. However, as Chapters 6 and 7 reveal, such imagery also represented the potential dissolution of the Victorian gender construction as women increasingly sought new opportunities outside of their traditional roles. For example, by linking its subject to malaise, *Laus Veneris* simultaneously embodies not only an aesthetic of fashionable ill health, but also a powerful and potentially threatening sexuality.

The idea that representations of the female Aesthete reflect a potential fissure in the period's prevailing gender ideology is also suggested by the manner in which these subjects seem obsessed with certain Aesthetic objects. Just as earlier chapters established Victorian artists' predilection for depicting women in altered states, Chapter 6 shows how this theme evolved into the reveries of female Aesthetes gazing at Aesthetic objects. This notion is confirmed in works like Whistler's *The Little White Girl No. 2* (see Figure 83) as well as *Punch* cartoons like *The Six Mark Tea Pot* (see Figure 72). The Aesthetic movement positioned Victorian women as a cultural and artistic force, and moreover, the idolization of the Aesthetic object signaled women's potential abandonment of the home. The manner in which the male Aesthete appropriated this model of feminized languor was even more troubling.

Chapter 7 extends the fetishized object into a supernatural realm through the Victorian medium and her transcendent state of mind. Just as the female aesthete is induced into a hypnotic state by an Aesthetic object, the Spiritualist woman achieves a state that is not only altered, but

also heightened, as she becomes the mouthpiece of an invisible authority and communes with celestial realms. Works like Waterhouse's *Crystal Ball* (see Figure 96) signal a new but similar fixation that renders women otherworldly, yet beautiful. Images of the femme fatale—e.g., Frederick Sandy's *Morgan Le Fay* (see Figure 103), Evelyn de Morgan Pickering's *Love Potion* (see Figure 104), and Edward Burne-Jones' *The Beguiling of Merlin* (see Figure 110)—suggest that women who access such altered states are also deemed dangerous or in possession of occult powers. These images signify that the type of insight, or knowledge, available in these states is somehow empowering and therefore potentially disruptive.

John White Alexander's *Miss Dorothy Quincy Roosevelt* (see Figure 57), G. F. Watts' *Portrait of Lady Lindsay* (see Figure 81), and Edward Poynter's *Portrait of Lady Elcho* (see Figure 80) reveal how this type of American and British portraiture became fashionable towards the end of the nineteenth century and embody an intersection with many of the ideas explored in this thesis. A later example is John Singer Sargeant's *Rest* (see Figure 69). In these examples, Victorian women are depicted with an iconographic disposition of this popular type—a sickly appearance, sedated stare, and general languor—yet the inclusion of these attributes in the realm of portraiture hints at how they were also evolving into a type of standardized beauty. In works like Burne-Jones' *Portrait of Madame Baronne Deslandes* (see Figure 94) and William McGregor Paxton's *The Crystal Ball* (see Figure 108), the necromantic object is either nestled provocatively in the subject's lap or held close to the bosom. Here, apparently, the crystal ball becomes a fashionable accessory intended to emphasize the sitter's physical and mental passivity, while also imparting a modern or avant-garde sense of femininity.

