

The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature



**The
Woman Painter
in Victorian
Literature**

ANTONIA LOSANO



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Cover: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *A Parable of Love (Love's Mirror)*. Reproduced by permission of the Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery.

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In Memoriam

Sarah Louise DeRolph Wampler

1908–2000

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INTRODUCTION



“What power! This is the way women should assert their rights!”

George Eliot, on seeing a painting by Rosa Bonheur.

(Letter to Sara Hennell, August 19, 1857. *George Eliot Letters*, 2: 377)

I.

WHY SHOULD George Eliot, who used words to assert her rights, declare that *painting* was the medium in which women could best demonstrate social power? Painting had enormous resonance and significance for Eliot, so it is understandable that she might have seen in a female painter the promise of women’s political and artistic success.¹ But a remarkable number of other nineteenth-century women novelists shared Eliot’s belief that the woman painter was the century’s strongest source of female social and creative potential, and they translated that belief into the creation of fictional women painters. Virginia Woolf’s Lily Briscoe did not emerge from a vacuum; Woolf would have seen the figure of the woman painter surprisingly often in the works of her Victorian foremothers. Charles Tansley’s stuttered pronouncement—“women can’t paint, women can’t write”—that haunts Lily throughout *To the Lighthouse* and stifles her creativity makes it clear that Woolf, like the Victorian writers I discuss in this study, recognized the intense interplay between her own medium and Lily’s. Woolf echoes numerous Victorian women writers in her belief that these two media of female aesthetic production are intimately connected in myriad ways, their fortunes rising and falling in tandem.

That Victorian women novelists embraced the figure of the woman painter as emblematic of the “Woman Question” more generally is perhaps

unsurprising given the public prominence of women painters at the time: the nineteenth century saw a marked rise both in the sheer numbers of women active in art professions and in the discursive concern for the woman artist in the periodical press, art history, and political debate. Census figures show that the number of women who chose to officially call themselves professional female artists doubled between 1851 and 1871; the number steadily increased as the century wore on.² As the numbers increased, so did the public debate over the role of women in the visual arts; one art historian has aptly termed the increasing public discourse concerning women in art an “unprecedented fuss” (Gillett 1990, 3). The Victorian woman painter was a “contested image,” to use Mary Poovey’s term;³ she was a figure whose ideological constitution and function (how she was perceived and constructed by the culture) varied tremendously. As Poovey argues, “Any image that is important to a culture constitutes an arena of ideological construction rather than simple consolidation” (1988, 9). The woman painter, like Poovey’s well-known example of the governess, posed a considerable ideological problem: on the one hand, women were considered “naturally” artistic—sensitive and devoted to beauty—yet were simultaneously thought to be incapable of true artistic creativity or judgment. In a similar paradox, women were seen as necessary to art as models and muses, yet at the same time discouraged from participating in the artistic arena for modesty’s sake (one might think here of M. Paul’s reaction to Lucy Snowe’s viewing of the Cleopatra painting in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*). But in spite of these ideological tensions, women were demonstrably entering the art world in droves and increasingly succeeding, causing enormous upheaval in the aesthetic as well as social beliefs of the time. And precisely because of these tensions, the woman painter was an “ideological formulation,” in Poovey’s words again (1988, 3), which was put to use by different institutions, individuals, or groups for different purposes.

The Victorian women writers I consider here used the figure of the woman painter as a kind of Foucauldian “dense transfer point” of power relations to engage with and intervene in the symbolic economies of gender (in particular those that underpinned the discourses of aesthetics, sexual desire, and professional identity) that were at work during the nineteenth century (Foucault 1990, 103). At the outset, I attempt to give some sense of the broader cultural discourse surrounding the woman painter—a discourse to which the women novelists considered next both contributed and reacted. While feminist literary scholarship of the past thirty years has extensively and perceptively studied the nineteenth-century woman writer, no sustained examination of the historical and discursive connections *between* women painters and women writers in the nineteenth century has yet been undertaken; nor has the immense influence of the history, aesthetics, and economics of women’s painting on

women's fiction been explored. I set out here to examine how the complex involvement of women in the nineteenth-century art world impacted the work of women writers of the same period, roughly 1848–1900. At base is the assumption that women's achievements in the visual arts and the public fervor surrounding their struggles to achieve artistic success were neither unknown nor unimportant to women working in other disciplines.⁴

In examining fictional representations of women painters, I focus in particular on what I term the *scene of painting*, which includes not just descriptions of fictional artwork but representations of the act and process of painting and, equally often, of the reception and judgment of women's artworks. I argue that these scenes of painting offer fully formed and often radical aesthetic, literary, and social critiques. These scenes function as sites from which women writers articulate a wide variety of concerns: the fraught material and ideological conditions of women's artistic production, the changing social role of the woman artist, the gender bias of philosophical aesthetics, and the persistent eroticization of women in art. Simply put, these scenes of painting offer us contained aesthetic and sociopolitical treatises in narrative form.

In these fraught fictional moments, Victorian women writers pose a series of fundamental social, ideological, and aesthetic problems. They ask the traditional aesthetic questions—what is art? what is beauty? what are the criteria for judging the two? what qualities are required in a great artist?—but add to each of these the explicit rider, *when the artist or viewer is a woman*, a woman moreover impacted by specific historic, cultural, and ideological forces? If aesthetics itself, as Terry Eagleton writes, “began as a discourse of the body” (1990, 13), surely, then (although Eagleton rarely considers it), the *gender* of that body is profoundly important. The novelists discussed in this study ask how women artists fit into the grand traditions of Art, and they expose what might be incoherent, illogical, or just plain wrong with those traditions. What happens, these texts ask, to the history of aesthetic perception when the art object under consideration has been created by a woman? Can a woman's art ever be judged without reference to her gender? Can the art world be made accessible to women, and at what cost? What kind of social, economic, and ideological barriers limit a woman artist's development, and how can these be broken down? How can women artists unravel the seemingly inextricable link between art and erotic desire? How can women mine the liberatory potential of art as a source of emotional, spiritual, or financial satisfaction and tap the potentially radical transformative power of the woman artist to make significant changes in social, cultural, and political arenas?

Finally, these women writers question the ways in which women's painting might mirror women's writing. I suggest throughout this book that women novelists use the figure of the woman painter not only to engage

with social and aesthetic debates about art in general, but also to consider the cultural position of their own medium. Indeed, both artistic media (painting and literature) were undergoing similar transformations during the period. For example, the Victorians inherited the eighteenth-century hierarchy that ordained History painting as the highest of High Art, with landscape art, portraiture, and still life taking their places farther down the totem pole. But by the mid-nineteenth century, the popularity of genre art began to scramble the old hierarchies; the art public flocked to see William Powell Frith's *Derby Day* and hailed it as High Art as well as a representation of everyday life. With the rise of the aesthetic movement, the influence of the egalitarian art theories of Ruskin and Morris, and the increasing public interest in interior design, the old notions of High Art—as confined to a few genres and available only to the elite—crumbled still further. Women entered this changing art world as engravers, illustrators, designers of textiles or china—or as painters in the traditional genres of High Art. The novel participated in a similar opening up of hierarchical conceptions of art. At the start of the nineteenth century, the novel stood in the shade of Poetry, which was considered the highest of literary arts. As the century progressed, this devaluation of the novel gave way—in dramatic fashion—to the enormous prestige of the Victorian realist novel.⁵ But many women novel writers still struggled, as did women painters, against an ingrained ideology which insisted that cultural productions by women, no matter the media, were inherently barred from the realm of High Art. Only two of the writers I examine here—George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë—were in their lifetime or after considered solidly High Art; the others were considered popular writers and have subsequently been relegated to “noncanonical” status (Anne Brontë is the exception here, resting as she does uneasily on the border between the two). My focus on noncanonical women writers—specifically Margaret Oliphant, Anna Mary Howitt, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Charlotte Yonge, Dinah Craik, and Mary Ward—means that questions of the gendering of aesthetic value are never far from the center of my analysis. By dramatizing the experiences and productions of women painters, these women writers were able to offer—however obliquely—their views on the shaky position of the woman's novel in Victorian culture. By reexamining these largely forgotten novels, contemporary scholars can similarly theorize the place of women writers in the Victorian canon.

II.

In investigating the interplay between literature and painting, my project is part of a large body of recent criticism called “interart criticism,” alternately

called “word and image studies”—both being a branch of the much larger and vibrant field of “interdisciplinary studies.” Interart criticism is an enormous and varied field, including studies of the influence of painting on particular authors,⁶ broader studies that argue for similarities across art media in the same historical period,⁷ studies in the way narrative relies on or makes use of the more formal elements of painting (description, perspective, fore- and background, etc.),⁸ and theoretical or historical studies of “the visual” as such.⁹ Most frequently, of course, interart literary criticism is a mixed bag, relying on historical, stylistic, biographical, and theoretical investigations. Recent interart scholarship on the Victorian novel—and on Victorian culture more generally—has highlighted the extremely visual nature of the genre and the social order in which it flourished. As Kate Flint argues, “The Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, and with the question of the reliability—or otherwise—of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw” (2000, 1). In *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, Flint explores the proliferation of visual images, techniques, practices, and theories that exploded in the nineteenth century. Historians (literary and otherwise) of the nineteenth century have written extensively on this explosion in a number of registers; the century saw, among other visual events, the advent of photography (plus a host of other technological marvels); the popularity of illustration in fiction; a rise in scopic controls within psychology, law, and empire; scientific treatises on vision and the structure of the eye; and not least an overwhelming literary obsession with visual description.¹⁰ Literary critics have explored the different ways that literature can borrow from, depend on, and interact with painting; many critics have suggested further that nineteenth-century writers in particular were indebted to, and even obsessed with, the visual arts. Victorian writers themselves regularly celebrated the connection between writing and painting: “The analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete,” writes Henry James in *The Art of Fiction* (1984, 187). More subtly, and slightly later, Virginia Woolf muses in her essay on Walter Sickert on the similarities: “Let us hold painting by the hand a moment longer, for though they must part in the end, painting and writing have much to tell each other; they have much in common. The novelist after all wants to make us see” (1950, 181).

