

GENDER, FASHION AND REPRESENTATION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITISH  
ART

by

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## **Abstract**

This Major Research Project (MRP) examines the artistic production of British culture in the second half of the Nineteenth Century from 1850–1900, while critically engaging with existing nineteenth century art and literature, in order to deepen the understanding of the immense role played by fashion in the lives of Victorian women. I have approached this research study not through the examination of actual dress in its materiality, but instead, through its visual representation in paintings. These sartorial embodiments of women's dress could help extend our understanding of artworks that are rooted in visual narratives—both literally and figuratively. Thus, this project aims to re-imagine histories of art through the analysis of the clothed body of women in nineteenth century paintings—for it is through their sartorial choices that women defied the Victorian ideals of femininity and femaleness.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project is in theory about the corporeal genius of women and their representation in art. In practice, it has been enriched by the many important contributions of women scholars, historians, artists, designers, and models. Thus, in essence, this project is about acknowledgment and celebration of women.

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## Introduction

In a work of art, more of the clothed picture of humanity is literally revealed; we see the clothes themselves, how they work on the body, and what they signify with regard to gender, age, class, status, and even cultural and sometimes political affiliations.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this project is to critically engage with existing nineteenth century art and literature, in order to deepen the understanding of the immense role played by fashion in the lives of Victorian women. Although in the big picture, this project examines the artistic production of British culture in the second half of the nineteenth century from 1850–1900, there are three major movements within this timeframe that will be the centre of its focus: the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, the Aesthetic Movement, and the Arts & Crafts Movement. These movements shared an affinity for alternative modes of dress and personal ornamentation; essentially, providing women with a creative platform to showcase their approach to self-fashioning and representation. I have approached this research study not through the examination of actual dress in its materiality, but instead, through its visual representation in paintings. These sartorial embodiments of women's dress could help extend our understanding of artworks that are rooted in visual narratives—both literally and figuratively. Unfortunately, however, the history of art has for the most part been exclusive in its narratives of great male artists, written by male historians, and for the study and pleasure of male students and cultural connoisseurs—somehow managing to not only overlook, but almost entirely erase, not only women artists, but *women*, from history.

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<sup>1</sup> Aileen Ribeiro, “Painting: Refashioning Art—Some Visual Approached to the Study of the History of Dress,” in *Fashion and Art*, (London; New York: Eng. ed. Bloomsbury, 2014), 173.

As Deborah Cherry argues, “Feminism remains beyond the frame” especially considering that “Many studies of ‘Victorian’ art carefully screen out anything even mildly tinged with political debate and the women’s movement is regularly evaded.”<sup>2</sup> That said, it is neither possible, nor wise to simply ignore such works of art and history, which is why I agree with Griselda Pollock in her suggestion that through challenging the pre-established gendered histories of art, “Instead of a known story of art, we create an open book awaiting its many enriching and transforming readings.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to acknowledge that as a result of such gendered readings of history, many gaps have been left, making it our duty as historians to fill them. Such modes of academic labour of filling gaps and correcting mistakes, however, takes a very long time to undertake, as it is evident through the many decades of struggle by feminist scholars and historians. Learning anew the histories of art, does not warrant ignoring what has already been written—no matter how problematic it may be—instead, it is through the act of re-reading, that we can hope to edit as we go along, filling in each gap, and hopefully, not only learn how to read the histories of art anew, but most importantly, help re-write them. Thus, it is apt to reiterate Sarah Ahmed’s words, as she suggests:

In a world in which *human* is still defined as *man*, we have to fight for women and as women. And to do that we also need to challenge the instrumentalization of feminism. Even though feminism can be used as a tool that can help us make sense of the world by sharpening the edges of our critique, it is not something we can put down. Feminism goes wherever we go. If not, we are not.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Deborah Cherry, introduction to *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Griselda Pollock, introduction to the Routledge Classics Edition, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), xxxi.

<sup>4</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2017), 15.

What also stands out from Ahmed's call to action is its suggestion that feminism is not merely a label, or a temporary act of political alliance; instead, it is both a mental as well as a corporeal mode of being. Thus, this project aims to re-imagine histories of art through the analysis of the clothed body of women in nineteenth century paintings—for it is through their sartorial choices that women defied the Victorian ideals of femininity and femaleness.

I will analyze selected paintings and use them as starting points for case studies, by thinking about feminism and feminist theory. It is thus, important to acknowledge my indebtedness to not only feminist art historians, but feminist scholars as a whole, for without their tireless efforts, I would not have had the theoretical tools and knowledge to undertake this research project. Scholars such as Linda Nochlin, who pioneered what has been since considered 'feminist art history' by asking "why have there been no great women artists?" in an essay of the same title and published in 1971. In 1972, Elizabeth Baroun and Ann Gabhart curated the exhibition "Old Mistresses: Women Artists of the Past", which then inspired the title of Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's important text: *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981, 2013). Through *Old Mistresses*, the authors problematized the exclusion of 'women artists' by challenging "...the normative procedures, inherent assumptions, value system and ideological language that constitute the discipline of Art History".<sup>5</sup> In its stead, they suggested the reinstitution of women artists into the discipline and acknowledgement of their varied approaches to 'representation' and 'self-representation'.<sup>6</sup> As I will argue, dress acts as a common denominator in how women actively participate in their 'representation' and 'self-representation', respectively. In *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories*

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<sup>5</sup> Griselda Pollock, "A Lonely Preface," to *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, (London; New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), xx.

<sup>6</sup> Griselda Pollock, "A Lonely Preface," xxi.

of Art (1988, 2003) Griselda Pollock encourages art historians to stop aiming for a ‘new art history’ by “no longer think[ing] of a feminist art history but a feminist intervention in the histories of art”.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps such interventions need not be detrimental in scale, but essential in consequence.

The ‘female nude’ and the ‘naked body’ in art, have been subjects of study and debate by many art historians. In comparison, the clothed female body has been mainly trivialized until relatively recently, with important interventions by art and dress historians.<sup>8</sup> In *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (1999) Griselda Pollock suggests a whole new nuanced reading of the histories of art in which “Differences can co-exist, cross-fertilize and challenge, be acknowledged, confronted, celebrated and not remain destructive of the other in an expanded but shared cultural space.”<sup>9</sup> This new reading encourages art historians to move beyond the pre-established gender binaries that dictate one’s approach to writing about women artists as opposed to male artists.<sup>10</sup> It is only by employing such an inclusive approach that we could recognize the much deserved membership of women, within the canon of art history that unfortunately, tends to resemble an exclusive all-male club. There have always been women artists, women designers, women makers, but they have been written out of the art history books because of their gender. These women were—and to some extent still are—denied membership to this patriarchal club, because of the feminine ideals that were imposed upon them, by the very same men that criticized them. Major art academies denied women access to an all rounded artistic education, and yet also contradicted a woman’s ability to paint as well as a

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<sup>7</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 24.

<sup>8</sup> For a list of sources, see section on general sources on the topic of art and fashion

<sup>9</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 34.

man.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, according to Victoria Horne and Lara Perry, the feminism of today “...is not the feminism of the 1850s, 1970s, or even the 1990s.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Griselda Pollock suggests that, in this new phase of feminist enquiry, we need “to escape the dangers of both feminist positivism and postmodern indifference.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Deborah Cherry, “Many [feminist] activists concurred that although there was ‘no sex in art’, there was a good deal of sexual discrimination in society.”<sup>14</sup> That said, she also points out that, although the concept of feminism and the emancipation of women was present in nineteenth-century Britain, it was not, however, until 1895 that Feminism as a term was used.<sup>15</sup> Thus, even though the focus of this project is a historical one, it is crucial to approach the analysis of women’s embodiment in the nineteenth century through engagement with contemporary theory in the disciplines of art history and fashion studies. I personally must also reiterate that I am approaching this project from the gendered position of a woman, and I am largely drawing from and engaging with feminist art history. That said, however, I have to agree with Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry as they note:

Of course, it is important to maintain the distinction between women and feminists because not all of one group is part of the other. But it can be a feminist strategy to write an art history that takes women as its subject, with the aim to dismantle the banal generalisations that are sustained by gendered discourses of the artist.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of women’s art education see Joanna Devereux, *The Making of Women Artists in Victorian England: The Education and Careers of Six Professionals*, (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Victoria Horne, and Lara Perry, introduction to *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Pollock, introduction to the Routledge Classics Edition, *Vision and Difference*, xxxii.

<sup>14</sup> Cherry, introduction to *Beyond the Frame*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Cherry, introduction to *Beyond the Frame*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, “This Moment: A Dialogue on Participation, Refusal and History Making” in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 127.

I have approached this research through analysis of painted representations of women as I am interested in the embodied aspect of dress, rather than clothing itself as a subject. Perhaps I prefer this approach due to the uncanny nature of studying clothes without their wearer.

According to Elizabeth Wilson,

A part of this strangeness is that it links the biological body to the social being, and public to private. This makes it uneasy territory, since it forces us to recognize that the human body is more than biological entity. It is an organism in culture, a cultural artefact even, and its own boundaries are unclear.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to feminist theories, this research is greatly indebted to the work of Joanne Entwistle. Drawing from Entwistle's theories on the embodied aspects of fashion, dress, and identity, this project will further illuminate the gendered nature of artistic production in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Entwistle, "...when talking about individuality and identity and the role played by fashion and dress it is important to recognize that identities are socially meaningful. The individual may want to 'stand out' but she or he also wants to 'fit in' with a group."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, following Entwistle's example and borrowing from her interpretation, theories relevant to fashion studies will be discussed. In addition, nineteenth-century theorists and key figures such as John Ruskin or William Morris may also be considered for purposes of historical contextualization. Thus, throughout this paper, relevant theories, both contemporary and historical, will be reflected on, in order to better understand Victorian artistic production, both in terms of art and fashion. Most importantly, however, it is crucial to acknowledge that even if not directly referenced, concepts put forward by key theorists such as

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory*. (Cambridge: Second ed. Polity Press, 2015), 139.