The examples analyzed in this dissertation reflect the many diverse and evolving classifications of Victorian femininity. Yet, even as nineteenth-century women moved away from being the “Angel of the House,” this trope of femininity did not fall away. Rather, as its meaning shifted and become more layered and complex, so did its association with the burgeoning Aesthetic and Spiritualist movements. Indeed, in many ways, women continue to be considered as ideal representations of these paranormal phenomena, and even in the twentieth-first century, they are depicted in a myriad of updated altered states. Images in the realm of popular media, for example, as well as some in the fine arts, suggest a continued fixation with this theme—whether in depictions of the beautiful corpse or portraits that glorify the sickly, emaciated aesthetic—all of which confirm the power of its legacy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abelson, Elaine S. *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Alexander, Lynn M. *Women, Work, and Representation: Needlework in Victorian Art and Literature*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003.
- Allan, J. M. "On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women." In *Transactions of the Anthropological Society of London*, cxcv-ccvvi, Vol. 7. London: Asher & Co., 1896.
Access date, December 2013
http://archive.org/stream/journalvolume00londgoog/journalvolume00londgoog_djvu.txt
- Anderson, Anne. "Life into Art and Art into Life: Visualizing the Aesthetic Woman or 'High Art Maiden' of the Victorian 'Renaissance.'" *Women's History Review* 10, no. 3 (2001): 441-462.
- Anon., "Artists and Their Work." *Munsey's Magazine* 11, no. 4 (July 1894): 344.
- Anon., Review of *International Exhibition in British Journal of Photography*, May 1871, 216.
- Anon., "Royal Academy: First Notice." *Athenaeum*, no. 3679 (Apr. 30, 1898): 573.
- Asleson, Robyn, et al. *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Masters: The Andrew Lloyd Weber Collection*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2003.
- Aveni, Anthony. *Behind the Crystal Ball: Magic, Science, and the Occult from Antiquity Through the New Age*. Boulder: University of Colorado, 2002.
- Bailin, Mariam. *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Banner, Lois W. *American Beauty*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.
- Banta, Marta. *Imaging American Women: Ideas and Ideals in Cultural History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- Barnes, David S. *The Making of a Social Disease: Tuberculosis in Nineteenth-Century France*. London: University of California Press, 1995.
- Barreca, Regina. *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*. Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press, 1990.

- Barringer, T. J. *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Bashman, Diana. *The Trial of Woman: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society*. London: MacMillan, 1992.
- Bassein, Beth Ann. "Poe's Most Poetic Subject." In *Women and Death: Linkages in Western Thought and Literature*, 44-58, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984.
- Beard, George Miller. *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881.
- Bell, Malcolm. *Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Record and Review*. London: George Bell & Sons, 1898.
- Berger, Martin. *Man Made: Thomas Eakins and the Construction of Gilded Age Manhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Besterman, Theodore. *Crystal-Gazing: A Study in the History, Distribution, Theory, and Practice of Scrying*. New York: New Hyde Park, 1965.
- Bills, Mark, and Barbara Bryant, eds. *G. F. Watts: Victorian Visionary: Highlights from the Watts Gallery Collection*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Bills, Mark, and Vivien Knight. *William Powell Frith: Painting the Victorian Age*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Black, Joseph, et al. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Victorian Era*. 2nd ed. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012.
- Bown, Nicole. "'A Case of Such Familiars at Home': Natural and Supernatural in the Work of John Anster Fitzgerald." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 210-238.
- . *Fairies in Nineteenth-century Art and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- . "What Is the Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of?" In *The Victorian Supernatural*, edited by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, 151-172. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Bronfen, Elizabeth. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

- Bryant, Barbara. *G. F. Watts Portraits: Fame and Beauty in Victorian Society*. London: National Gallery, 2004.
- Bryant, William Cullen. *Poems*. New York: D. Appleton, 1854.
- Bryson, Bill. *At Home: A Short History of Private Life*. New York: Doubleday, 2010.
- Budge, Gavin. *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Natural Supernatural: Transcendent Vision and Bodily Spectres, 1789-1852*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Bullen, J. B. *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Paintings, Poetry, and Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Burke, Doreen Bolger. *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Rizzoli, 1987.
- Burnham, William H. "Illusions of Memory." *Scribner's Magazine* 11 (1892): 198.
- Byrne, Katherine. *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Calloway, Stephen. *Liberty of London: Masters of Style and Decoration*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1992.
- Calloway, Stephen, Lynn Federle Orr, and Esmé Whittaker, eds. *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde*. London: V & A Publishing; San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2011.
- Cartwright, David T. "The Female Opiate Addict in Nineteenth-Century America." *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 10, no. 2 (Mar. 1982): 161-171.
- Casteras, Susan P. "Aesthetes on Display: 'Not Masculine and Progressive but Reclusive and Retrospective.'" In *Palaces of Art: Whistler and the Art Worlds of Aestheticism*, edited by Lee Glazer and Linda Merrill, 107-120. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2013.
- . "Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle at the Palace of the Aesthetes." In *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, edited by Susan Casteras and Colleen Denney, 75-92. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.
- . *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987.
- . *James Smetham: Artist, Author, Pre-Raphaelite Associate*. Aldershot, UK: Scolar Press, 1995.