Sophia Andres argues that this obsession with the visual realm, particularly with painting, put heavy pressure on Victorian writers. The perceived intimacy between the two arts generated “a set of pictorial demands placed on novelists, [who were] expected not only to be masters of the art of narrative but also to be familiar with the visual arts. . . . They were expected to understand painterly techniques to such an extent as to be able to employ

them in their narratives or, even further, to transform pictorial into narrative techniques” (2005, xix). In this same vein, numerous critics draw the connection between the centrality of the visible and the rise to prominence of realism as an artistic ideal; the lexicon of painting was thought to provide writers with the techniques they needed to generate satisfactory realist texts. Mack Smith, for example, argues that “the language of the realism movement has such a strong bias for visual metaphors because the movement itself is grounded in painting” (1995, 243). Similarly, Peter Brooks writes that realism “makes the visual the master relation to the world . . . ; knowing those things is a matter of viewing them, detailing them, and describing the concrete milieu in which men and women enact their destinies. To know, in realism, is to see, and to represent is to describe” (1993, 88). Nancy Armstrong, too, argues that practices of visual representation and strategies of literary representation evolved together; fiction came to “equate seeing with knowing and made visual information the basis for the intelligibility of verbal narrative” (1999, 7–8).

The obsession with the visual arts meant that Victorian writers not only used painterly techniques in their works but also regularly included in their novels paintings themselves—real or imagined. Smith offers, in an appendix to *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition*, a remarkably concise rundown on the possible meanings of painting in realist nineteenth-century fiction. Most frequently, he argues, novelists use painting as a “reflexive tool” (1995, 244), a way to express and define their aesthetic principles (Zola is the writer Smith most associates with this tradition). In specific instances, novelists use painting to depict failed representation, or a flawed form of representation that is set against the more successful form of the novel itself. Dickens, for example, in *Little Dorrit* contrasts the dishonest (misrepresentational) portraits painted by Henry Gowan with the more honest representations of the novel itself. Paintings may also be used to express character, as when Jane Eyre’s three watercolors are seen to “reflect her view of herself and the world,”¹¹ or when a painting is seen as a harbinger of death or a similar narrative signal.

Other critics argue for specific narrative uses of specific kinds of visual arts. Françoise Meltzer, for example, in *Salome and the Dance of Writing* focuses on verbal representations of portraits in literary texts from a wide range of time periods. She writes, “The presentation of a portrait in a text particularizes the hierarchical stance writing wishes to assume in the face not only of the eidetic image (which . . . writing always strains to reduce to its own medium), but of representation itself as well” (1987, 215). Meltzer also argues that “the portrait is so convenient a measure for the power given to representation in a text” (2), but for Meltzer the portrait, because it “retains

an element of alterity" (11), is often an unwanted presence within a literary work. In Meltzer's terms, the image often "play[s] Arachne to literature's Minerva" (215) and is finally punished for its difference. Concentrating more specifically on nineteenth-century literature, Alison Byerly's investigation of references to visual art, music, and theater in realist fiction leads her to a similar argument: she suggests that such references are "insistent reminders of the disjunction between art and life" which "threaten to sabotage the realist claim to unmediated representation. Such persistent allusions to art must, it would seem, have a purpose beyond mere decoration in order to be worth the risk" (1997, 2). In both these analyses, reactions to art within the novel model modes of aesthetic judgment and artistic consumption; paying particular attention to scenes of aesthetic judgment in fiction allows us to decode writers' theories of representation.

In addition to such studies of the inclusion (or intrusion) of visual arts in literature, we must add investigations of painter-figures as characters within narrative. As Bo Jeffares and Mack Smith argue, the nineteenth century saw a proliferation of the painter-hero in English and Continental fiction. Jeffares and Smith consider almost exclusively male painter-figures;¹² although a varied bunch, male painters in literature can be characterized broadly as partaking powerfully of the Romantic ideal even once the value of that ideal had markedly depreciated. Male painters were depicted as outsiders; Casteras notes that male artists in novels "establish recognizable traits of an idealized romantic artist who was bohemian, flamboyant, tormented or struggling, moody or soulful, and often imbued with a Promethean spirit that allied him with the alleged divinity of genius" (1992, 209). The female artists depicted by Victorian women novelists regularly partake of this mythos—they too are represented as being in diverse ways outside the scope of traditional bourgeois culture. Their artistic impulses are both the psychological cause and the narrative effect of their otherness; in other words, these novelists represent a woman's artistic nature as both responsible for her desire to escape gender norms and the symbol of that desire. But as we shall see, these women painters' outsider status is materially and socially instantiated, rather than emotionally depicted as it is with the male artist-heroes of the period. Artist-heroines are generally too busy trying to make a living to indulge in expressions of artistic angst.

In this study, I ask what narrative work is done by references to painting and painters in fiction by women, arguing that such narrative references are self-reflexive moments, articulating not simply writers' large-scale aesthetic and social opinions but their literary theories as well. However, I make several departures from current interart scholarship. Critics have tended to read the

painter figure as a simple extension of the writer; Deborah Ellen Barker, for example, argues persuasively (apropos of painter-heroines in American fiction) that “the woman painter-as-heroine . . . provided women writers with an artistic alter-ego, and allowed them to explore issues of creativity and sexuality which conflicted with the limitations of feminine decorum that readers and critics often expected of the woman writer” (2000, 2). Although it is certainly accurate to suggest, as Barker does, that women painters in both Britain and America were often more radical (sexually and politically) than their sister artists (women writers), it is an oversimplification to see the painter-heroine as a mere fictional double for the woman writer. I therefore rarely draw a one-to-one correspondence between the woman writer and the woman painter, for while this is certainly a significant part of the story, I hope to suggest here that the painter figure in these novels goes well beyond an alter ego; these are *Künstlerromane*, certainly, but not primarily personal ones.¹³ If these fictional women painters do not easily lend themselves to biographical readings, they likewise cannot be read as simple historical reflections; that is, few of the artist-heroines in these novels are directly modeled on historical characters. Rather, the fictional women artists appear to be composite creatures, cobbled together out of known public figures, the author’s acquaintances, and her fantasy ideal of a woman painter. Similarly, there are few one-to-one correspondences between fictional scenes and real historical paintings to be found in these texts. What Andres calls “isomorphic equivalents” (2002, 374) or “narrative reconfigurations” (2005, xvi)—that is, fictional scenes that call to mind specific Victorian paintings¹⁴—are rare.¹⁵

In another departure from recent interart scholarship on Victorian fiction, I regularly consider fictional representations of the *act* of painting rather than simply ekphrastic representations of the artifact of painting,¹⁶ thus emphasizing art as a *social* process involving multiple ideological pressures. In such scenes of painting, the woman painter was a nodal point for discussions of numerous problems relating to women and the social realm: access to education and training, professionalization, economic freedom, property rights, and other similar issues. Representing the difficult *process* of women’s artistic production and its aftermath (public scenes of judgment, common to all the novels I consider) enables women writers to engage not just with aesthetic concerns but with the social issues that inevitably arise out of these public scenarios. When I do turn my attention to ekphrastic descriptions of paintings themselves, I focus the discussion on the gender implications of these references. By considering representations of women’s paintings in texts by women writers, I introduce the issue of gender into the critical discourse surrounding textual ekphrasis. Ekphrasis has been most simply defined

as “the verbal representation of visual representation” (Heffernan 1993, 3); unlike pictorialism, which represents natural objects and scenes, ekphrasis deals with visual works of representational art *per se*. W. J. T. Mitchell, in *Iconology*, explains that the relationship between the word and the image has always been essentially paragonal; that is, it turns on the *antagonism* between the two.¹⁷ At different moments in history and in the works of different artists, one or the other medium has emerged as dominant—dominance here meaning that one medium is considered more successful in reproducing or expressing reality. As Starzyk explains, discussions of the antagonism between word and image are based on the “continued dominance of mimesis” (Starzyk 2002, 1). Although some critics, such as Jean Hagstrum (1958), have suggested that (at least until the late eighteenth century) the relationship between word and image is amicable (since both media are involved in the attempt at representing an immutable truth), most critics contend that by the Romantic period ekphrasis marks some form of rivalry between the two media. Starzyk, for example, contends that in the Romantic and Victorian periods, the verbal and the visual exist in a dialectical relationship, serving as *both* “duplicates *and* rivals” (2002, 5; emphasis in original). Nineteenth-century ekphrastic writers are therefore “simultaneously enamoured of and terrified by the image they gaze upon” (7).

Throughout the critical history, ekphrasis has been theorized as an implicitly gendered phenomenon. Critics have uniformly coded the word as male in ekphrastic encounters, while the silent and beautiful image that cannot speak for itself is, unsurprisingly, feminized. Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is the quintessential example here: the artwork, described as a “still unravish’d bride of quietness,” is immobile (“still”), potentially sexualized (“unravish’d”), feminized (“bride”), and mute (“quietness”), and is then subjected to the verbal attentions of a masculine poetic speaker eager to pin “her” down with concrete description.¹⁸ James Heffernan has taken up this binary formulation and interpreted various moments of ekphrasis as the

struggle for dominance between the image and the word. . . . First, because it evokes the power of the silent image even as it subjects that power to the rival authority of language, it is intensely paragonal. Second, the contest it stages is often powerfully gendered: the expression of a duel between male and female gazes, the voice of male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening, of male narrative striving to overcome the fixating impact of beauty poised in space. (1993, 1)

He writes later in a similar metaphoric register, “Ekphrasis stages a contest

between rival modes of representation: between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image" (6).

Historians of ekphrasis find that this gendering extends far back into literary history; scholars of the Early Modern period, for example, contend that the development of ekphrastic texts mirrors the courtly love poem.¹⁹ The poet in both genres worships an unwilling, mute, or immobile feminized object and describes it in an attempt to possess it. The "blazon" or detailed description of the beloved is therefore structurally similar to an ekphrastic description of an artwork, as Nancy Vickers's foundational article on the blazon suggests.²⁰ Both use detailed description to control a female object. Similarly, Marion Wells writes (also apropos of Shakespeare's *Lucrece*) of "the destructive power of emotionally charged visual description" (2002, 98) known as *enargeia*, a related rhetorical device. Although *enargeia* tries to make an object "live" for the reader through unusually potent sensory description, it more frequently has the opposite effect, Wells argues, by entombing the object and simultaneously causing a loss of selfhood in the viewing subject, so absorbed does he (in most cases) become in the object.²¹ This destructive power is arguably a major component of ekphrastic literature beyond the Early Modern period as well; ekphrasis seems always to slide inexorably into violent appropriation, and even eulogistic ekphrasis like Keats's still serves to metaphorically entomb a feminized art object.