Marx, Simmel, and Bourdieu, amongst many others, have been immensely influential in the works of scholars and historians who are essential to this project.

Karl Marx, and his theories regarding capitalism, labour, ‘species being’ and the duality of adornment are directly in line with Britain’s economic growth as a result of burgeoning industrial developments. Accordingly, Marx’s disenchantment with Victorian capitalism has much in common with William Morris and his views on the same subject. As Anthony Sullivan argues, the increase in the scale of machine-made commodities resulted in a shift that moved away from the slow creation of hand-made artisanal objects in small quantities to an overabundance of objects lacking originality and craftsmanship.<sup>19</sup>

A consideration of these nineteenth-century economic and socio-cultural developments is critical in understanding the importance of textile design, production and consumption by artists and connoisseurs whose artistic tastes were quite different from popular Victorian fashions and norms. The advent of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the slow mode of production of hand-crafted objects and textiles, brought renewed attention to the individual maker, artist, and designer. Thus, those belonging to artistic circles demonstrated a new approach to personal and interior adornment that was less about “conspicuous consumption” and more about superior taste. Artistic shops such as Liberty of London, founded by Arthur Lasenby Liberty in 1875, provided their clientele with merchandise deemed superior for their design, production, and overall quality.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anthony Sullivan, “Karl Marx: Fashion and Capitalism,” in *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*. (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 33.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara J. Morris, *Liberty Design: 1874–1914* (London: Chartwell Books, 1989), 7.

Georg Simmel was born in 1858 and wrote many of his social theories and much of his philosophy during the development of the nineteenth century's modern city and society.<sup>21</sup> He belonged to the 'art for art's sake' school of thought in which, nineteenth-century Aestheticism as well as the Arts & Crafts Movement were also rooted. Simmel believed there was a link between the human aesthetic experience and society at large; in essence, he legitimized the importance of fashion from a sociological perspective. Although problematized and contested by some scholars, the 'trickle down' theory that has become attributed to Simmel, could be utilized in understanding the growing popularity of Aesthetic dress in Victorian England. Influenced by Pre-Raphaelite art and initially adopted by those belonging to artistic circles, Aesthetic Dress principles, eventually trickled down to those from outside of artistic society. Indeed, "The association of Aesthetic dress with Pre-Raphaelitism (as its origin and ongoing influence) suggested wearers' advanced taste and artistic knowledge".<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, this concept of 'advanced taste and artistic knowledge' could also be grasped through Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the refinement of taste as outlined in "The Forms of Capital". Given the rich cultural production of the nineteenth century, going against the societal norm—in dress and or manner as was the case with the Aesthetes and members of artistic circles—required access to *economic, cultural and social capital*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Peter McNeil, "Georg Simmel: The Philosophical Monet," in *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*. (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 63.

<sup>22</sup> Kimberly Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform*, (New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Agnès Rocamora, "Pierre Bourdieu: The Field of Fashion," in *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*. (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 240.

## **The Painted Fashionable Body: Women's Representation in Victorian Art**

By closely looking at depicted garments, within the larger context of a painting, one could introduce a new approach to the pre-established reading of artworks. Unfortunately, in discussions of art, the topics of dress and fashion seems to garner less scholarly attention in comparison, to say, home furnishings or other decorative objects. Considering fashions are imbedded with historical, social, cultural and economic significance, there is an opportunity to try and unravel the messages deeply woven within their fibre, one thread at a time. This unravelling, then, could lead us to new meanings imbedded in the many layered brushstrokes that make up the overall composition. And, most importantly, why not move beyond merely mentioning the dresses worn by female sitters or patrons, and instead, try to grasp the relationship between the wearer's body and these rich textiles reproduced in paint? In fact, approaching art through the novel lens of women's fashions and their corporeality, will contribute to the discourse surrounding Victorian fashion, and the significant role it played in the lives of nineteenth-century women. Furthermore, an emphasis on fashion and dress would bring much deserved attention to the important contribution of female artists, designers, embroiderers, and weavers to the rich world of British art and design in this period. This is especially true considering that, during the last fifty years of the century, there was a substantial increase in the number of women working as artists and designers.<sup>24</sup> The link between women's corporeality and fashion is an important aspect of nineteenth-century artistic production that has perhaps received less attention than it deserves.

Mary P. Merrifield, in *Dress as A Fine Art* (1854) makes a case for the importance of dress by suggesting that it is no longer a straightforward matter of mere protection, but closer to

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<sup>24</sup> Cherry, introduction to *Beyond the Frame*, 3.

being an act of skillful creation similar to that of a work of fine art. She goes on suggesting that dress “is an art to set off our person to the greatest advantage,” although, one must restrain oneself from employing artifice in improving one’s appearance. In Mrs. Merrifield’s opinion, “No deception is to be practiced, no artifice employed, beyond that which is exercised by the painter, who arranges his subjects in the most pleasing forms, and who selects colors which harmonize with each other...”<sup>25</sup> Such conflicting sentiments also signals the ongoing disenchantment of the artistic members of society such as William Morris and his contemporaries with the inferiority of English design and ornament.<sup>26</sup> This dissatisfaction, in turn, played a significant role in the direction of art and fashion during the second half of the century, which will be discussed in more detail throughout this paper.

According to Sandra Stansbery Buckland, “most dress scholars recognize that dress records messages about culture—the people, their values and their roles”.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Elizabeth Wilson posits that “Fashion is obsessed with gender, defines and redefines the gender boundary”.<sup>28</sup> In the same vein, Joanne Entwistle suggests that clothed bodies are gendered bodies. Historically, women’s sartorial choices have been scrutinized and policed through notions of sexuality and sexual identity and, seen as markers of social class and distinction.<sup>29</sup> Though the study of art history is well established within academia, the study of dress and fashion has generally been marginalized within social theory. This marginalization, according to

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<sup>25</sup> Merrifield, Mary P. *Dress as a Fine Art. with Suggestions on Children's Dress*. (United States: Leopold Classic Library, On Demand Reprint of the 1854 edition), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Linda Parry, introduction to *William Morris Textiles* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983): 13.

<sup>27</sup> Pedersen, Elaine L., Sandra S. Buckland, and Christina Bates. "Theory and Dress Scholarship: A Discussion on Developing and Applying Theory." *Dress* 35, no. 1 (2008): 75.

<sup>28</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> Entwistle, 150.

Entwistle, is derivative of the close association of dress with women which, has in turn rendered fashion as “‘frivolous, ephemeral nonsense’, unworthy of serious academic attention”.<sup>30</sup>

American sociologist, Herbert Blumer has identified the deficiencies of studying fashion by sociologists, and the occasional pieces of scholarly writing on the topic to be lacking in substance as he argues that:

Failure to observe and appreciate the wide range of operation of fashion; a false assumption that fashion has only trivial or peripheral significance; a mistaken idea that fashion falls in the area of the abnormal and irrational and this is out of the mainstream of human group life; and, finally, a misunderstanding of the nature of fashion.<sup>31</sup>

Fortunately, though rather slowly, the importance of fashion as a significant carrier of personal, social, political, economic and cultural meaning is becoming more recognized both within academia and beyond.

Given that fashion has been acknowledged as one significant aspect of modernity by scholars such as Elizabeth Wilson and Christopher Breward, naturally, France and England are two of the main nation states at the fore-front of modernization. Thus, they are both recognized for their major contributions to cultural developments including art and fashion. That said, according to Aileen Ribeiro, though equally productive, there is an inherent difference between the viewpoints of French artists of the nineteenth century and those of their English counterparts.<sup>32</sup> This difference is acknowledged to have carried over not only in the depiction of fashion in art, but rather into the creation of it. Many French artists of the period were actively involved in the creation of fashions—to be later depicted in their art—whereas English artists

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<sup>30</sup> Entwistle, 145.

<sup>31</sup> Herbert Blumer, “Fashion from Class Differentiation to Collective Selection,” in *Fashion Theory: A Reader*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 232.

<sup>32</sup> Aileen Ribeiro, *Clothing Art: The Visual Culture of Fashion, 1600-1914*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017), 31.

were seen as less interested in that aspect of fashion.<sup>33</sup> There are, of course, exceptions, as Rossetti and Whistler's involvement in the creation and design of garments is widely acknowledged by scholars, including Aileen Ribeiro and Kimberly Wahl. Aileen Ribeiro asserts that, nineteenth-century French art was a reflection of society's enchantment with 'modernity' and took on the notion of 'Art for Art's Sake'. Whereas English art, leaned towards the 'anecdotal' and fashion—in art as in life—reflected the Victorian pre-occupation with morality.<sup>34</sup>

Intriguingly, Charles Fredrick Worth, who was an English dressmaker in the 1850s, is considered to be the very first fashion designer of the modern period. Though English by birth, he gained his fame as a couturier to the French Court of Napoleon III. The period between 1850 to 1870 marked the Second Empire in France, and it was during this time that Paris became recognized at the center of fashion and good taste.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps Paris' popularity as the capital of fashion at this time is partly due to France's highly fashionable Empress Eugénie, whose superior sense of style has been immortalized by famous court painters such as Franz Xaver Winterhalter (Fig. 1). According to Wilson, however, Empress Eugénie's patronage of Worth was merely an aide to his fame and success as a couturier; rather, it is his unique aura as an artist and innovator that made him a true arbiter of taste.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, England's perceived inferior image as less fashionable in the nineteenth century, may be due to the image of its own Queen and Empress. Unlike her French counterpart, Queen Victoria has hardly been recognized as

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<sup>33</sup> Ribeiro, *Clothing Art*, 410.