- . “*Malleus Malificarum* or the Witches’ Hammer: Victorian Visions of Female Sages and Sorceresses.” In *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, edited by Thais E. Morgan, 142-170. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990.
- . “Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty.” In *The Pre-Raphaelites in Context*, edited by Malcom Warner, 139-148. San Marino, CA: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1992.
- . *The Substance or the Shadow: Images of Victorian Womanhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, 1982.
- . *Susan MacDowell Eakins*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1973.
- . “The Unsettled Hearth.” In *Re-Framing the Pre-Raphaelites: Historical and Theoretical Essays*, edited by Ellen Harding, 149-172. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1996.
- . “Winged Fantasies: Constructions of Childhood, Innocence, Adolescence, and Sexuality in Victorian Fairy Painting.” In *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood Between Rousseau and Freud*, edited by Marilyn R. Brown, 142-170. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002.
- Casteras, Susan, and Colleen Denney, eds. *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*. New Haven, CT: Yale Center for British Art, Yale University Press, 1996.
- Castro, Marilyn. “Fashion Reform: Aesthetic Movement in Dress and Interiors.” In *Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothing in Literature, Film, and Television*, edited by Paul McNeil, Vicki Karaminas and Catherine Cole, 127-136. Oxford: Berg, 2009.
- Chapman, Mary. “Living Pictures: Women and Tableaux Vivants in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture.” Ph.D. dissertation. Ann Arbor: Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1993.
- Cherry, Deborah. *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain, 1850-1900*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Chrichton-Browne, James. “Dreamy Mental States.” In *Stray Leaves from a Physician’s Portfolio*, 1-42. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927.
- Christ, Carol. “Victorian Masculinity and the Angel of the House.” In *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Woman*, edited by Martha Vicinus, 146-162. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.
- Christian, John. *Edward Burne-Jones: The Earthly Paradise*. Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2009.

- Cleaves, Margaret. *The Autobiography of a Neurasthenic as Told by One of Them and Recorded by Margaret Cleaves*. Boston, 1910.
- Cohen, Michael. *Sisters: Relation and Rescue in Nineteenth-Century British Novels and Paintings*. London: Associated University Press, 1995.
- Colbert, Charles. *Haunted Visions: Spiritualism and American Art*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Connor, Holly Pyne. *Off the Pedestal: New Woman in the Art of Homer, Chase, and Sargent*. Newark, NJ: Newark Museum, 2006.
- Courtwright, David T. "The Female Opiate Addict in Nineteenth-Century America." *Essay in Arts and Sciences* 10, no. 2 (Mar. 1982): 161-171.
- Crook, Tom. "Norms, Forms and Beds: Spatializing Sleep in Victorian Britain." *Body and Society* 14, no. 4 (Dec. 2008): 15-35.
- Cunningham, Patricia A. *Politics, Health, and Art: Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003.
- Curl, James Stevens. *The Victorian Celebration of Death*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2000.
- Cushman, Philip. *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995.
- DelPlato, Joan. *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875*. New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002.
- de Montfort, Patricia. "White Muslin: Joanna Hiffernan and the 1860s." In *Whistler, Women, and Fashion*, edited by Margaret F. MacDonald, 95-115. New York: Frick Collection, 2003.
- Denney, Colleen. *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2000.
- Dickerson, Vanessa D. *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996.
- Dijkstra, Bram. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Dixon, Laurinda S., and Gabriel P. Weisberg, eds. *Sickness and in Health: Disease as Metaphor in Art and Popular Wisdom*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004.