How might it be possible to rethink the traditional gendering of ekphrasis? To begin with, we must first uncover a canon, so to speak, of women's ekphrasis, in which women occupy any or all of the possible subject positions involved in ekphrasis: viewer, describer, author, or producer of the art object itself.²² Thus far, every major critic of the sister arts fails to consider any texts describing images made by women. This may be understandable for the Classical and Early Modern periods, but it is less so for subsequent literary eras. W. J. T. Mitchell, who includes no women artists in his analyses, does at least make a quick gesture in their direction when he concedes at the end of his chapter on ekphrasis in *Picture Theory* that "All this would look quite different, of course, if my emphasis had been on ekphrastic poetry by women" (1994, 181). How different would it look, for example, if the ekphrastic scenario involves a woman viewing an artwork? or a woman describing another woman's artwork? or a woman describing her own artwork, as happens in artists' memoirs? Or when an artwork being described has—at least within the fictional world of the text—been created by the *same* woman artist who creates the ekphrasis?

Once a suitable object of study has been found, we can begin to reconceive the model of ekphrasis with which critics have been working for decades.

Heffernan gives a useful place to begin when he argues that some ekphrastic moments offer hints—but only hints, and generally ineffectual ones—of gender resistance. He writes:

Ekphrasis entails *prosopopeia*, or the rhetorical technique of envoicing a silent object. Ekphrasis speaks not only about works of art but also to and for them. In so doing, it stages—within the theater of language itself—a revolution of the image against the word, and particularly the word of Lessing, who decreed that the duty of pictures was to be silent and beautiful (like a woman), leaving expression to poetry. In talking back to and looking back at the male viewer, the images envoked by ekphrasis challenge at once the controlling authority of the male gaze and the power of the male word. (1993, 7)

Heffernan purports to consider “an alternative genealogy” (46) of feminine ekphrasis where we might see this revolution, but the only art form he considers is women’s weaving (in the cases of Philomela and Arachne) as described by exclusively male authors. Furthermore, his “alternate genealogy” focuses *solely* on images of *rape* (the chapter is titled “Weaving Rape”), arguing that “violated women speak in and through pictures of violation” (89). While these images of rape may provide a “radical alternative to the pictures of still unravished beauty” typical of the male ekphrastic tradition, they forcibly suggest just how little power women are permitted within this tradition: the only thing women’s visual representations have to say here is “Help, rape!” In Heffernan’s argument, woven depictions of rape ekphrastically described by male writers bear the burden of enacting “a revolution of the image against the word” (90); yet Heffernan nowhere considers the possibility of *women* writers offering ekphrases of women’s visual representations, nor of male writers representing women’s artistic productions that represent something slightly more revolutionary than rape.

Writing about rape and ekphrasis together is also not an isolated incident. Heffernan’s focus on narratives of rape comes, obliquely at least, from Suzanne Langer’s well-known comment about relations between the various arts. Unlike more contemporary interart theorists like Mitchell, Langer argues that true interart blending is impossible. Opera, for example, might have elements of drama but is, in Langer’s mind, fundamentally music; one art form always subsumes another. In this context she writes, rather alarmingly, “There are no happy marriages in art—only successful rape” (1957, 86). Such a statement most clearly articulates the paragonal quality Heffernan and others see in interart relationships and has proved a useful paradigm for

thinking through the gender politics of many of the classic ekphrastic texts by men in the Western canon, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess” among them.

In this study, I look exclusively at fictional ekphrastic scenes created by women writers to describe artworks produced by women. I should note that I am dealing here solely with what John Hollander calls “notional ekphrasis,” descriptions of *imaginary* works of art. Ekphrases of real, existing works of art he terms “actual ekphrasis”; this group includes such examples as Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” or Williams’s poems on Brueghel. Actual ekphrastic poetry or fiction about women’s paintings by women writers of any era is extremely rare;²³ I have found no nineteenth-century works by women which ekphrastically describe real artworks by other women (other than descriptions in nonfiction works such as memoirs or art criticism), although the occasional woman poet writes of artworks produced by men.²⁴ Notional ekphrases such as the ones I examine are more common, but still significantly less common than similar descriptions by male writers; why this might be so is one of my underlying questions in this study. Are women writers less likely to use ekphrasis? and if so, why?

In the cases of notional ekphrasis that I examine, I ask if the interart relationship between word and image is necessarily still violent or antagonistic when a woman writer describes a work produced by a woman painter, and if the traditional gender associations (male word and female image) need apply. The overwhelming answer is no. Several of the novelists I consider here offer a complete reversal: scenes in which the image (even though produced by a woman) is implicitly male and the describing voice female. Others envision a mutually interdependent and potentially supportive interaction between word and image rather than the “revolution of the image against the word” noted by Heffernan in his alternate genealogy or the disciplining of the image by the word as in traditional ekphrases.²⁵ Ekphrasis is still about power in these texts, certainly, but not necessarily the power of one medium (the word) over another (the image). Descriptions of women’s paintings by women writers are rather an attempt to consolidate female power; by controlling ekphrastic description, these writers attempt to control interpretation as well. My aim is to explore the nature and narrative ramifications of the nonparagonal theory of ekphrasis which arises when we look specifically at how women writers represent the productions of their sister artists.

In the texts I consider here, ekphrasis is further transformed by being repositioned with regard to the narrative that encloses it. Traditional ekphrasis is considered paragonal not just because it controls a female object with language but because that art object is explicitly set apart from the narrative

that describes it; the object becomes confined in a textual frame. Ekphrastic moments are typically understood as therefore halting narrative progression. (Classical examples of this occur when Homer pauses his narrative of events to describe the construction of Achilles' shield or in Virgil's similar description of the images on Aeneas' shield.) This obstruction of narrative serves (seemingly) to highlight the absolute difference between the art object and the temporal movement of narrative. Ekphrasis can be read, then, as a way for writers to tout the strength of their own medium (temporal, fluid) over the image (static); it can also be read as narrative's way of borrowing the positive qualities of visual art. As Alison Byerly argues, references to the visual arts in fiction can on the one hand serve to validate the power of realist narrative by contrasting it with art objects put forward as "obviously" unreal within the context of the narrative. On the other hand, however, moments of ekphrastic description can signal independence: "Artistic allusion in the novel attempts to confer upon particular passages the autonomy and uniqueness of the artifact" (1997, 4).

In ekphrastic scenes by women describing women's artworks, we see most often the latter investment. The visual realm is conceived less as a failure or a threat to fiction than as a threat to *women*, and hence something which must be negotiated and assimilated if women are to become successful artists. As critics since Laura Mulvey's influential work have argued, the problem of being looked at is of central concern to women; as the texts I consider here demonstrate, it is even *more* of a problem if you are a woman producing art that you wish to be looked at. Ekphrasis becomes a way for women to reclaim power over the visual realm by refocusing narrative attention on women's artistic *productions* rather than upon their bodies.

III.

In blending traditional aesthetic questions with social and material debates, the women writers I discuss in this book anticipate much of the recent debate over aesthetics. After enjoying centuries of high status, the field of philosophical aesthetics came under serious attack by numerous late-twentieth-century critics who argued that the conditions and categories of aesthetic debate were, in fact, heavily weighted with considerable ideological baggage. Terry Eagleton's massive study *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* ripped open the major aesthetic writers from the mid-seventeenth century onward to reveal their historical and political underpinnings, suggesting finally that, because of such ideological motivations, aesthetics is and has always been largely incapable

of doing what it purports to do: offer an objective definition and evaluation of art. If Eagleton's tome attempts an exhaustive reinterpretation of aesthetic history, his project—and that of others engaged in salvaging the aesthetic from its purely formalist bent—can be found in embryo, short and sweet, in one paragraph in Raymond Williams's discussion of aesthetics in *Keywords*. Williams writes:

It is clear from this history that aesthetics, with its specialized reference to art, to visual appearance, and to a category of what is "fine" or "beautiful," is a key formation in a group of meanings which at once emphasized and isolated subjective sense-activity as the basis of art and beauty as distinct, for example, from *social* or *cultural* interpretations. It is an element in the divided modern consciousness of *art* and *society*: a reference beyond social use and social valuation which . . . is intended to express a human dimension which the dominant version of *society* appears to exclude. The emphasis is understandable but the isolation can be damaging, for there is something irresistibly displaced and marginal about the now common and limiting phrase "aesthetic considerations," especially when contrasted with *practical* or *utilitarian* considerations. (1985, 32; emphasis in original)

Much of Williams's critical work and the tradition of Materialist critical thinking that he inspired attempts to overcome this "damaging" definition of aesthetics as divorced from social, political, or historical forces. In this vein, for example, Martha Woodmansee dismisses traditional aesthetics as "great minds speaking with one another over and above the historical process" (1994, 7) and advocates shifting critical attention away from formal aesthetic evaluations and toward the material and social conditions of artistic production. In Tony Bennett's succinct terms, aesthetics is simply "really useless knowledge." (Bennett 1987).

More recently, however, the term has enjoyed something of a revival, as critics attempt to find ways to balance the traditional concerns of aesthetics—artistic quality, emotive response, beauty, and more—with a politically informed methodology. A volume of critical essays on aesthetics contains in its title the two critical terms that have come together in recent approaches to aesthetics: *The Politics of Pleasure* (Regan 1992). Michele Barrett's essay in this volume coins the phrase "materialist aesthetics" to describe attempts to locate the universal and metaphysical discourse of aesthetics in its historical framework; such scholarship treats aesthetics as a subject in the history of knowledge, as historically contingent and ideologically inflected.²⁶ Other critics provide similar ways to approach aesthetics with an eye to ideology.

George Levine, for example, sees aesthetics as a potentially disruptive force within dominant ideologies (1994), while Susan Wolfson argues for a “productive, generative meeting” between aesthetics and ideology (1998, 3). Isabel Armstrong also argues against the recent dismissal of the category of the aesthetic; in her view, “The politics of the anti-aesthetic [exemplified for Armstrong by Eagleton] rely on deconstructive gestures of exposure that fail to address the democratic and radical potential of aesthetic discourse” (2000, 2).²⁷ Armstrong’s democratic aesthetic is a balancing act: she is struggling to find a way to blend Marxist or materialist thinking (which is sensitive to issues of class, race, and gender) with an evaluative discourse on beauty and affect (which has historically not been sensitive to these issues, as the materialist critics have pointed out) to create a new, radical aesthetic. Adorno, whose *Aesthetic Theory* (1984) Armstrong admires, also argues for a balance between Marxist methodology of aesthetic investigation (what are the conditions of production for art objects?) and a formalist view of the necessary autonomy of art. Art, for Adorno, is not a separate realm, yet it retains a certain autonomy even as it interacts with social reality.