<sup>34</sup> Ribeiro, *Clothing Art*, 298.

<sup>35</sup> See Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 32; and Christopher Breward, *Fashion*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)., 23.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 32.

particularly fashionable.<sup>37</sup> However, that is not to suggest her absolute disinterest in fashion or modes of personal adornment, rather, her approach to fashion has been viewed as one of uncomplicated simplicity and ease.<sup>38</sup> Also, her loyalty and patriotic patronage of the English textile industry could not have been very helpful in establishing her image as a harbinger of style.<sup>39</sup> Winterhalter also produced over a hundred commissions for Queen Victoria, though, the nature of these paintings were largely emblems of Courtly splendor, illustrative of the vast British Empire through portraiture and capturing the morally superior and rapidly growing royal family (Figs. 2 and 3).<sup>40</sup>

In fact, the Victorian Era saw the growth and expansion of the Industrial Revolution which had begun in the late eighteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth century. England, in particular, was at the heart of this industrial development due to its monopoly in the British cotton industry.<sup>41</sup> Christopher Breward, however, takes his analysis on the concept of ‘modernity’ and fashion, beyond that of the industrial revolution. Rather, he attributes the changing fashions of the nineteenth century, to the shifting landscape of society as a whole.<sup>42</sup> It must, however, be noted that, on a most basic level, such socio-cultural shifts were, in fact, as a result of the industrial revolution wherein a growing middle class arose with no former aristocratic connections and familial wealth.<sup>43</sup> For Breward, society at this time moved away

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<sup>37</sup> Staniland, Kay, *In Royal Fashion: The Clothes of Princess Charlotte of Wales & Queen Victoria, 1796-1901*, (London: Museum of London, 1997), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Staniland, Kay, *In Royal Fashion*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> Staniland, Kay, *In Royal Fashion*, 134.

<sup>40</sup> Mirja Straub, “Franz Xaver Winterhalter: Painter of Women,” in *High Society: The Portraits of Franz Xaver Winterhalter*, (Stuttgart: Arnold’sche Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 19.

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 67.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress*, (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 145–146.

<sup>43</sup> Bernard N. Schilling, “Victorian Decoration and the Gospel of Labour,” *The Art Bulletin* 21, no. 3 (1939): 289.

from its formerly defined class-based structure, and relied more upon a gendered division. Thus, this became a ‘modern’ society in which, men and women were to dress and behave according to acceptable sexual and social norms. Sartorial styles became imbued with meanings associated with feminine and masculine roles which found their respective places within public and private spaces.<sup>44</sup> According to Elizabeth Wilson, in the nineteenth century, such gendering of fashion had significant consequences, for it was through their dress that women secured their places within society and made a suitable match in marriage.<sup>45</sup> The importance of dress as a young woman’s ticket to social mobility was stressed through the many handbooks and guides directed towards educating Victorians—especially women—on the acceptable modes of behavior and dress. *The Daughters of England* by Sarah Stickney Ellis, published in 1845, is one such text providing mid-nineteenth century English women invaluable guidance on how to best behave as virtuous wives, mothers, and daughters.<sup>46</sup> *The Handbook of Etiquette: Being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* published in 1860, had advice on etiquette for both men and women.<sup>47</sup> John Ruskin’s lecture, “Of Queen’s Garden” was later published in 1865 as a two-volume essay collection entitled *Sesame and Lilies*. In this essay, Ruskin reiterates the gender divide within Victorian society, in which, men and women are encouraged to embrace their differences and acknowledge their interdependence on one another. Though, here, Ruskin condemns the notion of ‘superiority’ of one sex over the other, his actual words suggest otherwise—especially to our twenty-first century sensibilities. For Ruskin, the ideal Victorian

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<sup>44</sup> Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, 145–146.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson, 123.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, 1845, in *NF 19C Gender Behaviour and Etiquette Teachers Pack*. (The British Library, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> *The Handbook of Etiquette: Being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society*. S.I.]: Cassell, Petter and Galpin, 1860. in *NF 19C Gender Behaviour and Etiquette Teachers Pack*. The British Library, 2017.

woman is to be passive and accommodating in nature, for “The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive”.<sup>48</sup> It is Ruskin’s belief that if both sexes remain cognizant of their differences, they would potentially avert any dangers to their domestic bliss. Perhaps some of the most popular of such texts are those written by Mary Eliza Haweis. In the *Art of Beauty* (1883) Haweis advised women not only on the proper modes of dress, but also on other important matters, such as health and behaviour.<sup>49</sup> Though intended to empower women, her advice, however, still reiterates the importance of a woman’s ability to attract and marry a suitable man. Once again, the author’s advice must be viewed as a product of the milieu to which she belonged, for women in nineteenth-century Britain did not possess much social, political or even financial power as they belonged to a patriarchal society upon which men held absolute dominance.<sup>50</sup> Women, then, were first at the mercy of their fathers, brothers and later at the mercy of their husbands and sons. Or, in the words of Thorstein Veblen, they were simply “men’s chattel”.<sup>51</sup> Most ironically, this patriarchal society with its many imposed restrictions of women was in fact ruled by a Queen—a woman! Queen Victoria has, however, been recognized as a firm opponent of women’s suffrage, and believed her own sex to belong in the domestic sphere, rather than the political.<sup>52</sup>

Also, the growing popularity of women’s periodicals—such as *The Young Englishwoman* (1864–1877) and *The Queen* (1861–1922)—during the second half of the century, put the

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<sup>48</sup> John Ruskin, [*Sesame and Lilies, Etc.*]. Second Edition, with Preface ed. 1865, in *NF 19C Gender Behaviour and Etiquette Teachers Pack*. (The British Library, 2017), 146.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, *The Art of Beauty*, (Forgotten Books, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Mary L. Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2007), 51.

<sup>52</sup> Paula Bartley, *Queen Victoria*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2016), 208.

fashionably adorned female body in their pages as illustrations for fashion plates. Thus, according to Kay Boardman, the images of the fashionable female body found in these magazines were multifunctional and imbued with binary significations.<sup>53</sup> Female consumption, thus, signaled female commodification; women became the subject of not only another's gaze, but also their own gaze—and most importantly, as Boardman suggests, “through clothing gender boundaries [were] constantly defined and redefined.”<sup>54</sup> In direct contrast to the idealized images of fashionable femininity in women's periodicals were the cartoons found in satirical magazines such as *Punch*. Established in 1841, through humour and satire, *Punch* successfully published cartoons on a range of subjects, including politics, social commentary and—most relevant to this research—fashion. Though some of its cartoons satirized styles of male dress, it was women's dress that received the most attention from *Punch* and its male readers. According to Shu-Chuan Yan, *Punch* cartoons tend to vilify women through their sartorial choices, in order to appeal to a dominantly conservative middle-class male audience. Thus, *Punch* employed humour, as a defense mechanism to conceal the growing anxiety felt by middle-class men as a result of a changing Victorian society and “the struggle for space and power”.<sup>55</sup> It should then come as no surprise that Victorian women asserted their agency sartorially and with decisions related to fashion and dress, for it was widely believed that “...the culture of beauty is the natural right of every woman”.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Kay Boardman, "A Material Girl in a Material World": The Fashionable Female Body in Victorian Women's Magazines," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 3, no. 1 (2002): 96.

<sup>54</sup> Boardman, "A Material Girl in a Material World", 97.

<sup>55</sup> Shu-Chuan Yan, "(Ad)Dressing Women: Fashion and Body Image in *Punch*, 1850s-1860s," *Women's Studies* 43, no. 6 (2014): 754.

<sup>56</sup> Haweis, *The Art of Beauty*, 3.

### Case Study 1: The Angel in Victorian Domestic Hell

*Broken Vows* from 1856 by Philip Hermogenes Calderon (Fig. 4), is a painting full of meaningful symbols that many in Victorian society would have recognized. It is, however, also a paradoxical image. It is a narrative painting with a moral message about nineteenth-century femininity. Griselda Pollock posits that “Femininity should be understood therefore not as a condition of women, but as the ideological form of the regulation of female sexuality within a familial, heterosexual domesticity which is ultimately organized by the law.”<sup>57</sup> Debra N. Mancoff has explained the symbolic significance of this distressing scene of infidelity and betrayal in her reading of the surrounding garden. She has also commented on the ‘steadfast character’ of the cheated woman, suggested by the ivy-covered wall upon which the woman leans.<sup>58</sup> This is a painting that challenges the widely-believed Pre-Raphaelite representation of women as ‘sad and sickly’. Though troubled and visibly distressed, here is a woman of not only superior moral character—as opposed to the ‘other’ woman in the narrative—she is also willful and unfaltering in her desire for freedom. On first glance, this could merely be read as a painting about a woman’s despair. Upon closer inspection, however, one could detect the larger underlying problems of a woman’s position in society that is run by men, depriving women of their most basic rights as citizens. Unfortunately, this is a society in which a woman embodies the notion of ‘the angel in the house’, and yet, she is an angel living in the hell of her husband’s making, whose undivided power gives him the right to lie and cheat.