- Dodier, Virginia. *Clementina, Lady Hawarden: Studies from Life, 1857-1864*. New York: Aperture, 1999.
- Dorment, Richard, and Margaret F. MacDonald. *James McNeill Whistler*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995.
- Drinka, George Frederick. *The Birth of Neurosis: Myth, Malady and the Victorians*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.
- Dubos, Rene, and Jean Dubos. *The White Plague: Tuberculosis, Man, and Society*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1952.
- Duffin, Lorna. "The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman as an Invalid." In *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, eds. Lorna Duffin and Sara Delamont. London: Croom Helm, 1978.
- du Maurier, George. *Trilby*. London: Osgood and McIlvane, 1895.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Diedre English. *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness*. New York: Feminist Press, 1973.
- . *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978.
- Eldredge, Charles C. *Tales from the Easel: American Narrative Paintings from Southeastern Museums, circa 1800-1950*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004.
- Ellis, Sarah Stickney. *The Women in England*. New York: Edward Walker, 1850.
- Fitzgerald, Penelope. *Edward Burne-Jones*. Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1975.
- Flanders, Judith. *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.
- Frawley, Maria H. *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- . *Life in the Sick-Room: Harriet Martineau*. New York: Broadview Literary Texts, 2003.
- Fuller, Robert C. *The Psyche as Symbol: Theological Anticipations in Americans and the Unconscious*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Gere, Charlotte. *Artistic Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement*. London: V & A Publishing, 2010.

- Abdy, Jane, and Charlotte Gere. *The Souls (An Elite in English Society, 1885-1930)*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984.
- Gilder, Jeannette Leonard, and Joseph Benson Gilder. *The Critic*. New York: The Critic Company, 1886. Access date, November 2014
https://books.google.com/books?id=HxY_AAAAYAAJ
- Gillet, Paula. "Art Audiences at the Grosvenor Gallery." In *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, edited by Susan Casteras and Colleen Denney, 39-58. New Haven, CT: Yale University for British Art, 1996.
- Goldsmith, Barbara. *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victorian Woodhull*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.
- Goodbody, Bridget L. "The Present Opprobrium of Surgery: 'The Agnew Clinic' and Nineteenth-Century Representations of Cancerous Female Breasts," *American Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 31-51.
- Gosling, F. G. *Before Freud: Neurasthenia and the American Medical Community, 1870-1910*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
- Hale, Sarah Josepha. *Flora's Interpreter; or, The American Book of Flowers and Sentiments*. Boston: Benjamin B. Mussey & Co., 1848.
- Haller, John S., Jr., and Robin M. Haller. *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974.
- Hamilton, Walter. *The Aesthetic Movement in England*. London: Reeves & Turner, 1848.
- Harland, Marion. *Eve's Daughters; or, Common Sense for Maid, Wife, and Mother*, with an introduction by Sheila M. Rothman. Farmingdale. New York: John R. Anderson & Henry S. Allen, 1885.
- Harris, Beth. *Famine and Fashion: Needlewomen in the Nineteenth Century*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.
- Heilman, Anne. *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and Mona Caird*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- Herndl, Diane Price. *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Higginson, Thomas W. *Common Sense About Women*. Boston, 1881.