The women writers I discuss in this book make it clear that this attempt at formulating a materialist aesthetic—while being absolutely crucial—is not a new project. Victorian women writers shared Armstrong’s desire to achieve the fine balance between formalism and materialism, and they expressed their theories in narrative form. Because nineteenth-century women rarely wrote formal aesthetic treatises, they are often left out of aesthetic history. Elizabeth Bohls has argued that women writers of the Romantic period inserted themselves into the aesthetic tradition—a powerfully masculine and confined tradition—by encoding aesthetic treatises within travel narratives, memoirs, journals, and other types of nonfiction writing. These late-eighteenth-century women writers thereby opened out the tradition of aesthetics, radicalizing the discourse to make space for female subjectivity. Bohls writes:

Instead of restricting aesthetics to a narrow, prestigious genre of academic or theoretical writing, I define it more broadly as a discourse, or a closely related set of discourses, encompassing a set of characteristic topics or preoccupations as well as a vocabulary for talking about these. Aesthetic discourse deals with the categories and concepts of art, beauty, sublimity, taste and judgment, and more broadly with the pleasure experienced from sensuous surfaces or spectacles. (1995, 5)

Similarly, I argue here that Victorian women writers use the figure of the

woman painter to offer sophisticated, detailed, and often radical aesthetic theories within their novels—indirectly, perhaps, but still emphatically. Through their aesthetic debates, these women writers attempt to theorize female subjectivity through art; in doing so they also critique the philosophical discourse of aesthetics itself, that privileged field which, as Luc Ferry writes, “holds the sediments of the history of democratic individualism or modern subjectivity” (1993, viii). Women novelists use the woman painter as a figure for radical female subjectivity, at once engaged in the production, reception, and judgment of art. I see, I paint, I judge; therefore I am.²⁸

The Victorian women novelists who are the focus of this study try to answer the “classic” questions of traditional (derived from late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century models) aesthetics but are never unaware of the political nature of aesthetics. That is, these nineteenth-century women writers are *already* practicing a materialist aesthetics in their fiction. When they make their heroines artists, women writers recognize the social and political conditions of that status, and any discussion of the value or beauty of art is tinged inescapably with a self-conscious awareness of the political ramifications of aesthetics. In their representations of painter-heroines, these novelists show us ways in which aesthetics is conditioned by social ideology—how, for instance, women’s art cannot be evaluated without the lens of gender ideology and beliefs about femininity, and how femininity is constructed in part by beliefs about art and aesthetic response. These writers consistently question the possibility of an aesthetic even temporarily abstracted from ideologies of civil society.²⁹ Thus, rather than assume that the materialist or historicist insight into aesthetics (that aesthetics is historically contingent) is a twentieth-century “discovery,” we must acknowledge that nineteenth-century women writers were themselves aware of the ideologically constructed nature of a supposedly universalist discourse of beauty and were exploiting and exploring this connection in fiction.

As well as critiquing the aesthetic tradition, women writers were also participating in it. Numerous recent critics have argued persuasively that the nineteenth century saw a radical shift in the experience of the aesthetic, a shift that forcibly impacted women artists of all kinds. Eighteenth-century aesthetics theorized art from the point of view of the spectator and the art object; as Nietzsche writes of Kant, “all I wish to underline is that Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem from the point of view of the artist (the creator), considered art and the beautiful purely from that of the ‘spectator,’ and unconsciously introduced the ‘spectator’ into the concept ‘beautiful’” (*Genealogy of Morals* 1887; quoted in Agamben 1999, 1). The spectator, in Kantian aesthetics, approached the art object with disinterest; the aesthetic experience was an ideal meeting between an unconscious

art object and an unselfconscious viewer. Nineteenth-century aesthetics, on the other hand, introduced the artist into this scenario; as Agamben writes, “The focal point of the reflection on art moves from the disinterested spectator to the interested artist” (1999, 2).³⁰ Following Nietzsche, Agamben takes the mythical sculptor Pygmalion as the model for this transformation in aesthetics. In classical and eighteenth-century aesthetics, art was considered dangerous because it could (for Plato) destroy the moral foundation of a city or (for the eighteenth-century writers) inspire the spectator with a kind of divine terror; both functions of art profoundly affected the *spectator*. In the nineteenth century, aesthetics shifts its focus from spectator to *artist*. Writes Agamben, “To the increasing innocence of the spectator’s experience in front of the beautiful object corresponds the increasing danger inherent in the artist’s experience” (3). This “danger” is not always danger in any negative sense. As the Pygmalion example dramatizes, the experience of the artist can be awful in the older sense of the word: awe-inspiring. The artist becomes a creature for whom art is a passion, a life-and-death erotic experience.³¹

In Adorno’s historical account of the aesthetic, the period from the late eighteenth through the late nineteenth century is similarly pivotal and conflicted. For Adorno, this is the era in which “genius” comes into being as a concept that isolates individuals from society, a turn which Adorno deplors: the idea of genius “tends to diminish the status of the work, glorifying instead its author out of a false sense of enthusiasm” (1984, 243–44). Similarly, “[The obsession with the artist/genius] glorifies pure creation by the human being without regard to purpose . . . and it relieves the viewer of the task of understanding the artistic object before him, giving him instead a surrogate—the personality of the artist or, worse, trashy biographies of him” (245). Thus it would seem that art pulls farther away from society, becomes less concerned with quotidian realities, by virtue of the fact that art’s creator is set above the common run of humanity.³²

We can look to numerous nineteenth-century writers for support of these claims that the aesthetic experience became artist-centered during the nineteenth century. Carlyle, in an article on the importance of Biography published in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1832, argues that

In the Art, we can nowise forget the Artist: while looking on the *Transfiguration*, while studying the *Iliad*, we ever strive to figure to ourselves what spirit dwelt in Raphael; what a head was that of Homer. . . . The Painter and the Singer are present to us; we partially and for the time become the very Painter and the very Singer, while we enjoy the Picture and the Song . . . this is the highest enjoyment, the clearest recognition, we can have of these. (1832, 254)

What Carlyle goes on to call the “Biographic appetite” (255) is, he argues, at work in our appreciation of narrative fiction as well as poetry, history, and painting: we read or view art simply to find out what artists think. Two years later, Anna Jameson similarly claimed that it was “atheistical” to ignore the artist. She writes (with rather surprising foreshadowing of Oscar Wilde):

What Goethe says of poets must needs be applicable to painters. He says, “If we look only at the principal productions of a poet, and neglect to study himself, his character, and the circumstances with which he had to contend, we fall into a sort of atheism, which forgets the Creator in his creation.” I think most people admire pictures in this sort of atheistical fashion; yet, next to loving pictures, and all the pleasure they give . . . equal with it, is the inexhaustible interest of studying the painter in his works. . . . Almost every picture has an individual character, reflecting the predominant temperament—nay, sometimes the occasional mood of the artist, its creator. Even portrait painters, renowned for their exact adherence to nature, will be found to have stamped upon their portraits a general and distinguishing character. (1834, 169–70)

Such an obsession with artists led, according to Julie Codell, to a proliferation of artists’ biographies during the Victorian era; in turn these biographies marked a dramatic change in the public perception of artists (particularly in the latter half of the Victorian period), who were constructed no longer as “agonized geniuses” but instead as “gentlemen and ladies . . . thoroughly socialized, not alienated and suffering in garrets. . . . Victorian artists were models of success, decorum, proper manliness and femininity and, ultimately, of Britishness, all intended for public consumption” (2003, 2–3); such art writing served to “domesticate the artist” (23). Codell writes, “Victorian artists’ lifewritings were predicated on the presentation of a mutually reflecting mirror between public and artist, not on distinguishing the artist radically from the public” as in the Modern period (6). Furthermore, the artist came to be identified as a figure “contributing to the public good” (15) rather than a figure opposed to public morality; artists were written about as insiders rather than Romantic outsiders. Arguably, artist-biographies were part of what Linda Dowling termed the “aesthetic democracy” of the period: a prevalent Victorian discourse that advocated opening up art for a wider public.³³ That emergent art-loving public read artists’ biographies in droves and found the life of the artist to be part of the consumable aesthetic package. In part because of this public interest, the artist became a social figure to be reckoned with; from being artisans of the working class, artists became their own class, outside

traditional hierarchies.³⁴ On the one hand, Victorian artists' "increasing agency" (9) was embraced by women artists, who "exploited male professional culture and identified themselves with it as a strategy for success" (11). On the other hand, because this newfound agency made artists more independent and liberated than ever before, women were more stridently debarred from entering the ranks of a profession that might allow them similar freedoms.

John Ruskin was perhaps the best-known contributor to this repositioning of the artist as central within the aesthetic system during the nineteenth century. If, as Ruskin believed, the art of a society could be used as a gauge of the quality of that society in other registers, then the artist had a considerable responsibility. "You can have noble art only from noble persons," wrote Ruskin in *Lectures on Art* (1903–12, 20: 139). Or again, in *Queen of the Air*, he writes: "Great art is the expression of the mind of a great man" (ibid. 19: 212). In Ruskin's writing, this concern for the ethical qualities of the artist devolves perpetually on a concern for the *physical* being of the artist, whose very *body* becomes an object for intense scrutiny. Thus, when in *Lectures on Art* he attempts to delineate the spiritual power of a great artist, he fixates on the artist's body before moving out again from that body to ethical realms:

Try, first, to realize to yourself the muscular precision of that action [drawing a line], and the intellectual strain of it . . . imagine that muscular firmness and subtlety, and the instantaneously selective and ordinant energy of the brain, sustained all day long . . . and all this life long. And then consider, so far as you know anything of physiology, what sort of ethical state of body and mind that means! . . . what fineness of race there must be to get it, what exquisite balance and symmetry of the vital powers! (ibid. 20: 149)

Similarly, in volume 2 of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin asserts that "a great painter must necessarily be a man of strong and perfect physical constitution" (1866–84, 2: 78).

The refocusing of the aesthetic gaze on the figure of the artist, rather than the spectator or the art object, occasioned a considerable crisis for Victorian women artists, their critics, and their supporters. Should the woman artist, too, be "sensitive, active and vigorous" like Ruskin's male artist? Need she be able to hold her pencil all day and all life long with "muscular firmness"? Intellectual and spiritual genius aside, is it possible for a woman to have the physical qualities Ruskin imagines are necessary to produce great art? Few scholars of Victorian aesthetics consider the impact of gender on the changing aesthetic theories of the period (most, like Jonah Siegel, continue to use the pseudo-universal "he" to refer to "the artist"),³⁵ but it seems clear

that women had an enormous role to play in the theoretical as well as the social aspects of art in the era. If there was what Paula Gillett describes as a “continuing lack of consensus concerning the role of the artist in society, and the legitimate functions served by the painter’s work” (1990, 14) during the Victorian era, women painters were not able to merely insert themselves into an already codified ideology of The Artist. As Clarissa Campbell Orr writes in her introduction to *Women in the Victorian Art World*, the struggle for women painters to gain acceptance was “not just a question of being admitted to art schools or the Royal Academy, but of *challenging the whole notion of what an artist was*” (1995, 7; emphasis added). Women painters could and did actively contribute to the nineteenth-century conception of the character and role of the artist; and women writers who represented women painters in their fiction were therefore inserting themselves into an extremely volatile moment in aesthetic history.