She is dressed in keeping with the acceptable, even fashionable styles of the mid 1850s. On the surface, she could be yet another model taken from the fashion plates (Fig. 5) found in

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<sup>57</sup> Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and Spaces of Femininity” in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 111-112.

<sup>58</sup> Debra N. Mancoff, *The Pre-Raphaelite Language of Flowers*, (Munich: Prestel, 2003), 16.

popular women's magazines. She is dressed in green, which, though toxic with arsenical poison, was well in line "with 19<sup>th</sup>-century associations between femininity and nature".<sup>59</sup> Her green pagoda-sleeved jacket is demurely buttoned up to the top and tightly hugging her upper body. The tension visible through the stretching of fabric right below her left hand is suggestive of a laced corset underneath. That is perhaps why she seems out of breath and fatigued, for some women found their corsets restrictive and uncomfortable. Though wearing a corset, her trailing skirts' hem is bunched up on the ground, suggesting the absence of petticoats underneath—Which was in fact, very shortly after replaced by the crinoline. Thus, she is both conforming to the expected fashionable ideals of dress and defying them at the same time. The crinoline made of steel, also referred to as a 'cage crinoline' was widely mocked in satirical publications such as *Punch* (Fig. 6). With her green attire, she blends into the background, casting a large shadow on the wall behind her. Though still wearing her wedding ring on her left hand, there is a gold bracelet—a fashionable accessory for women at the time—discarded at the hem of her skirt. In contrast to the wedding ring which symbolizes her commitment to her marriage, the cast-off bracelet symbolizes the broken vows. The rejected bracelet is also significant for its prior close proximity to the wearer's body. The Collins Dictionary defines the term bracelet, as "a chain or band, usually made of metal, which you wear around your wrist as jewelry".<sup>60</sup> Thus, as an item of fashion that is closely worn on the body, its abandonment is a conscious act of defiance by its wearer. The rejection of an item that merely moments before caressed the skin intimately, is a rejection of that familiar intimacy. It could be easily assumed that the bracelet here must be a gift

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<sup>59</sup> Alison Matthews David, *Fashion Victims: The Dangers of Dress Past and Present*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 81.

<sup>60</sup> See the Collins Dictionary definition for "bracelet"  
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/bracelet>

from the husband, whose hands are no longer familiarly touching the hands of his wife. Bracelet is also closely related to the word ‘brace’ which is synonymous with words such as ‘tighten’, ‘fortify’, and ‘reinforce’. Thus, one could read the dropped bracelet as a proxy for the husband’s touch and its brace on his wife’s wrist. Similarly, though painted in the exterior space of a garden, the rendering of the space creates a claustrophobic “place of seclusion and enclosure.”<sup>61</sup>

The ‘fallen woman’ or ‘fallen Magdalens’ chastised for their sexual transgressions is a popular Victorian trope and the subject of many works of art and literature.<sup>63</sup> According to Jan Marsh, the Pre-Raphaelites were especially interested in this subject, and depicted women perceived as having lower moral standards quite frequently.<sup>62</sup> Among the most popular of such works is *The Awakening Consciousness* (Fig.7) from 1853 and painted by William Holman Hunt. Though not a professional prostitute, nevertheless, here the woman has found herself in a socially compromising position as a ‘kept woman’ and her tale is one of caution for other respectable Victorian women. In mid-nineteenth century England—and London in particular—prostitution was deemed ‘the great social evil’.<sup>63</sup> Thus, cognizant of the social stigma attached to the immoral message of such images, Holman Hunt has captured the moment of the woman’s regret, leaving room for hope and redemption. Perhaps, this woman who is most likely not married at the moment—she is not wearing a wedding ring—may repent her ‘sins’ and end up finding a suitable husband for whom she will be a dutiful and attentive wife. The above readings of the painting are undoubtedly further inspired by Annie Miller, who sat for the painting as a

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<sup>61</sup> Pollock, “Modernity and Spaces of Femininity”, 90.

<sup>63</sup> Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art*, (London: Phoenix Illustrated, 1998), 77.

<sup>62</sup> Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women*, 82.

<sup>63</sup> Marsh, 77.

model.<sup>66</sup> Miller, a barmaid, was engaged to Hunt for a time period and was allegedly in an intimate relationship with Rossetti as his mistress.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, however, in much of the literature on this painting, there are hardly any mentions of the “be-whiskered young man” who is according to Aileen Ribeiro, “not quite aware of what is happening”.<sup>68</sup> Though there is no denying the suggestions put forward by scholars in discussions of this painting, the man seems to be merely mentioned as an accessory to the woman’s sin. It is curious, however, how given the moral and social consequences of this scene, the man is almost infantilized in both depictions—grinning somewhat naïvely—as well as commentary, while, the woman is vilified for her knowingly sinful nature. After all, there could be no ‘awakening’ unless one is conscious of their moral wrong-doing, whether repentant or not.

Given that the woman’s clothing significantly informs readings of the *Awakening Consciousness*, it is imperative to acknowledge aspects of the female body and its relationship to garments. As Joanne Entwistle posits, the moral implications of women’s wickedness are informed by Judeo-Christian doctrine, which deems not only the decorated but also the naked female body problematic.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, according to Efrat Tseëlon, “the links between sin, the body, woman and clothes are easily forged”.<sup>65</sup> Whether in full state of dress, or undress, the female body is inherently cloaked in layers of meanings woven through religious, social, and economic threads found throughout history. As Joanne Entwistle indicates, as a result of such cultural attitudes towards female dress, “women have developed a finely tuned self-

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<sup>66</sup> Marsh 82; Ribeiro 311.

<sup>67</sup> According to Aileen Ribeiro, the couple’s engagement ended in 1859. See *Clothing Art*, 311.

<sup>68</sup> Ribeiro, 311.

<sup>64</sup> Entwistle, 148.

<sup>65</sup> Efrat Tseëlon, qtd. in Entwistle, 14.

consciousness about appearance which has nothing to do with their innate ‘nature’.”<sup>66</sup> Is it then too far to suggest that the *Awakening Conscience* could easily be reimagined as the ‘Awakening Self-Consciousness’? In fact, here is a woman deemed responsible not only for her own morally questionable behaviour, but is also held responsible—by the larger society—for the man’s moral degradation. Dressed in a white cotton bodice over a petticoat resembling a nightgown in the light of day, she embodies the nocturnal nature of an animal. Of course, Joanne Entwistle has problematized the theories put forward by Enlightenment thinkers, who suggested that women’s sole role in society was to reproduce.<sup>67</sup> Entwistle additionally critiques Rousseau, for suggesting that “women lacked the reason necessary to function in the public realm and must therefore remain confined in the private sphere of the home”.<sup>68</sup> Here, however, even in the confines of the house, the woman’s body is hardly at home. Her un-corseted and awkwardly twisted body is depicted such that her *derrière* is further accentuated and sexualized. The red patterned shawl wrapped around her hips, and the position of her intertwined hands, somehow do more to suggest her sexuality by drawing attention to her womb. In fact, the knot of the shawl mirrors her tightly clasped hands, which seem to be denying access to the man whose hand is confronted by hers. Depicted in this painting is an image of nineteenth century angst, for someone who is not only a sexual being, but more importantly for being a *female sexual being*. Furthermore, as suggested by Griselda Pollock in her readings of ‘bending bodies’ in Van Gogh’s paintings of women, the middle-class man in this painting has the right to his mistress’ body, for he has bought it through monetary and material exchange as represented by the dwellings of this ‘kept woman’. Most significantly, in exchange for her position, “She has to take up a pose neither his bourgeois

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<sup>66</sup> Entwistle, 149.

<sup>67</sup> Entwistle, 145.

<sup>68</sup> Entwistle, 145.

mother nor sisters would ever adopt in front a man and for such a viewing.”<sup>69</sup> Ultimately, denying her any personal agency, her angst and despair are ignored—not only by her lover, but also by Victorian society in general. The woman’s body has thus, visually and metaphorically, become a site of nineteenth century gender politics.

Another example is Alfred Elmore’s painting, *On the Brink* (Fig. 8) in which a timid woman is shown in the foreground, while there is a man lurking in the shadows, leaning outward from a windowsill behind her. There is something sinister about the composition and the relationship between the man and the woman. Aileen Ribeiro has suggested that the scene is outside of a gambling room and the man may be trying to tempt the woman by offering to pay her gambling debts.<sup>70</sup> Of course, that is only one speculation, and there could be many underlying messages hidden within the painting. Evidently the woman’s body language signals the uncomfortable position she has found herself in, whether physically or perhaps, socially. That said, the title which has been read as a signifier of the woman’s impending fall from grace, could instead, be easily understood as that of the man’s—he is, after all, the one literally on the brink of two spaces at once. His body is partly inside the parlour while also leaning outward and invading the woman’s space, outside. The man is thus, the body that is on the edge—of society, respectability and grace. Apparent by her shrinking body, she is not open to the man’s sexual advances, visually implied by the budding flower directly pointing at the folded fabric of her skirt, visually mimicking the anatomy of her sexual organs. In fact, even if the woman is desperate due to her actions, the man here is just as morally implicated as is the woman. Perhaps, given the sense of fear and anxiety evident on the woman’s face, this painting is not a lesson

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<sup>69</sup> Griselda Pollock, “The Ambivalence of the Material Body,” in *Differencing the Cannon*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Ribeiro, *Clothing in Art*, 311.

about female immorality, but instead, a critique of a woman's precarious place within a patriarchal society.