- Hirsh, Sharon. "Codes of Consumption: Tuberculosis and Body Image at the Fin-de-Siècle." In *In Sickness and in Health: Disease as Metaphor in Art and Popular Wisdom*, edited by Laurinda S. Dixon and Gabriel P. Wesiberg, 144-165. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004.
- Hobbs, Susan. *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
- Hodgson, Barbara. *Arms of Morpheus: The Tragic History of Laudanum, Morphine, and Patent Medicines*. New York: Firefly Books, 2001.
- Holmes, O. W. *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table: Every Man His Own Boswell*. London: Ward Lock, 1865.
- Huxley, Thomas H. *Science and Education: Essays*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899.
- Jacobus, Mary, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Dally Shuttleworth, eds. *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Jalland, Pat. *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, edited by Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- . *Death in the Victorian Family*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- James, Alice. *The Diary of Alice James*, ed. Leon Edel. New York: Penguin American Library, 1982.
- Jiminez, Jill Berk. *Dictionary of Artists' Models*. London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001.
- Kandall, Stephen R. *Substance and Shadow: Women and Addiction in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Kasson, Joy. *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- King, Helen. *The Disease of Virgins: Green Sickness, Chlorosis, and the Problems of Puberty*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Kontou, Tatian. *Spiritualism and Women's Writing: From Fin-de-Siècle to the Neo-Victorian*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Lambourne, Lionel. *The Aesthetic Movement*. London: Phaidon, 1996.

- Laurent, Béatrice. *Sleeping Beauties in Victorian Britain: Cultural, Literary, and Artistic Explorations of a Myth*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2014.
- Lawlor, Clark. *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.
- Lehman, Amy. *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists, and Mesmerists in Performance*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009.
- Linton, Elizabeth Lynn. *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays*. London: R. Bentley and Sons, 1883.
- Logan, Peter Melville. *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in British Prose*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Maas, Jeremy. *Victorian Fairy Paintings*. London: Royal Academy of Arts in association with Merrell Holbertson Publishers, 1997.
- MacDonald, Margaret F., et al. *Whistler, Women, and Fashion*. New York: Frick Collection, 2003.
- Macnish, Robert. *The Philosophy of Sleep*. New York: D. Appleton, 1834.
- Mancoff, Debra N. "Epitaph in Avalon: Edward Burne-Jones's Last Picture." In *Collecting the Pre-Raphaelites: The Anglo-American Enchantment*, edited by Margareta Frederick Watson, 163-174. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 1997.
- . *Flora Symbolica: Flowers in Pre-Raphaelite Art*. Munich: Prestel, 1988.
- . *Jane Morris: The Pre-Raphaelite Model of Beauty*. San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2000.
- . *King Arthur's Modern Return*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998.
- Marsh, Jan. *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal*. London: Quartet Books, 1989.
- . *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*. London: Quartet Books, 1985.
- Matthews, Alison Victoria. "Aestheticism's True Colors: The Politics of Pigment in Victorian Art, Criticism, and Fashion." In *Women and British Aestheticism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Michaels, Barbara L. *Gertrude Kasebier: The Photographer and Her Photographs*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992.

- Miliaras, Barbara. "Love and Death: The Function of the Grotesque in the Paintings of Edward Burne-Jones." In *Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts*, edited by Liana De Girolami Cheney, 127-149. New York: E. Mellen Press, c. 1992.
- Mitchell, Rebecca N. "Acute Chinamania: Pathologizing Aesthetic Dress." *Fashion Theory* 14, no. 1 (Mar. 2010): 45-64.
- Mitchell, Silas Weir. *Doctor and Patient*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1888. Access date, November 2014 <https://books.google.com/books?id=mJMPAAAAAYAAJ>
- Moore, R. Laurence. *In Search of White Crows*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- . "The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalism in Victorian America." In *Women's Experience in America: An Historical Anthology*, edited by Esther Katz and Anita Rapone, 142-162. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1980.
- Morris, Edward. *Victorian and Edwardian Paintings in the Lady Lever Art Gallery*. London: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1994.
- Myrone, Martin. *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake, and the Romantic Imagination*. London: Tate Publishing, 2006.
- Nelson, James G. "Aesthetic Experience and Rossetti's 'My Sister's Sleep.'" *Victorian Poetry* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1969): 154-158.
- Newall, Christopher, et al. *Frederic, Lord Leighton: Eminent Victorian*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.
- Newton, Mary. *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*. London: John Murray, 1974.
- Ober, K. Patrick. *Mark Twain and Medicine: "Any Mummery Will Cure."* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003.
- Oppenheim, Janet. "*Shattered Nerves*": *Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England*. New York: Oxford Press, 1991.
- Ormond, Leonée. "Female Costume in the Aesthetic Movement of the 1870s and 1880s." *Costume* 2 (1968): 30-38.
- Orr, Lynn Federle, and Stephen Calloway, eds. *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde, 1860-1900*. London: V & A Publishing, 2011.
- Ott, Katherine. *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture Since 1870*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