It was certainly in women painters’ best interest to help reconfigure the public conception of the notion of artistic genius, to make “the artist” a public, domestic, social individual. As Christine Battersby writes in *Gender and Genius*, “The Romantic conception of genius is peculiarly harmful to women. Our present criteria for artistic excellence have their origins in theories that specifically and explicitly denied women genius” (1989, 23). Women, she argues, were denied genius “even though qualities previously downgraded as ‘feminine’ had become valuable as a consequence of radical changes in aesthetic taste and aesthetic theory . . . cultural misogyny remained (and even intensified) despite a reversal in attitude towards emotionality, sensitivity and imaginative self-expression [qualities which continued to be defined as feminine]” (ibid.). The cult of genius (a more focused and gender-biased version of the cult of the artist) posed particular problems for women; the very definition of “genius” articulated by Romantic theorists precluded women from inclusion in the ranks. As the century progressed, however, young artists and the viewing (and purchasing) public began increasingly to hold the Romantic concept of artist as “misunderstood genius” in disfavor—a notion many women painters of the time shared. Bracketed by early-nineteenth-century Romanticism on the one hand and late-century Aestheticism on the other, the art of the middle decades of the nineteenth century (when women artists were entering the scene in greatest numbers) might be best summarized as “art for the public’s sake.” Here women could excel. Women painters, by virtue of their gender, were already in a position to present themselves as moral guardians; it was regularly argued that women painters’ work could have a beneficial influence on society. This influence wasn’t always conceived as elevating or ennobling (such would be the effects of masculine High

Art), but women's art was thought to educate, soothe, or amuse—as the *Punch* review discussed in chapter 1 will show. In tension with this moral conception of art, the tradition of the Byronic hero certainly lived on in the radical bohemians of the Pre-Raphaelite set—the debauched artist (often perceived as a dangerous French import) lived alongside the Victorian ideal of the socially responsible artist whose art was intended to stimulate public morality. As we shall see, however, women painters of fact and fiction most often attempted to align themselves (at least publicly) with the image of the artist as a moral and domestic creature.

IV.

Relying on interart theory, materialist aesthetics, and a range of art historical documents, this book examines the scene of aesthetic production as depicted in Victorian novels by women in which the focus is as much on the figure of the woman artist—her body and her place in the social body—as it is on the art object being produced. In chapter 1, I look more closely at ideological discourse surrounding the woman painter during the second half of the nineteenth century, examining periodical articles and nonfiction writings that introduce key problems in the historical conditions of women painters. The remainder of the study looks at fictional works, beginning in chapter 2 with Anne Brontë's undervalued *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The heroine of *Tenant*, Helen Graham, offers a seminal example of the fictional woman painter, whose development as an artist allows Anne Brontë to articulate her critique of social and aesthetic systems which confine women (literally and figuratively in this case). In chapter 3 I turn to Anne's sister Charlotte's descriptions of a woman's paintings in *Jane Eyre*, a novel well known for its obsession with the visual realm. Jane's artwork—wild and strange—has frequently been read as a sign of her similarly untraditional interiority; I shift the focus of the discussion to consider Jane's art as part of Charlotte Brontë's dismissal of key social conventions on the one hand and her reconceptualizing of classic ekphrasis on the other. Both Brontë sisters use the figure of the woman painter to intervene in an aesthetic history conceived as erotically charged and in a social history seen as obstructing women's professional or emotional development.

Chapter 4 discusses works that specifically diffuse the erotic component of women's experience in the aesthetic realm. Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*, Anna Mary Howitt's novella "Sisters in Art," and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* look more specifically at the social and economic concerns surrounding that experience. Chapter 5 introduces a little-known fictionalized

account by Anne Thackeray Ritchie of the eighteenth-century painter Angelica Kauffman, titled *Miss Angel and Fulham Lawn*. Ritchie's heroine—the only fictional woman artist explicitly based on a real painter—offers a stunning example of women painters' inability to shed their skin and to be viewed as artists rather than as women. Chapter 6 offers two examples of fictional women painters who do manage to escape the problematic female body, but only because they are physically deformed or disabled. The physical disabilities of the painter-heroines of Dinah Craik's *Olive* and Charlotte Yonge's *Pillars of the House* allow them to escape traditional gender expectations. My final chapter looks at fictional women painters in the work of Mary Ward, whose wavering and conflicted commitment to feminist goals translates into similarly conflicted representations of women artists. Finally, in my coda I take a brief look at late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century representations of women painters in the public press to suggest, rather dolefully, that the ideological pressures facing women painters in the Victorian era have yet to leave us.

Prevailing Winds and Cross-Currents

Public Discourse and the History of Victorian Women Painters

I.

AT THE END of the eighteenth century and into the early decades of the nineteenth, painting and drawing were required accomplishments for women in England. Even before large numbers of women began to work as professional painters in the Victorian era, drawing and watercolor painting formed part of the standard education for middle- and upper-class ladies. In 1810, a popular art critic saw the rise of women's amateur art as a "revolution":

It is impossible to congratulate our fair countrywomen too warmly on the revolution which has of late years taken place, when drawing and fancy-work of endless variety have been raised on the ruins of that heavy, unhealthy and stupefying occupation, needlework. Drawing, the groundwork of refined taste in the arts, is now considered, and very justly, as an indispensable requirement in the education of both sexes. In that of females in particular, it has opened a prodigious field of the excursions of imagination, invention, and ingenuity. ("Observations on Fancy Work" 1810, 397)

Similarly, Ellen Clayton, a Victorian historian of women in art, noted that "Drawing and painting became, in the days of King George the Third as fashionable accomplishments with young ladies as Greek and Latin had been

with their Tudor predecessors, or pianoforte playing and amateur acting with their Victorian successors. . . . Art had become a craze . . . it was a necessary addendum to a superior education” (Clayton 1876, 1: 336).

Women’s amateur artistic endeavors became highly commercialized and institutionalized at the start of the nineteenth century; a flood of art shops, art books (there were more, and more varied, art manuals in the 1800–50 period than ever before, many directed at women), sketching clubs, and new exhibit sites appeared (see Bermingham 2000, 132–33). Art was becoming part of women’s social life. For example, Ackermann, an entrepreneur as well as a writer, kept a shop that was something between an art gallery, an art supply store, and—gradually—a feminized tea shop. Such a blend was part of a gradual change in retail shops to “adjust . . . shops to the needs and tastes of their female customers” (ibid. 175). Alongside this commercialization of women’s art came a gradual but inevitable division between men’s production of original works of (possible) genius and women’s production of derivative works meant for amusement or home decor. Women were thought incapable of originality and relegated to the role of copyists; the female amateur was thus debarred from the masculine world of anticommercial, anticonsumer High Art. Writes Bermingham of the early nineteenth century, “The professional artist expressed his genius and imagination; the lady amateur practiced art for amusement and to display her taste and skill, to strengthen the domestic bonds of love and duty, to serve the community, and to improve her taste and that of the nation” (180).

As the century progressed, however, many women began to take their artistic skill more seriously. Elizabeth Ellet, writing a history of women painters in 1859, insists that “The progress of female talent and skill . . . has become more remarkable than ever within the last fifty years. The number of women engaged in the pursuits of art during that time far exceeds that of the whole preceding century” (234). We can see this transformation from amateurism to professionalism recorded almost unwillingly in the works of Sarah Stickney Ellis, the Victorian antifeminist moralist. While Ellis insists that women should not intrude on the professional male province of High Art, she nevertheless advocates a surprisingly rigorous brand of art-as-accomplishment. Ellis’s collection of short conduct manuals, written beginning in 1838 for the “Women, Daughters and Wives of England” and collected into a volume titled *The Family Monitor*, encouraged women to buttress masculine superiority by obliterating their own selves. Directed particularly to middle-class *women* (rather than upper-class *ladies*), Ellis’s trilogy schools female readers in “the minor morals of domestic life” (1848b, 3). One such “particular minutia of practical duty,” as Ellis terms them, is the proper application of

women to the fine arts. But not of course so that they might become professional artists (Heaven forbid!). Drawing and painting serve for Ellis as ways to discipline the feminine mind and to keep it out of trouble. She extols the virtues of drawing as follows:

Among [drawing's] advantages, I will begin with the least. It is quiet. It disturbs no one; for however defective the performance may be, it does not necessarily, like music, jar upon the sense. It is true, it may when seen offend the practiced eye; but we can always keep our productions to ourselves. In addition to this, it is an employment which beguiles the mind of many cares . . . drawing is of all other occupations the one most calculated to keep the mind from brooding upon self, and to maintain that general cheerfulness which is a part of social and domestic duty. (1848a, 38)

Ellis is insistent that women should not study the art of painting to the extent that, or with the intent that, the productions might enter the public sphere. Women must remain, instead, domestic artists, since there is danger in achieving too great a skill in (and sensibility for) art: "In every object . . . the painter perceives at once what is striking, characteristic, harmonious, or graceful . . . he feels himself the inhabitant of a world of beauty, from which others are shut out" (ibid. 39). Women, in Ellis's system of belief, are not supposed to "shut out" others; women are connective tissue, uniting families, communities, and the nation. For a woman to become an Artist, then, would violate the principles of femininity Ellis is attempting to prescribe.