The woman's attire adds to the ambiguity of this image. Tightly wrapped in her mantle, she is seated in a position slightly bent forward—perhaps suggesting the lack of a corset underneath her dress. With her skirt and mantle falling to her side, not only is she literally taking up most of the pictorial space of the painting, but also metaphorically; she is denying closer access to her body. Thus, there is no space for the man to join her on the bench upon which she is seated. Visibly wrinkled, it is difficult to tell whether her garments appear somewhat dirty due to their colours, or the harsh shadows, complicating the viewer's understanding of the work. Due to this lack of visibility, the woman's dress defies proper analysis as to its style of fashion or ornamentation. At first glance, however, the reflective surface of her clothing suggests the use of silk material, which would have been substantially expensive to attain and care for. Suggesting that perhaps she was once a respectable lady, who could afford such fashions, this begs the question as to her personhood and identity—who is she? And how did she end up in this dark corner of Victorian society?

Returning to the woman visualized in the *Broken Vows*, there is a distinct difference between her embodiment and those of the other women discussed. Most importantly, this painting is an anomaly, for according to Jan Marsh, a man's indiscretions and infidelity were hardly ever the subject of such narrative paintings, for sexual deviation and immorality was considered a feminine folly. Furthermore, as noted by Anthea Callen, "Marital sex with women of one's own class was for reproduction, not for pleasure."<sup>71</sup> Thus, a distinction has been made

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<sup>71</sup> Anthea Callen, "Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement," in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, (London: Women's Press, 1988), 162.

by the corporeality of the wife and that of the ‘other woman’. The wife is fashionable, yet not enslaved by fashion. Unlike her husband’s secret lover who is shown wearing a fashionable straw bonnet, her dark hair is veiled under a black fringed scarf, hinting at her unhappy mental state and emotional turmoil. Though her eyes are shut to the world, they are still visible, unlike the other woman’s eyes that are obscured by the wooden fence. Most importantly, though not without voyeuristic potential, the woman here is not offered for sexual contemplation. Left in the shadows, she is nevertheless, facing the light—foretelling of her hope for rebirth and resurrection. The artist has depicted a narrative in which the virtuous Victorian wife is wronged by her husband. However, though clearly wronged, she is not victimized. She is righteous in her anguish, yet self-composed and strong. Weary with fatigue, she is still standing tall. She may not possess any legal rights to hold property or ask for a divorce, however, she still has control over her sartorial choices. Given that in the second half of the nineteenth century, many English women were demanding equal social and political rights as men, their dress gained significance as an important act of protest and defiance. Thus, to some extent, the wife in this painting could choose to dress her body in a manner indicative of her impending emancipation. She embodies her conflicting emotions on whether to blindly follow normative dictates on the moral duties of a wife, or, instead, to break free from the confines of her socially imposed prison. On the one hand, she may be on the brink of a loveless marriage and even a divorce, on the other, she may be on the brim of freedom—to step out of the shadows imposed by a rigid and misogynistic society and follow the light to a new life. This might be a life in which she could aim for personal agency beyond that of a housewife—a life in which she could discard outdated beliefs as she discarded her ‘tarnished bangle’.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Mancoff, *The Pre-Raphaelite Language of Flowers*, 16.

During this time, there was controversy surrounding the underpinnings of women's clothes, especially corsets. With the organization of dress reform societies, opponents of corsets aimed to bring to light diseases associated with tight lacing and stays. Maladies such as displacement of vital organs and most importantly 'higher breathing'—as opposed to men's abdominal breathing—were cited as contributing to a reduction in vital capacity.<sup>73</sup> In an 1893 article entitled "Victims of Vanity," Violet Greville lamented the popularity of tight lacing, deeming it "degrading, immoral and idiotic," and urged women to renounce its practice by acting as their "own saviour".<sup>74</sup> The corset continues to be a topic for discussion and debate for there are many differing views on not only the object itself, but also of the alleged virtues and or vices of Victorian women who chose to wear them. Though debates on this subject are varied, the gendered role of fashion in relation to the female body and the forming of a women's identity remains constant. In "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman," Helene Roberts has indicated some of the problematic—not only physical, but also social and sexual—characteristics of Victorian dress for women.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Tracy J. R. Collin indicates that "One role of fashion is to send a message about 'perceived gender roles.'"<sup>76</sup> Given the extensive body of scholarship on the topic of corsets—both historical and contemporary—it is not within the scope of this particular project to discuss them in any detail. In brief, however, it is essential to note that, the corset is an item of dress with social, moral, physical, medical,

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<sup>73</sup> David Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism: Corsets, Tight-Lacing and Other Forms of Body-Sculpture*, (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), 119.

<sup>74</sup> Violet Greville, "victims of Vanity," *The National Review* 21, no. 121 (1893): 79.

<sup>75</sup> Helene E. Roberts, "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman," *Signs* 2, no. 3 (1977): 554-569.

<sup>76</sup> Tracy J. R. Collins, "Athletic Fashion, "Punch", and the Creation of the New Woman," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 43, no. 3 (2010): 317.

economic and even political associations.<sup>77</sup> Relevant to our discussion, is Mrs. Haweis' critique of tight stays and their alleged damage to a woman's health. Paradoxically, however, she also goes on to suggest that fitted undergarments (corsets) are essential for properly shaping a woman's body, especially those women who do not possess naturally shapely bodies.<sup>78</sup> She, then, goes on to praise what has become known as Pre-Raphaelite dress, which allowed women freedom of movement through abandoning tightly laced corsets, dropped shoulder sleeves as well as crinolines, all of which were fashionable at this time.<sup>79</sup>

In light of this discussion, it is once again time to return to the woman in *Broken Vows*, and re-consider her dress as one that is symbolic of not only women's emancipation as a result of the Women's Movement, but also of Pre-Raphaelite dress and aesthetics. Calderon, painting in the Pre-Raphaelite style, whether consciously or unconsciously, reveals his admiration for the fashion choices of his heroine—for she is on a path to making important sartorial changes that not only will impact her health, but also her freedom. Clutching at her tightly fitted jacket, she seems fatigued and out of breath, which would have been accelerated by her snugly fitting corset underneath her clothes. Though her skirt looks cumbersome, she has, however, chosen to abandon wearing heavy petticoats, at least somewhat freeing the lower half of her body. The artist, though painting a scene of marital infidelity with moral undertones, is also, in his own way, critiquing popular fashion styles for Victorian women. It is, however, important to differentiate between the regular donning of corsets by Victorian women, and the fetishistic ritual of tight lacing. As argued by Alanna McKnight, the many extant images of women with

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<sup>77</sup> For a range of detailed discussions on the corset debate, see Kunzle, Steele, Wilson, Entwistle and Haweis.

<sup>78</sup> Haweis, 48-49.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson, 209-210.

extremely small waists were as a result of either tight lacing or image re-touching, an unusual phenomenon in the lives of many women in the nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup>

According to Justine De Young “artists were attuned to the significance and signification of dress” however, “their responses to and uses of fashion, while always deliberate, were by no means uniform, ranging from enthusiastic celebration to deliberate rejection and everywhere in between”.<sup>81</sup> More tellingly, and as demonstrated through discussions so far, it is impossible to separate fashion from the body, the body from the woman, and the woman from the society of which she is a member. A woman’s sartorial choices, thus, become imbedded with hope and fears—depending on how they are read and by whom.

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<sup>80</sup> Alanna McKnight, “Damsels in This Dress: Female Agency and the Demise of the Corset,” in *Fashion, Tyranny & Revelation*, (Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2016), 221–230.

<sup>81</sup> Justine de Young, introduction to *Fashion in European Art: Dress and Identity, Politics and the Body, 1775–1925*, (London: I. B. Tauris 2017), 2.

## Case Study 2: The Sartorial Agency of a Victorian Aesthete

It is widely acknowledged by dress historians that many characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite dress from the 1840s had significant influence on and paved the way for Aesthetic dresses of the 1880s. According to Kimberly Wahl, Aesthetic dress should be viewed for not only its stylistic features, but also for its design, production and presentation which adhered to three main principles. For Wahl, the principles comprise of “an implicit critique of fashion, an acknowledgment of clothing as a powerful signifier of both individual and collective identity, and a complex negotiation of modernity in terms of historical precedents.”<sup>82</sup> Though later informed by the growing rhetoric for dress reform, Wahl further situates Aesthetic dress within “a nexus of artistic, political, historical, and philosophical discourses and practices.”<sup>83</sup> It is also important to position Aesthetic dress within the larger context of nineteenth century initiatives by artists and designers to improve British design and industry. This disillusionment was as a result of the inferior quality of British wares displayed at the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. More tellingly, superior Aesthetic sensibilities and taste were largely assumed to be inherently intuitive.<sup>84</sup> That said, the inherent possession of such cultivated Aesthetic taste, ultimately signaled the acquisition of ‘cultural capital’ as posited by Pierre Bourdieu in the “Forms of Capital”.<sup>85</sup> Aesthetic dress was also deeply impacted by the importance of hygienic dress on the overall health of Victorian women, especially with the growing popularity of literature on this topic, such as those published by the *Rational Dress*

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<sup>82</sup> Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting*, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Wahl, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Wahl, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Agnès Rocamora, “Pierre Bourdieu: The Field of Fashion,” in *Thinking through Fashion: A Guide to Key Theorists*. (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 233–250.