- Owen, Alex. *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*. London: Virago, 1989.
- . “The Other Voice: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism.” In *Language, Gender, and Childhood*, edited by Carolyn Steedman et al., 34-73. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Paddington, J. G. “On the Phenomena Displayed on Mrs. Thompson’s Trance.” *Proceedings of the Society of Physical Research*. London, 1916.
- Palmer, Cynthia. *Sisters of the Extreme: Women Writing on Drug Experience*. Vermont: Park Street Press, 2000.
- Parris, Leslie, ed. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. London: Tate Gallery, 1984.
- Parry, Ellwood C., III. “The Thomas Eakins Portrait of Sue and Harry; or, When Did the Artist Change His Mind?” *Arts Magazine* 53 (May 1979): 146-153.
- Perkins, Maureen. “The Meaning of Dream Books.” *History Workshop Journal* 48 (Autumn 1999): 102-112.
- Perry, Claire. “American Women, Neurasthenia, and the Art of Doing Nothing.” In *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Katherine Williams, 69-77. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Peterson, Linda H. *A Companion to Victorian Poetry*, edited by Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Anthony H. Harrison. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
- Pike, Martha. *Ritual and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne. Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Philosophy of Composition.” In *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by G. R. Thompson, 61-69. New York: Norton, 2004.
- Porter, Katherine H. *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1958.
- Poulson, Christine. *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art, 1840-1920*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.
- Powell, Kirsten. “Edward Burne-Jones and the Legend of Briar Rose.” *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 5, no. 2 (May 1986): 15-28.
- Powell, Nicolas. *Fuseli: The Nightmare*. New York: Viking Press, 1973.

- Praz, Mario. *Romantic Agony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Prettejohn, Elizabeth, ed. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003.
- Psomiades, Kathy Alexis. *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Pyne, Kathleen. *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.
- Rappaport, Erika Diane. *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Reed, Edward S. *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Rein, David M. S. *Weir Mitchell: As a Psychiatric Novelist*. New York: International University Press, 1952.
- Rosenberg, Carroll Smith, and Charles Rosenberg. "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-century America." In *Women and Health in America, Historical Readings*, edited by Judith Waltzer Leavitt, 111-130. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.
- Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. *Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism; Papers, 1854 to 1862*, edited by William Michael Rossetti. London: George Allen, 1899.
- Rozinek, Erika Ingelina. "*We All Take Our Turn*": *Invalidism in American Culture, 1850-1910*. Ph.D. dissertation. Winterthur, Ann Arbor ProQuest/UMI, publication Number 1413561.
- Rylance, Rick. *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Satter, Beryl. *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Saunier, Philippe. "Edward Burne-Jones et la France: Madeleine Deslandes, une preraphaelite oubliée." *Revue de l'Art*, no. 123 (1999): 57-70.
- Scully, James, and George Croom Robertson. *Aesthetics, Dreams, and Association of Ideas*. New York: Humboldt Pub. Co., 1888.
- Seaton, Beverly. *The Language of Flowers: A History*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995.