Yet when Ellis offers her plan for a proper education in art, one begins to wonder how any woman who completes such rigorous training could remain an amateur. For a woman to learn to draw properly, Ellis argues, she must first study perspective, the preliminary step in "the *philosophy* of picture-making, or, in other words, the relation of cause and effect in the grouping and general management of objects, so as to unite a number of parts into a perfect and pleasing whole" (ibid.; emphasis added). As a "philosophy," perspective becomes imbued with considerable depth and intellectualism—gone is any sense that drawing provides quiet entertainment in the hours of women's ennui. After conquering perspective, the eager amateur must then gain a solid knowledge, writes Ellis, of botany and entomology, a field of study that sends Ellis into a positively bloodthirsty fervor of excitement. Although she bemoans the "sacrifice of life most revolting to the female mind," she admits that any detailed study of insect life requires "those regular rows of moths and beetles pricked on paper." From entomology, women must move on to study in the "*whole range* of natural history" (ibid. 41; emphasis added). By this

point, one wonders what dutiful female student would have time for marriage or childbirth—especially since drawing is but *one* of the accomplishments a young woman is expected to have under Ellis's plan. Regardless of this formidable array of knowledge Ellis encourages women to amass in search of artistic production, Ellis still desires women to remain amateurs in art, putting any artistic talent they may gain in the service of husbands, children, or the moral regeneration of the community. But Ellis is writing these conduct manuals at precisely the moment when women's relation to the art world was changing dramatically, a change reflected in the strange excess of Ellis's plan of study for young women.

Artistic accomplishment—that quiet, private act done solely for the moral improvement of the amateur artist or the genteel amusement of a suitor—begins to give way to serious art training for women. By the 1840s, demand for more formal art training for women including just such subjects as Ellis suggests rose dramatically. If a young nineteenth-century woman discovered in herself a taste and talent for art, how could she get the education she required? Women born into artistic families had a much easier time securing a satisfactory art education, since many were given instruction by fathers and brothers—sometimes with the view to training women as studio helpers (painting in backgrounds, etc.), but often with the result that these women became artists in their own right (see Cherry 1993, chap. 1). If her family was not artistic, a budding young artist's first recourse, if she was reasonably well-off and her parents approved, might be to hire a drawing master to teach her in her home. The Brontë sisters received such training sporadically (aided by the fact that Branwell Brontë intended to become a painter—the sisters piggybacked, in a sense, on their brother's training).¹ If a young woman's family was unwilling or unable to hire an in-home art teacher, what other options were there? Again with parental approval, a young woman might attend one of the local Schools of Design, the London Female School of Art, or one of the few private art schools in England that accepted women students. The number of art schools or private salons that accepted women students increased from mid-century onward, although few offered women the same course of study as male students until the turn of the century. Women students were accepted at Slade's, Cary's, Shaw's, and Cass's, which were all privately run; public schools that accepted women students by mid-century included the South Kensington School of Art, the Royal Academy female schools, and the Crystal Palace School (mainly offering classes in the decorative arts). Larger towns had their public School of Art or School of Design to which women were often admitted (the young artist in Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*, discussed in chapter 4, attends and then teaches in just such a school). Private schools

specialized in training wealthier young women: Mrs. Henrietta Ward, wife of Edward Ward, R.A., and herself a well-known painter, records in her memoirs that several of Queen Victoria's daughters studied at her school, as well as many duchesses and countesses. Mrs. Ward's school also boasted such notable visiting professors as Alma-Tadema, John Horsley, Marcus Stone, Luke Fides, and William Powell Frith—all prominent Royal Academy members of the time, and friends of Mrs. Ward and her husband.²

Training abroad was another option for artistically minded young women. Many women artists report in their memoirs that art schools in France, Germany, or Italy were more likely to accept or encourage women students, and that opportunities for artistic freedom were greater once one got free of Mother England. America, too, offered freedoms not to be found in England.³ The painter Louise Jopling, for example, began her career as an artist in France, where she entered a state technical school in Paris. Jopling writes, "In France one is expected to cultivate what little talent one possesses. How my relations in England would have stared, and thought me little less than mad, to entertain the idea of becoming a 'professional'—I, a married woman!" (1925, 5). Anna Mary Howitt records a similar liberating experience studying art in Germany in her memoir *An Art Student in Munich* (1854). And May Alcott's book *Studying Art Abroad* (1879) includes chapters on London, Paris, and Rome (Alcott was American); she makes it quite clear that London, although still an important center for art, has less to offer the female student than does the Continent.

One area of artistic education proved particularly troublesome for English women: painting the unclothed human figure. Considered by many the pinnacle of the painter's art and often the most lucrative, painting the nude human body requires a solid grounding in anatomy and access to nude models. But even after the national network of Female Schools of Design was instituted, women still were forbidden by public art institutions to study "from the life" (that is, from nude models) until the end of the century. Many public and private art schools permitted women, in carefully segregated classes, to draw from the *draped* figure, and occasionally a private school would allow advanced female students segregated access to nude models, but until the end of the century women had no *public* access to nude models.⁴ Women artists often grouped together, pooled their money, and hired models for private sessions (Clayton 1876, 2: 83). Part of the problem was, of course, that delicately nurtured females were considered too modest to be confronted by nudity. Both because they had little access to models and because of the intense public disapproval, extremely few women artists dared publicly exhibit nudes. Anna Lea Merritt and Henrietta Rae were two of the



Figure 1.1. "Found Out." Anonymous. *Punch* 89 (February 14, 1885).

few painters brave enough to send nudes to the Royal Academy shows, and this only in the last two decades of the century—and they caught hell for it. Another part of the problem was that the artist/model relationship, hitherto defined exclusively as male/female, had long been considered a site and source of erotic desire, as the cartoon in figure 1.1 dramatizes.

For a woman to paint from the life, then, embroiled her in a potentially erotic scenario, but one with radical permutations of the key players. The cartoon in figure 1.2 satirizes this potential problem: a roomful of female art students gaze longingly on a male model, whose pose suggests both seduction and affectation. The scene calls into question the motivations of female art students, who appear here to simply be embracing the opportunity to look at an attractive man; the dandified, languid appearance of the male model further implies a demasculinization of men who might become the subjects



FEMALE SCHOOL OF ART—(Useful Occupation for Idle and Ornamental Young Men).

Figure 1.2. “Female School of Art.” Anonymous. *Punch* 66 (May 30, 1874).

of women’s artwork. It’s not hard to imagine what the public would have thought of women art students gazing on a *nude* male model. Painting nude female models was equally problematic, raising as it did the specter of lesbian desire.⁵

Even finding clothed models was difficult for many women painters. Some relied on friends, family members, or female patrons for models. The well-known Impressionist Berthe Morisot, for example, painted family members and friends to save money on hiring models. Similarly, the English painter and portraitist Louise Jopling recalls in her memoirs how she circumvented the high cost of models when she was just entering the painting profession: “I started painting a three-quarter length of myself from my reflection in the mirror in my little bedroom; and this because my model cost me nothing, and never looked bored.” On another occasion she resorts to “borrowing” a model; she writes, “The Romer family were away for a summer holiday, so I utilized their pretty cook as a model” (1925, 10–11). Countless other women artists were forced to discover similar stratagems to learn and exercise their trade. In the absence of live models, women’s only available subjects were local landscapes, flowers, or domestic subjects. Access to the sort of subject matter

that formed the basis for elevated genres of art in the period (the nude, exotic landscapes, etc.) was often impossible for Victorian women painters, who regularly echo a remark made by Helen Graham in Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*: "You see there is a sad dearth of subjects. I took the old hall once on a moonlight night, and I suppose I must take it again on a snowy winter's day, and then again on a dark cloudy evening; for I really have nothing else to paint" (A. Brontë 1979, 69). For all the hardships, there were still considerable motivations for women to become professional painters. Art was one of the few professional fields open to women in the period, which made it desirable if not easy. As Dinah Mulock Craik (whose novel *Olive*, discussed in chapter 6, features an artist heroine) writes in her treatise on women's work, *A Woman's Thoughts about Woman*, "Female professions, as distinct from what may be termed female handicrafts, which merit separate classification and discussion, may, I think, be thus divided: the instruction of youth; painting or art; literature; and the vocation of public entertainment—including actresses, singers, musicians and the like" (1860, 66). Though many women were employed in design, as engravers, or in other branches of what Craik calls "handicrafts," the middle of the century saw increasing agitation for women to be allowed access to the professional aspects of artistic endeavor. Women painters struggled to achieve the kind of education that could enable them to stop painting flowers and fruit and paint instead in the most respected genres—history paintings, landscape, portraiture, and figure painting—which were also the most lucrative.

II.

The debate over art education was logically tied up with the problem of employment for women. After receiving proper training, how could a woman make a living as an artist? Finding a place to send your artwork so that people could see it and buy it was the first step. The process of exhibition was made more difficult for Victorian women for a number of reasons: because they had little access to the better-known schools, they also had less pull with the various exhibition galleries or art shops, which were often tied to specific schools. An unknown artist (of either gender) who had not passed through one of the respected art schools would have had a difficult time placing a picture in an important gallery or shop. Women painters had a harder time than their male colleagues, however, because of the taboo against women actively participating in any professional market; relying (as does Helen Graham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) on a male relative was often essential. The founding

of the Society of Female Artists in 1856 (as well as several other women-only galleries) smoothed the path for numerous women painters. The SFA was founded by Harriet Grote, Barbara Bodichon, and other women artists and boasted such supporters and members as Eliza Fox, Henrietta Ward, and Anna Jameson. The society offered struggling women artists a London venue to introduce their work to the public; it also offered established women artists a place to send small sketches or studies to gather meager but much-needed profits. The SFA provided many women a stepping stone to more prestigious galleries.

To make a living as a painter in England, no matter one's gender, it was helpful (if not entirely necessary) to get a picture accepted to the Royal Academy. Although this old and august institution was regularly attacked and rival progressive galleries (like the Grosvenor) were regularly set up to challenge its staid aesthetics, the R.A. remained the best place for an artist to sell his or her works. The R.A. shows were large, frequently exceeding a thousand pictures. The 1862 exhibit, to take a random example, had 1,142 works by 1,142 different artists, 146 of which were Academicians (whose works were guaranteed to be shown at R.A. exhibitions) and 996 outsiders (who had to submit paintings for consideration) (Nunn 1987, 91). Of this number, 55 were women (and of course none of those women were Academicians, women being formally debarred from membership from the late eighteenth century until the early twentieth century); the number of women exhibitors in the R.A. ranged from fifty to one hundred during the nineteenth century. By contrast, the smaller SFA shows included from three hundred to four hundred works of art by approximately a hundred fifty artists. At the SFA, however, prices were considerably lower. One of the SFA's goals was to provide lesser-known women artists a venue for selling their works, and it followed that the prices were low. The *Englishwoman's Review* writes:

Some people like to read penny newspapers and sixpenny monthlies, and some people like to buy cheap pictures. For our own part we could spend a good deal of money with great pleasure in purchasing pictures in the Female Artists's Exhibition. If we had a limited amount of money and wanted to buy pictures to decorate our drawing room we should go there to buy them. If our supply of money were unlimited we confess we should go elsewhere. If we wanted a newspaper and could afford it we should take *The Times*, but if we were poor we should take a penny print, and be glad there were such things as cheap newspapers. ("Gallery of Lady Artists" 467)

The review continues by arguing that this cheapness is a public service: it

provides the public with decent decoration and tantalizes them with the possibility of getting for a low price something that will increase in value if the artist gains a name for herself. Standard prices at the SFA were between two guineas at the lowest to 50 pounds at the absolute highest.⁶ Lower prices notwithstanding, however, painting was still one of the rare ways by which a woman of the middle or upper classes in Victorian England could support herself and often a family, and the number of women embracing art as a profession rose steadily throughout the century.