*Society's Gazette*.<sup>86</sup> That said, it was widely believed that sartorial change for the better could only be achieved through modes of dress that are not only healthy, but also aesthetically pleasing. Aesthetic dress, of course, belonged to the larger milieu of Aesthetically inspired living, including but not limited to all types of ornamentation, and interior design and decoration. In essence, those belonging to Aesthetic circles, did not only dress in Aesthetic styles, they, rather, *embodied* Aestheticism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, artists and designers belonging to these artistic circles, commonly frequented culturally significant institutions such as the South Kensington Museum (Victoria and Albert Museum) and the Grosvenor Gallery. According to Wahl, these locations became significant sites of visibility within which bodies were Aesthetically presented and seen.<sup>87</sup> Thus, this increased sense of visibility provided a ready stage for the performativity of dressed bodies in “the expression of individual identity.”<sup>88</sup>

James McNeil Whistler was among the many artists who not only belonged to the Aesthetic circle, but he also employed dress as a significant aspect of his paintings. In fact, many art and dress scholars have widely acknowledged the importance of fashion in Whistler's works.<sup>89</sup> *Harmony in Red: Lamplight* (Fig. 9) from 1886 is a portrait of Whistler's wife Beatrice, who was the widow of renowned architect E. W. Goodwin. Beatrice was an artist and designer in her own right and made many important professional contacts on her own merit. While married

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<sup>86</sup> Wahl, 17.

<sup>87</sup> For in-depth analysis of the significance of the Grosvenor Gallery see Kimberly Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in An Age of Reform*.

<sup>88</sup> Wahl, introduction to *Dressed As in a Painting*, xi.

<sup>89</sup> See Margaret F. MacDonald, Susan Grace Galassi, and Aileen Ribeiro. *Whistler, Women & Fashion*. (New York: Frick Collection, 2003); Kimberly Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in An Age of Reform*.

to Goodwin, the couple collaborated on many projects in which Beatrice provided the designs for decoration and textiles.<sup>90</sup>

The most striking aspect of this painting is the manner in which Beatrice is posing. In fact, posing may not be the correct term here, for it implies a sense of artificiality in the subject's stance and attitude. Joanne Woodall describes naturalistic portraiture as "a physiognomic likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of the living or once living person depicted."<sup>91</sup> Likewise, there is something of Beatrice's interiority that is reflected in her exterior attire. Interestingly, this painting may be considered among some of Whistler's less sartorially fashionable works, for Beatrice's outfit is the epitome of understated elegance and simplicity, and, devoid of any ostentatious ornamentation. Her black dress is mostly covered by the large red cloak worn over it and tied into a large bow at the neck. Her sole accessory seems to be her small red bonnet almost disappearing into the vast red wall that she is standing in front of. Though it is difficult to judge given the age of the painting and the quality of reproductions, there is a fiery quality to Whistler's choice of red, which calls to mind burnt sienna. This is not the kind of red that passionate poems are written about, it is rather, the red of familiar intimacy. Interestingly, though exhibited at the Society of British Artists in 1886, the painting did not actually sell, which according to Margaret F. MacDonald may have been due to the work being deemed too personal.<sup>92</sup> Though there is an undeniable sense of intimacy attached to this work, I, personally do not see it as a sign of a developing relationship. In contrast, in my view, this is a painting of female empowerment and agency. Beatrice is standing in a self-assured position with

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<sup>90</sup> Margaret F. MacDonald, "Love and Fashion: The Bernie Philips" in *Whistler, Women, & Fashion*, 187.

<sup>91</sup> Joanna Woodall, introduction to *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>92</sup> MacDonald, "Love and Fashion: The Bernie Philips", 187.

her arms emerging from the armholes of her vast cloak and resting on her waist. Not only does her extended left foot—peeking out from under the skirt of her dress—suggest the lack of any substantial underlying structure that would limit her mobility, but her authoritative pose also lacks the soft “lady-like” manner of idealized Victorian femininity. Ultimately, Beatrice is aware of not only Whistler’s gaze as the artist, but also of the other gazes through which her likeness will be viewed. It is apt here to reiterate John Berger’s suggestion as he articulates the relationship of the gaze as follows:

One might simplify this by saying *men* act and *women* appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.<sup>93</sup>

Beatrice, however, uses this relationship to her advantage and meets the artist’s—as well as the viewer’s—gaze intently and head on; in essence, she is confident, and even confrontational. Likewise, she is the embodiment of Aestheticism and superior taste with her cool demeanor. Borrowing from Kimberly Wahl’s analysis of Whistler’s *Portrait of Miss May Alexander*, from 1873, the Aesthetic interior was just as important to Whistler as was the figure itself, thus, according to Wahl, “an artistic conceit of this kind clearly references the importance of [the] figure as an integral element of an Aesthetic interior.”<sup>94</sup> As such, the corporeal presence of the female body became integral to the making of an Aestheticized space.

Beatrice Whistler possessed not only necessary cultural capital that further cultivated her inherently good taste, but she also, possessed the social capital to display her sartorial Aestheticism. Not only did such access to capital mean physical access to the actual artistic

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<sup>93</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 47.

<sup>94</sup> Wahl, 39.

spaces, but it also meant access to modes of visual representation in the form of portraiture on view at these galleries. As Wahl notes, the growing presence of women at cultural institutions—not only as patrons but also as artists themselves—challenged established notions of Victorian femininity and portraiture. She then goes on to suggest that, Whistler’s representations of women in Aesthetic forms of dress played an important role in bringing that Aesthetic feminine sartorial agency into the fore of artistic production and consumption. Additionally, with her previous knowledge of textiles through her research on costumes at the British Museum, Beatrice was in a position of Aesthetic authority.<sup>95</sup> Beatrice is also in a position of privilege for she is familiar with the “spaces and exchanges” that take place within Aesthetic places.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, an Aestheticized space such as the Grosvenor Gallery, meant that, she—along with other female Aesthetes—was highly aware of “simultaneously occupy[ing] subject positions as both agents of Aesthetic sensibility and objects of Aesthetic contemplation.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Wahl, 68.

<sup>96</sup> Pollock, “Modernity and Spaces of Femininity”, 74.

<sup>97</sup> Wahl, 71.

### Case Study 3: A Sartorial Allegory for Victorian Female Friendship and Artistic Labour

In paintings, such as *The Keepsake* (1898–1901), by Kate Elizabeth Bunce, (Fig. 10) Victorian preoccupations with morality, gender roles and sexuality are artfully cloaked in Medievalist notions of religious piety, feminine fidelity, and male chivalry. Born and raised in Birmingham, Bunce was an accomplished painter in her own right, who not only painted in the Pre-Raphaelite style, but also worked in the long-abandoned medium of egg-tempera. Thus, not only did her work resemble the art of the past with its Medievaesque composition and elements—as did the works by the Pre-Raphaelites—but, perhaps most importantly, due to her choice of medium, her works have an inherent medieval quality that could only be detected in actual medieval art also created in egg tempera. As an allegorical painting based on a poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Keepsake*, is filled with social and historical messages.

According to Deborah Cherry, “Allegory’s double readings place art and image, art and politics, in reciprocal connection, in a relationship that implies exchange and mutual transformation rather than causality or antecedence.”<sup>98</sup> That said, Bunce’s use of historicized allegorical themes and symbols is made modern through her subtle engagement with the growing popularity of hand-crafted techniques, particularly those championed in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Despite the fact that by the later decades of the nineteenth century, during which Bunce was active as an artist, women had become major contributors to the creation of art and art objects, there still remained a separation between spaces deemed ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. In fact, this gendered division of spaces was quite prevalent in the city of Birmingham, which would have surely impacted women artists including Bunce.<sup>99</sup> This problematic hierarchy of

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<sup>98</sup> Cherry, *Beyond the Frame*, 216.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Pollock, *Vision and Difference*, 96. For full paper, see Catherine Hall and Leonore Davidoff, “The architecture of public and private life: English middle-class society in a

female vs male agency, is a concept highlighted by Anthea Callen, especially in relation to the division of labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement. Callen also underlines the accepted roles of middle-class women and the ideal goal of attaining a husband and marriage within the safe interiority of the home. Thus, while she acknowledges the contribution of women within the Arts and Crafts Movement, she shows reluctance to move past the patriarchal division of sexual labour perpetuated by the same movement. She positions such asymmetric agency of the sexes as an inherent element of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood—the movement from which the Arts and Crafts movement was born—as so aptly the label itself implies.<sup>99</sup> In a much more recent essay, Jan Marsh also problematizes the gendered nature of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and its marginalization of women through their exclusion from significant spaces of engagement and visibility, such as those offered through the membership in the movement’s key associations.<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, however, another essay by Lynne Walker—published within the same anthology as Anthea Callen—suggests a new and more positive approach to the role of women within the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>101</sup> Here, without disregarding the important contributions by Callen, Walker argues against the rigid reading of an overtly gendered and patriarchal division of labour in the Arts and Crafts. In fact, she attributes much of the recognition, visibility and even financial independence of women artists gained during this time to the inclusivity of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

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provincial town 1780–1850”, in Derek Fraser and Anthony Sutcliffe (eds), in *Pursuit of Urban History*, (London, Edward Arnold, 1983), 326–46.

<sup>99</sup> Anthea Callen, “Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 151–164.