- Sharkey, Seymour J. "Morphinomania." *Nineteenth Century* 22 (1887): 335-342.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. London: Virago Press, 1987.
- Silver, Anna Krogovoy. *Victorian Literature and the Anorexic Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Silver, Carole G. *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Smailles, Helen. "A Gentleman's Exercise: Ronald Leslie Melville, 11th Earl of Leven, and the Amateur Photographic Association." *Photographic Collector* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 262-293.
- Smith, Elise Lawton. *Evelyn de Morgan and the Allegorical Body*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002.
- Smith, F. B. *The Retreat of Tuberculosis, 1850-1950*. London: Croom Helm, 1988.
- Sontag, Susan. *Illness as a Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001.
- Spies, Kathleen. "Figuring the Neurasthenic: Thomas Eakins, Nervous Illness, and Gender in Victorian America." *Nineteenth Century Studies* 12 (1998): 84-109.
- Squire, Geoffrey, et al. *Simply Stunning: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing*. Cheltenham, UK: Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums, 1996.
- Stage, Sarah. *Female Complaints: Lydia Pinkham and the Business of Women's Medicine*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979.
- Stewart, Garrett. *Death Sentences: Styles of Dying in British Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Strouse, Jean. *Alice James: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980.
- Surtees, Virginia, ed. *The Diary of Ford Madox Brown*. New Haven, CT: Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 1981.
- Taylor, Jenny Bourne. "Obscure Recesses: Locating the Victorian Unconscious." In *Writing and Victorianism*, edited by J. B. Bullen, 137-177. London: Longman, 1997.
- Taylor, Jenny Bourne, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds. *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

- Thomas, Samuel J. "Nostrum Advertising and the Image of Woman as Invalid in Late Victorian America." *Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 104-112.
- Tintner, Adeline R. "The Sleeping Woman: A Victorian Fantasy." *Pre-Raphaelite Review* 2 (Nov. 1978): 12-26.
- Tomes, Robert. *Bazar Book of Decorum: The Care of the Person, Manners, Etiquette and Ceremonials*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870.
- Troyen, Carol. *The Lure of Italy: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914*, edited by T. Stebbins et al. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1992.
- Trumble, Agnus. *Love and Death: Art in the Age of Queen Victoria*. Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2001.
- Van Hook, Bailey. *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.
- Vrettos, Athena. *Somatic Fictions: Imaging Illness in Victorian Culture*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Wahl, Kimberly. *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform*. Lebanon: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013.
- Warren, Samuel. *Passages from the Diary of a Late Physician*. 3 vols. London: Blackwood and Sons, 1885.
- Weaver, Jane Calhoun. *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist: Collected Art Writings*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Weisberg, Barbara. *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism*. San Francisco: Harper, 2004.
- Weisberg, Gabriel P. *Montmartre and the Making of Mass Culture*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
- Weiss, Marta. "Staged Photography in the Victorian Album." In *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre*, edited by Lori Pauli, 81-99. London: Merrell Publisher, 2006.
- Weliver, Phyllis. *Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900: Representations of Music, Science, and Gender in the Leisured Home*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000.
- Werbel, Amy. *Thomas Eakins: Art, Medicine, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007.

- Wheeler, Michael. *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Wildman, Stephen, and John Christian. *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998.
- Willburn, Sarah A. *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006.
- Williams, Isabelle. "Elizabeth Siddal: The Health Issue." *Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* 5 (Spring 1996): 53-70.
- Williams, Katherine, et al. *Women on the Verge: The Culture of Neurasthenia in Nineteenth-century America*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Willis, Martin. *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.
- Willis, Resa. *Mark and Livy: The Love Story of Mark Twain and the Woman Who Almost Tamed Him*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1992.
- Wilton, Andrew, Robert Upstone, et al. *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*. London: Tate Gallery, 1997.
- Winter, Alison. *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Wood, Ann Douglas. "The Fashionable Diseases: Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America." In *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, edited by Mary S. Hartman and Lois W. Banner, 1-22. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974.
- Wood, Christopher. *Burne-Jones: The Life and Works of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, 1833-1898*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1998.
- . *Fairies in Victorian Art*. Woodbridge, UK: Antique Collectors Club, 2000.
- . *Tissot: The Life and Work of Jaquest Josphe Tissot, 1836-1902*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986.
- Woolson, Abba Goold. *Woman in American Society*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873.
- Yeazell, Ruth Bernard. Introduction to *The Death and Letters of Alice James*, by Alice James. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.