If achieved, status as a professional artist could provide a secure social position for a woman, since the social status of the artist rose gradually over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After the founding and gradual rise to prestige of the Royal Academy during the eighteenth century,⁷ art production became increasingly professionalized during the early nineteenth century; by the mid-nineteenth century the R.A. and other institutions of art had developed schools, procedures, laws, and bylaws; art was now publicly visible as a *career*, not just an accomplishment or a quasi-spiritual vocation but a respectable and financially rewarding profession. The 1850s and 1860s saw the dramatic rise of an art public with unprecedented purchasing power; in turn, these decades brought considerable wealth and social stature to those professional artists willing and able to provide the sort of artworks favored by the rising middle classes: genre works on contemporary subjects, sentimental realism, portraiture, and landscape art. For those supplying this market, the mid- and late nineteenth century saw an enormous increase in the average price paid for paintings. The years from 1860 to 1914 have been called the golden age of the living painter, with artists collecting as much as 7,000 guineas for a single painting. A relatively well-known (male) artist might regularly earn £1,000 to £4,000 for a large canvas.⁸ Compare this to the £150–200 per year which comprised the average merchant or lawyer's income, and it becomes evident that artists could easily become quite rich, and hence quite respectable. Joshua Reynolds (one of the first to raise the painter to the status of the gentleman), Edward Burne-Jones, William Powell Firth, and George Frederic Watts were among those artists of middle- and lower-class backgrounds for whom art became a source of wealth and status (Burne-Jones was knighted; Watts was twice offered the hereditary title of baronet but declined).⁹ In addition to economic prosperity, another contributing factor in the rise of respectability of art as a profession was the influx of "gentlemen" into the professional art world. Many male artists began their careers already independently wealthy, or at least from titled or wealthy families. Sir Francis Grant (R.A. president, 1866), Lord Leighton (R.A. president, 1878), William Morris, and Philip Gilbert Hamerton were well-born

gentlemen when they began their careers. (Morris, however, took great pains not to appear the well-born gentleman he actually was.)¹⁰

Artwork by women unsurprisingly failed to earn the same prices as did works by male artists, nor did women painters achieve the same level of fame as their male colleagues, although a few became well known. In an article in the *Englishwoman's Review*, Jessie Boucherett writes of an exhibit in the Gallery of Lady Artists, "We believe the pictures in this gallery to be at present depreciated below their real worth, partly by the bad times, partly perhaps by the fact that they are generally painted by young women artists who have yet their fame to win. We should not be surprised if some years hence the purchasers of today were to find that their pictures had largely increased in value" (1881). Women's work in various galleries (Royal Academy, Society of Female Artists, Society of British Watercolours, Old Watercolour Society, etc.) ranged in price from £10 to, at the very top end, £100, with the average between £15 and £30 (Nunn 1987, 114–18). The few women on the high end of the scale, painters like Emily Mary Osborn or Elizabeth Thompson Butler, occasionally sold large canvases at the Royal Academy shows for over £1000. But Butler was an astute businesswoman, and she knew how to capitalize on enormous public success, a rare thing for a woman painter in the nineteenth century. As a contrast, when Frederic Leighton made his debut in 1855 as an entirely unknown but male artist at the R.A., he sold his *Cimabue's Procession* to the Queen for 600 guineas (Gillett 1990, 209).

III.

Even women like Butler who became successful professional artists still had battles to fight. In particular, women painters (like many other professional women) faced intense ideological disapproval because of their participation in the public realm. As Harman argues, "From the mid-nineteenth century onward . . . as women increasingly sought access to the public sphere—to political discussions, to education, to the professions, and to the vote—the debate about female publicity took a more prominent place in the collective cultural discussion" (Harman 1998, 1–2).¹¹ The public sphere was unusually problematic for women painters. Whereas women writers could and often did remain anonymous, carrying out their trade at discreet distance in modest solitude,¹² a painter couldn't very well hide her endeavors. Paint and paintings have a visible (and olfactory) physical presence; brushes and paint pots can't be whisked out of the way at a moment's notice; canvases and easels take up space. Art education, too, was a particularly thorny problem, since it was

generally done in public and the specter of drawing from life always lurked in the background. The rare woman painter who successfully carved out a space in which to paint, secured an artistic education, and painted a good picture had yet more work to do in the public arena. Whereas the Brontë sisters could interact with editors by *mail* and remain physically in Yorkshire (for the most part), a large painting on canvas was not something one sent by post. Instead, paintings were carried or carted to art dealers or exhibit halls; generally the artist needed to be present to supervise the transportation and to negotiate with dealers or purchasers.

And there was yet more public work to be done, even once the painting arrived at its destination. It might seem obvious that artworks are made to be seen, but in the nineteenth century this meant *public* viewing, in newly created galleries, museums, or academies. In the eighteenth century, an artist could be successful and yet have his or her works seen by only a few patrons or people at court, but this changed early in the Victorian era. As Jan Marsh writes, “display is integral to artistic practice . . . being seen is what works of art are for, and certainly in the nineteenth century public exhibition was the first goal of the aspiring artist” (1995, 36). But not only the artworks were on display. To begin with, the Victorian art world was a highly gregarious arena; for example, Varnishing Day, the day before the opening of the Royal Academy exhibit each year, was a huge event, a time for painters to interact with one another. Painters (male or female) worked side by side putting the finishing touches on their work directly in the gallery (see figure 1.3). The Royal Academy Exhibit itself, in addition, was a see-and-be-seen event, a time for artists to mingle with the art public who were, as we have seen, increasingly fascinated with the artists themselves rather than simply the artworks.¹³

The R.A. Summer Exhibit averaged 355,000 paying visitors during the 1880s and 1890s—earlier figures were likely similar, with perhaps a rise in attendance during the “boom” years of the 1860s. As this suggests, art viewing in the nineteenth century was a profoundly public event; visits to the Royal Academy were part of the social rounds, and exhibits at galleries like the Grosvenor or the Female School of Art were also important public events, attended by the rich and famous as well as by the middle classes and always covered by the press. As Kate Flint writes, “by stressing . . . social gathering rather than the paintings themselves, depictions of art shows, whether in paintings or in periodical publications, ultimately serve to reinforce the point that spectators are participating in social rituals, however much any individual act or spectatorship may involve individualized, subjective apprehension and judgment” (2000, 176).



Figure 1.3. George DuMaurier, “Varnishing Day at the Royal Academy.”
Punch 73 (June 19, 1877).

If the Royal Academy and other galleries weren’t public enough, as the century progressed artists’ own studios increasingly became spaces for socializing and, crucially, marketing.¹⁴ The Sunday before a show’s official opening, wealthy clients would “go the rounds” of studios to decide on possible purchases or to give orders for portraits or other pictures. This Picture Sunday—or Show Sunday as it was often called—allowed for early sales; it also

allowed artists to hobnob with the fashionable art-loving public and with one another. Additionally, it permitted an increasingly curious public a sight into the artist's private and working life. Mrs. E. M. Ward wrote in her memoirs that "Artists appear to possess a peculiar attraction. . . . A deep curiosity exists to see the inner workings of studio life" (1925, 113). By the 1880s, Show Sundays were so popular that "there was a spillover from one designated day to almost any Sunday, or sometimes both Saturday and Sunday" (Gillett 1990, 194). It was also quite common for Victorian artists to paint with a crowd of spectators present; the solitary genius image of the Romantic period gave way in the Victorian era to a socially visible and active artist.

Because of the public visibility inherent in her line of work, the woman artist had to be seen—and, problematically, the public often found it difficult to decide which of the dyad (artist/work) was the more interesting and attractive spectacle. Emily Mary Osborn's painting *Nameless and Friendless* (1857) dramatizes this scenario in exemplary visual form (figure 1.4).¹⁵ The painting depicts the trials a young woman painter might have faced when attempting to sell her productions. The young painter stands, gazing forlornly down, before the counter in an art dealer's shop, where the dealer scrutinizes her small oil painting. By her clothing we can see that she is poor; the painting's title reinforces this reading. That she is "nameless" suggests that her painting has brought her neither fortune nor fame; that she is "friendless" further marks her situation, as she has no one to intercede for her in the art world. The young woman's face registers sorrow and, perhaps, shame—the shame of being in a public place with the intent of selling her productions for profit. She modestly does not look at the dealer; the small boy (perhaps a brother, or a boy hired to help carry her art supplies—but obviously poor himself, wearing trousers which are much too big for him and a coarse coat), however, looks straight at the dealer as he critically examines the painting, as if the boy (because of his gender) is ready to take charge of any economic exchange which might ensue. The young woman registers her nervousness by twisting a piece of string between two very dainty and delicate hands—hands, the viewer may be meant to imagine, which were once the hands of a woman of leisure but are now the hands of a working woman, who has become a "victim of the art market" (Casteras 1992, 221).

While the young woman artist and the boy form the central triangle of the painting, there are two other scenes in the background that contrast with the scene in the foreground. In the rear center we see the back of a wealthy woman in a fancy hat, an ornate hairdo, and a bustled dress; just behind her is another small boy carrying something rolled up under his arm. The boy, too, is well dressed and groomed, and is likely the wealthy woman's son. Is this a



Figure 1.4. Emily Mary Osborn, *Nameless and Friendless*, 1857, private collection. Source: The Bridgeman Art Library. Reproduced with permission.

wealthy patroness of the arts, departing with her latest purchase? Certainly her upright bearing and her clothing make her a strong contrast to the poor, huddled young woman exhibiting her paintings before the critical dealer. The other background scene depicts two men who hold between them a drawing of a ballet dancer in a very exuberant and exposed posture—arms above her head, one leg pointed outward and up. The men however, instead of looking at the aesthetic object before them (an image of a beautiful public woman), look askew (one sidelong, one just under his hat) at the young woman painter by the counter. The intensity of their gazes registers the public scrutiny a woman painter received: just as her artwork is thoroughly examined, so too is her person monitored.