<sup>100</sup> Jan Marsh, “Women Artists and the Decorative Arts 1880–1935,” in *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts, 1880–1935: The Gender of Ornament*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 36.

<sup>101</sup> Lynne Walker, “The Arts and Crafts Alternative,” in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, (London: Women's Press, 1988), 165–173.

Similar to most other works by Pre-Raphaelite artists, Bunce has created an interior space that is shallow and claustrophobic, with hardly any negative space to rest the eye upon. Though full of symbolic clues as to the tragic tale of romantic love and its loss, it is the female figures that take up most of the pictorial space, rather than the objects. In fact, the place within which Bunce has situated her female companions, resembles what Griselda Pollock calls ‘the spaces of labour’.<sup>102</sup> Here, then, Bunce has represented the familiar and perhaps even domestic space within which she and her fellow artists and companions engage in the labour of artistic production and creativity. In this crowded scene, there are many references to the Arts and Crafts Movement, with the abundance of creative productions, such as weaving, stained glass and jewellery, and metalwork, amongst others.<sup>103</sup> Thus, Bunce has not only depicted an allegory based on Rossetti’s poem, but most importantly, she has created an allegory for the artistic genius of women. According to Pollock, “The spaces of femininity operated not only at the level of what is represented”, but the spaces within which femininity is actually lived. Furthermore, “They are the product of a lived sense of social locatedness, mobility and visibility.”<sup>104</sup> Bunce has respectively, produced an image of female creativity and artistic agency as a lived experience for women artists such as herself.

Given the prominence of female bodies within this work, it is fitting to approach it through a visual analysis of represented dress. Most significantly, in *The Keepsake*, Bunce has painted her female companions from her social circle, as models for the figures of the queen and

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<sup>102</sup> Pollock, “Modernity and Spaces of Femininity,” 78.

<sup>103</sup> Martin Ellis, Victoria Osborne, and T. J. Barringer, and Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*, (New York: American Federation of Arts, 2018), 245.

<sup>104</sup> Pollock’s “Modernity and Spaces of Femininity,” 93.

her attendants.<sup>105</sup> In fact, the model for the figure on the right is Ethel Newil, with familial ties to the Birmingham artistic community; the figure in the patterned green dress and holding a staff is that of another friend, Katie Palmer; and finally, the enthroned figure of the queen is modeled after the artist's cousin. The carpet loom behind the queen's throne demonstrates the important craft of weaving within the Arts and Crafts Movement and one undertaken within the interior space of domesticity. Additionally, however, according to Deborah Cherry, "With its knots and breaks, slacks and tensions, and its fabric of interconnections, weaving provides a useful analogy for uneven and changing patterns and textures of friendship shaped by proximity and distance".<sup>113</sup> Represented within this scene of allegorical companionship between a queen and her attendants, is the real friendship and collaboration between Bunce and her own female friends. Thus, this scene exhibits notions of female friendships and close bonds between Victorian women.<sup>106</sup> Though the representation of women within Victorian painting is not an unusual happening in and of itself, as Sharon Marcus notes, it is usually in relation to male relatives: husbands, fathers, or even brothers.<sup>107</sup> *The Keepsake*, then, is interesting for its lack of male figures, with its all-female cast of characters. That said, it is of course, naïve to ignore the pilgrim's staff and purse, which stand in for the body of the lost male lover. However, the staff is nevertheless carried by a female figure, which is not without significance—after all, the artist could have easily shown the moment of a male messenger returning the pilgrim's staff to the court, which would have undoubtedly had a more gendered association with the masculine. Also,

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<sup>105</sup> See the online information section of the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery for this painting.

<sup>113</sup> Cherry, 12.

<sup>106</sup> For a more nuanced discussion of Victorian female friendships and sexuality see Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>107</sup> Sharon Marcus, introduction to *Between Women*, 9.

it is almost possible to consider the staff as a pictorial device in the division of space in terms of the overall composition. The figure, holding the staff, is represented in profile, looking towards the queen in a medieval-inspired dress reminiscent of the dresses worn by women in other Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Before the Battle* (Fig. 11) and John Everett Millais's *Mariana* (Fig. 12). It is also interesting to note that, according to an exhibition catalogue to mark Liberty of London's Centenary, held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1975, 'shop walkers' working for the firm wore similar style dresses in velvet (Fig. 13)—a custom that may have begun in the 1890s and continued to be practiced until 1932.<sup>108</sup> Both in terms of style and the use of patterned fabric, this garment also brings to mind the dress in William Morris's painting, *La Belle Iseult* (Fig. 14). Painted in 1858, Morris has depicted Jane Burden, whom he married in 1859, as Queen Guenevere from the tale of Tristan and Iseult. Also, it is likely that Bunce may have seen a court dress by designer and dressmaker, Sarah Fullerton Monteith Young, active in the 1890s. Among Monteith Young's wealthy clientele were Mrs. G. W. and her daughter, who commissioned dresses and matching shoes for their audience with Queen Victoria on May 9, 1893.<sup>109</sup> This particular silk dress from the City of Birmingham Collection (Fig. 15) is one of the two dresses, and was made using a printed fabric designed by William Morris and produced by Morris & Co.

Unlike the more quasi-medieval styles of garments worn by the other two attendants, the green gown worn by this particular figure resembles fabrics with floral patterns designed by prominent Arts and Crafts designers such as Charles Francis Voysey (Figs. 16 and 17). Many of

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<sup>108</sup> *Liberty's 1875–1975: An Exhibition to Mark the Firm's Centenary*, Victoria and Albert Museum, July–October 1975, 39.

<sup>109</sup> Martin Ellis, Victoria Osborne, and T. J. Barringer, and Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*, (New York: American Federation of Arts, 2018), 198.

Voysey's earlier patterns were influenced by William Morris, whom he admired immensely, however, according to Karen Livingston, his later designs were uniquely his own.<sup>110</sup> Of course, it must be noted that historical medieval dresses may have also been made from patterned fabrics, however, the particular design of this pattern is significantly of its time. Thus, standing in a hybrid style of dress that is neither of the past, nor entirely of the moment, this figure is caught in a state of sartorial transition.

On the other side of the picture plane, is the enthroned figure of the queen, which is in stark contrast to the other figures. Her mildly slouched figure and the placement of her hands at her sides, bring to mind the beggar maid's figure from Edward Burne-Jones' *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* painted in 1884 (Fig.18). Unlike the semi-nude form of Jones' figure in her form-fitting semi-sheer dress, with her body offered to the viewer for contemplation, Bunce's queen is not sexually idealized. Though her long flowing brown hair—a style highly unusual and unaccepted within polite Victorian society—caresses her shoulders intimately, it is not sexually enticing. In fact, through her enthroned physical stance and turned gaze, the queen embodies a superior sense of nonchalance. Her gown is a sartorial fusion of Pre-Raphaelite and Artistic dress—there are elements of both styles such as the belt and the Watteau pleat visible by her side. It is possible that the queen's dress is entirely an object of the artist's imagination, rather than an actual garment. Bunce has rendered the translucent quality of her egg-shell coloured silk dress—available at artistic shops such as Liberty's (Figs. 19 and 20)—through the medium of egg-tempera, enabling her to build up the layers of paint in a manner that oil paint would simply not allow for as successfully. Additionally, this dress is an example of superior embroidery

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<sup>110</sup> Karen Livingstone, introduction to *C. F. A. Voysey: Arts & Crafts Designer* (London: V&A Publishing, 2016), 16.

skills—a significant artistic pursuit for women artists and designers in the Arts and Crafts Movement. In fact, there are some shared similarities between the overall style of this dress and its embroideries at the bottom borders of the figure’s skirt, with *Minstrel with Cymbals* (Fig. 21), an 1890s embroidery by May Morris. Though the association of embroidery and women has been the topic of debate for its gendered divisions of labour, in the case of this particular painting, it could be read as an emblem of female empowerment.<sup>111</sup> Defying such gendered biases, women, nevertheless, managed to become master embroiders and designers—of course, with May Morris being a perfect example. Unfortunately, however, as Jan Marsh laments, May Morris with her significant contributions to the Arts and Crafts Movement has tended to be under-recognized within the overall context of the movement. That said, fortunately, her importance is gradually being acknowledged, especially with the more recent publication of *May Morris: Arts and Crafts Designer* in association with the exhibition “May Morris: Art and Life” at the William Morris Gallery in London, from October 2017 to January 2019.

Through *The Keepsake*, not only has Kate Elizabeth Bunce demonstrated her own superior skill as an artist, but she has also illustrated a richly painted tale of Pre-Raphaelite artistry, Aesthetic style of artistic women, and most importantly the significant contribution of women to the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Thus, this painting illustrates Bunce’s cognizance of history and modernity by drawing attention to the nuanced manner in which it straddles closely connected, yet distinct artistic movements. Ultimately, through changing sartorial styles, *The Keepsake* signals nineteenth century women’s growing demands for personal emancipation and political suffrage. This revised reading of a work by a woman may not be too

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<sup>111</sup> For discussion on gender division of labour see Anthea Callen, “Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 151–164.

far from the truth, given that Deborah Cherry suggests that “The distinctive characteristics of the ‘new woman’ were personal freedom, individualism and the making of an independent life organized around work, socializing unchaperoned in mixed company, and living in rented accommodation rather than the family home.”<sup>112</sup> As the product of an artist working at the turn of the century, Kate Elizabeth Bunce’s *The Keepsake* must have encouraged aspiring women artists, designers, and makers, to remain steadfast and focused on their goal of artistic development.

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<sup>112</sup> Cherry, 153.

### **Conclusion: A Feminist Reading of the Fashioned Female Body in Victorian Art**

This major Research Project (MRP) began as a result of my academic interest in the two disciplines of art history and fashion studies. As I developed my focus, I realized that it is the embodied aspect of dress as represented in art that I am most interested in, rather than the close examination of extant garments. Though an extant garment is a valued form of material culture, it nevertheless, resembles a shell, wanting a corporeal body to fill its emptiness. The presence of a clothed body—whether real or as a representation in art—tends to animate the embodied narratives of a garment and give agency to its wearer. Thus, my approach is motivated by my fascination with the embodied aspects of the dressed female body and its underlying connotations within a particular social or cultural context. Furthermore, there is something special—essential even—in the slowly layered representation of a clothed body in paintings, as opposed to the instantaneously captured photographic image, or the unnaturally mechanical bodies of fashion illustrations.

The aim of this project is not to re-define the canon of art history, or to revolutionize the study of fashion. Instead, it is an attempt to re-examine the representation of women in the nineteenth-century British art of painting through the analysis of the clothed female body. As a woman and as a feminist, I have to emphasize that this project has been largely informed by the vital research of feminist art historians and scholars, who continue to challenge the pre-established patriarchal notions of art history. The close analysis of the works of art included in this study, have revealed many important aspects of a Victorian woman's sense of embodiment and sartorial agency within the rigid, yet changing Victorian society. In fact, this concept of change and growth, has been most prominently evident through the art works studied—the women discussed, utilized their dressed bodies to redefine their position within society.

A close analysis of the woman's embodiment of fashion in *Broken Vows*, by Philip Hemogenes Calderon, reveals the underlying patriarchal aspects of Victorian marriage and society. It also, however, highlights the many ways in which a woman's personal agency is vested in her sartorial choices. This painting is, therefore, an image of female emancipation, rather than subordination. *The Awakening Conscience* by William Holman Hunt, reveals the problematic notions of female sexuality—through the evocative body of a woman in a state of dress, or undress—in the prevailing gender politics of nineteenth century England. Similarly, the obscure and unintelligible garments of the woman in Alfred Elmore's *On the Brink*, exposes the precarious position of women within a patriarchal society that denies them equal rights—leaving women at the mercy of men. The two latter paintings, however, place the empowerment of women at the center of their narrative. In James McNeill Whistler's *Harmony in Red: Lamplight*, Beatrice Whistler's aesthetically dressed body is perfectly at home within the larger social context of the Aesthetic Movement. She is the embodiment of female agency and power, confidently subverting the highly gendered notion of the gaze. And finally, in *The Keepsake*, Kate Elizabeth Bunce has created a painting—cloaked in medieval allegory—yet, representative of the contemporary genius of women as artists. Though rich with visual imagery, the dressed female bodies are the most vital aspects of this painting, and through the re-imagination of historical fashion, Bunce, has illustrated the very important and multifaceted contribution of women to British art and design.

There have been a vast number of books written on the history of art, and as a result each work of art—including the ones discussed in this study—have become imbued with a unique set

of meanings.<sup>114</sup> This study, however, aims to re-visit these narratives and look at them anew through the lens of fashion. As demonstrated by the case studies herein discussed, this new lens could help lift the patriarchal veil of female subordination, and instead, reveal the sartorial agency of empowered and intelligent women. Of course, this new approach does not disregard the research of previous historians or refute their analysis, in contrast, it contributes to the discourse surrounding the representation of women in art. As this research project illustrates, dress is the holder of many socio-cultural, economic and even political meanings, and as a direct result of that, a clothed body is thus, cloaked in such meanings.

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<sup>114</sup> For a brief discussion of some of these printed texts, please see the section on “General Sources on Art and Fashion,” as well as the Bibliography.

## General Sources on Art and Fashion

It is possible to divide existing literature on the subject of art and fashion into two categories: A) an entire book or an anthology of essays; and B) a comprehensive catalogue published in association with an exhibition, usually held at a major museum or cultural institution. The latter could be further divided into two sub-categories: B1) an exhibition highlighting the creative output of an entire milieu or art movement; and B2) an exhibition on the artistic oeuvre of one particular artist.

*Fashion in Art: The Second Empire and Impressionism* (1995) by Marie Simon is concerned with nineteenth century French art. In *Ingres in Fashion* (1995) Aileen Ribeiro closely analyzes works by Ingres whose skillful renditions of dress inspired many other artists to faithfully capture the dress of their fashionable sitters. Barbara Bryant's *GF Watts Portraits: Fame & Beauty in Victoria Society* (2004) published by the National Portrait Gallery in London, celebrates the artistic contributions of Watts to the art of portraiture. As it is stated clearly by its title, in *Art and Fashion: The Impact of Art on Fashion and Fashion on Art* (2005) Alice Mackrell brings much needed attention to the important relationship between these two cultural modes of production. In *Fashion in Impressionist Paris* (2012) Debra N. Mancoff, surveys some of the most significant art-works imbued with the essence of the modern society and reflects on modernity through capturing the sartorially fashionable men and women city dwellers. *Fashion and Art* (2012, 2014) is an anthology of essays by some of the most prominent scholars in the field, and it is edited by Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas. In *A Portrait of Fashion* (2015) Aileen Ribeiro examines six centuries of dress at the National Portrait Gallery in London. *Fashion in European Art: Dress and Identity, Politics and the Body, 1775–1925* published in 2017 and edited by Justine De Young is another anthology of essays on this topic and an

important source which moves beyond the aesthetic relationship between these two spheres. And finally, *Clothing Art: The Visual Culture of Fashion, 1600–1914* is a mammoth text by Aileen Ribeiro, whose nuanced account here is focused on French and English art.

*Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art & Fashion* (1998–1999) was published in conjunction with the exhibition held at the Hayward Gallery in London. This is one of the earliest instances where the importance of art and fashion were brought into the fore at a cultural institution and paved the way for fashion to occupy the white cube of the art museum and gallery. Similarly, *Whistler, Women, & Fashion* (2003) published in association with an exhibition at the Frick Collection in New York City, is a text in which the authors discuss the importance of fashion in Whistler's art and his paintings of nineteenth century women.

*Impressionism, Fashion & Modernity* (2012) edited by Gloria Groom is considered one of the first exhibitions/catalogues in which fashion is discussed as critical aspect of modernity.

## Figures



Figure 1. Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *The Empress Eugenie Surrounded by her Ladies in Waiting*, Oil paint on Canvas, 1855. Musée du Second Empire, Compiègne.



Figure 2. Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Queen Victoria*, Oil paint on canvas, 1859. Royal Collection Trust, Buckingham Palace, London.



Figure 3. Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *The Royal Family in 1846*, Oil paint on canvas, 1846. Royal Collection Trust, Buckingham Palace, London.



Figure 4. Philip Hemogenes Calderon, *Broken Vows*, Oil paint on canvas, 1856. Tate Gallery, London.



Figure 5. François-Claudins Compté-Calix and Gabriel Xavier Montaut d'Oleron, *Two women in day dresses by Maison Minette*. (Les Modes Parisiennes, early 1850s, Victoria and Albert Museum, London).



Figure 6. *Cool Request*, 1857, Published in *Punch Magazine*.



Figure 7. William Holman Hunt, *The Awakening Conscience*, Oil paint on canvas, 1853. Tate Gallery, London.



Figure 8. Alfred Elmore, *On the Brink*, Oil paint on canvas. 1865. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Figure 9. James McNeill Whistler, *Harmony in Red: Lamplight*, Oil paint on canvas, 1886. Hunteran Art Gallery, Glasgow.



Figure 10. Kate Elizabeth Bunce, *The Keepsake*, Tempera on canvas, 1901. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.



Figure 11. Sir John Everett Millais, *Mariana*, Oil paint on Mahogany, 1851. Tate Gallery, London.



Figure 12. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Before the Battle*, Watercolour, 1858. The Rossetti Archive.



Figure 13. *Liberty Dress*, Purple Velvet, c.1929. *Liberty's 1875–1975 Exhibition Catalogue*.



Figure 14. William Morris. *Le Belle Iseult*, Oil paint on canvas, 1858. Tate Gallery, London.



Figure 15. Sarah Fullerton Monteith Young, *Silk Court dress*, 1893. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.



Figure 16. C. F. A. Voysey, *Gothic*, 1900. Jacquard woven wool and cotton. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 17. C. F. A. Voysey, 1900. Printed cotton. Designed for Liberty's. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 18. Edward Burne-Jones, *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid*, Oil paint on canvas, 1884. Tate Gallery, London.



Figure 19. A. E. Howarth, “‘Josephine’, an empire style evening dress made from silk crêpe, or satin, and finished with hand-embroidery and beads”. Watercolour, 1905, “Dress and Decoration Catalogue for Liberty’s” in *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration*, by Stephen Calloway (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992) 70.



Figure 20. A. E. Howarth, “‘Helen’ Empire tea gown of flowered crêpe de chin or gauze”. Watercolour, 1905, “Dress and Decoration Catalogue for Liberty’s” in *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration*, by Stephen Calloway (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992) 71.



Figure 21. May Morris, *Minstrel with Cymbal*, Hand embroidery, c. 1890, in May Morris, Anna Mason, Jan Marsh, and Jenny Lister. *May Morris: Arts & Crafts Designer*. (Thames & Hudson; London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2017), 121.

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