The painting presents the viewer with three warring representations of female identity. There is the wealthy, well-dressed woman customer leaving the shop, spending money rather than earning it. Second, there is the ballet dancer whose image we see held by the two men on the left. The dancer represents the spectacle of the female body, a professional body open to the most intense public scrutiny; she is an object of desire and aesthetic appreciation, and Osborn hints that she may be as much for sale as is the drawing

of her. The woman painter in the center, as Deborah Cherry writes, “introduces a third figuration of femininity, the middle-class working woman who could not easily be categorized . . . and whose respectability, the basis of her class identity and her sexuality, is at risk” (1993, 79). The risk involved in the painter’s profession is precisely her public visibility, which radically repositions her socially and erotically. On the one hand, the act of painting causes her intrusion as an economic producer (rather than consumer) into a male business enclave; on the other hand, becoming a painter threatens to reposition women within the traditional erotic structure of art. The woman is traditionally looked at (as is the dancer); painting is an attempt to escape this aesthetic position by producing an object which receives visual attention. But Osborn suggests that this attempted escape is a failure: the woman artist remains subject to public scrutiny.

IV.

Osborn’s painting functions explicitly as a feminist critique of the art world, and numerous other women painters also used their art—and their lives—to make similar social arguments, often embracing the publicity that inevitably accrued to them as a political tool. As Deborah Cherry has argued, the history of the woman painter in Victorian Britain is inextricable from the history of British feminism in the period; the art scene was frequently a locus for political rebellion by nineteenth-century feminists (see Cherry 2000). An enormous number of women artists or art critics played an integral part in the emergent nineteenth-century feminist movement. Barbara Bodichon, Anna Jameson, Lady Eastlake, Eliza Fox, Mary and Anna Mary Howitt, Henrietta Ward, Louise Jopling,¹⁶ and numerous other women who made their names in the art scene were also actively involved in the women’s rights movement. When the suffrage movement began, for example, a huge portion of the signatories of the 1889 *Declaration in Favour of Women’s Suffrage* were women artists (nearly sixty of the over two hundred signatories stated their profession as “artist” on the document).¹⁷ By contrast, the *Appeal against Female Suffrage* featured only one woman artist: Laura Alma-Tadema.

The driving force behind much of the Victorian feminist agitation—both in politics and in the arts—was Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, who combined in one woman the intertwined goals of art and feminism.¹⁸ Bodichon worked primarily as a watercolorist and regularly exhibited paintings at the Royal Academy and other galleries; she was one of the few women artists in the century to have her own gallery shows as well. Because of her wealth,

however, Bodichon didn't need the income she gained from her artworks; she used the money to finance her numerous feminist ventures: *The Englishwoman's Journal*, the founding of Girton College, political activism around women's rights bills, and other activities of the Langham Place Group, of which she was the leading force. She founded the *Englishwoman's Journal* in 1857; it was devoted to widening professional opportunities for women and published a great deal of art criticism and exhibition news. In 1859 Bodichon helped draft a petition to the Royal Academy demanding women's admission to the R.A. schools. The petition was signed by most of the prominent women painters of the time: Laura Hereford, Eliza Fox, Anna Blunden, Florence Claxton, the Mutrie sisters, Emily Mary Osborn, Rebecca Solomon, Margaret Gillies, and Mary Thorneycroft. The writer Harriet Martineau also supported the petition, giving it publicity in an article in the *Edinburgh Review* of April 1859.

One of the most visible political places of connection between Bodichon's feminism and her experiences in the art world was the agitation surrounding the Married Woman's Property Act (MWPA). Of the twenty-four signers of the Petition for Reform of the Married Woman's Property Act presented to Parliament in 1856, six were closely associated with the nineteenth-century art world as painters or art critics.¹⁹ The petition for the MWPA was developed both to preserve married women's inherited economic assets and to protect those married women who were beginning, in greater numbers, to earn money independently as artists and writers. The petition states explicitly, in its first paragraph, that income from the arts is at stake:

The Petition of the undersigned Women of Great Britain . . . Humbly Sheweth—That the manifold evils occasioned by the present law, by which the property and earnings of the wife are thrown into the absolute power of the husband, become daily more apparent. That it might once have been deemed for the middle and upper ranks, a comparatively theoretical question, but it is so no longer, *since married women of education are entering on every side the fields of literature and art, in order to increase the family income by such exertions.* (Holcombe 1983, 237; emphasis added)

Some of the immediate inspiration for the MWPA came from the notorious case of Caroline Norton, whom I discuss in chapter 2. Norton, separated from her husband, had great difficulties maintaining control over her income earned as a well-known writer. But countless other nineteenth-century women, as they entered the arts in greater numbers, demanded ownership of the fruits of their labors. The MWPA—defeated in Parliament successively

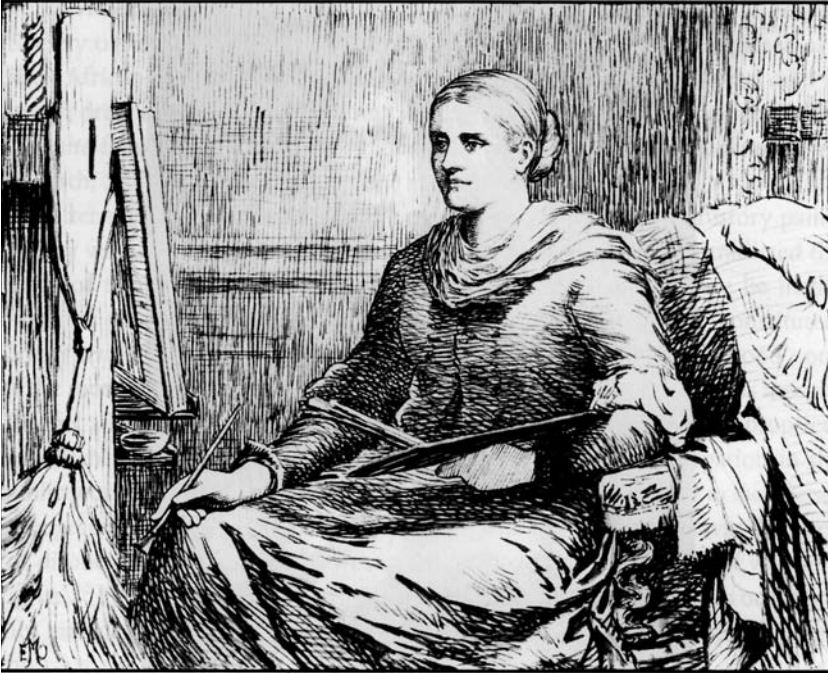


Figure 1.5. Emily Mary Osborn, *Sketch after a Portrait of Barbara Bodichon* (of original oil painting from 1884, whereabouts unknown). Source: Helen Blackburn, *Women's Suffrage* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1902).

in 1857 and 1868 and finally passed in 1870—was designed to protect the economic rights of just such working women.

Although Bodichon is better known today for her extensive contributions to the women's right's movement, in her own time she was equally well known as an artist. Indeed, as her biographer Pam Hirsch notes, Bodichon thought of herself first and foremost as an artist—for example, she entered “Artist” under the column for profession on her marriage certificate (1998, 129).²⁰ The portrait of Bodichon (see figure 1.5) by her friend and fellow artist Emily Mary Osborn also supports this emphasis on Bodichon's artistic career: though designed to celebrate Bodichon's involvement with Girton College, the portrait nevertheless portrays Bodichon before her easel even as it strives to represent Bodichon as a traditional scholar.

As Deborah Cherry writes, “It is significant that the founder of this first university college for women was portrayed as an artist” (1995, 65). Cherry further notes that Osborn elected to portray Bodichon as an oil painter rather than as the watercolorist she was—a decision motivated perhaps by the greater prestige of oil painting at the time.



Figure 1.6. Laura Alma-Tadema, *The Sisters*, 1883. Engraving. Whereabouts of original unknown. Source: Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Problem Pictures*, illustration 5.7.

The work of Bodichon and other feminist artists had wide-ranging effects. By 1870, the Royal Academy schools had begun to admit women students intermittently. Other schools were numerous and largely available to women. By the turn of the century, women could enter most art schools and could study from the nude model in several. Women artists had numerous options for exhibition and were accepted, more or less, in the public realm of art. However, the nineteenth century does not offer a completely rosy picture of a gradual increase in the prestige and public acceptance of women painters. The story is certainly one of increased access to training facilities, Royal Academy



Figure 1.7. Kate Greenaway, *Little Loves*. *The Illustrated London News*, Christmas number, 1877.

schools, and exhibition galleries. But in the later decades of the nineteenth century, a backlash in public opinion concerning women artists brought ideological setbacks,²¹ which might best be exemplified by the career of Laura Alma-Tadema, who came to prominence in the 1880s—her detailed, small, domestic subjects were considered appropriately feminine (see figure 1.6), and contrasted sharply with her husband's enormous neoclassical history subjects.

Similar, too, was the art of the enormously popular Kate Greenaway (see figure 1.7), whose images of adorable children and flowers were thought highly suitable for a woman artist. The public outcry against New Women artists, which I discuss in chapter 7, sets out the terms of the backlash. Well into the Modernist period and beyond, the woman painter has continued

to struggle against social restrictions and wavering public support (as Lily Briscoe's relationship to painting in Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* suggests); as we shall see in the coda to this study, even late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century woman artists haven't entirely succeeded in throwing off the ideological chains which also bound their nineteenth-century foremothers.

V.

Any public debate concerning women artists in the Victorian era (and beyond, as my coda suggests) was forced to tackle the problem of the visible female body and the erotic charge which seemed inevitably to accrue in the vicinity of women who paint. The traditional erotic structure of aesthetic experience might be reductively expressed as "male artist paints beautiful female object for the delectation of a male spectator." Certainly this triangle appears often enough in history and literature to be almost invisible in its familiarity. The art object is, as any number of aestheticians and critics have pointed out, a feminized object. But what happens to the aesthetic scenario when a woman holds the brush, when she steps out of her "natural" position as the beautiful object?

The classical myth of the origin of painting suggests that even a woman holding a brush can't escape being positioned within an erotic narrative. Once upon a time, or so Pliny tells us in book 35 of his *Natural History*, a Corinthian Maid (Dibutade by name) fell in love with a beautiful young man. One day while he slept she noticed that the light cast a perfect shadow of his profile on the wall behind him. Stealthily she took a stylus and, following the line of the shadow, traced the outline of his profile on the wall, knowing that he would soon wake and leave her, but that she would then have an image of him to adore in his absence. This image was the first "painting." Art was in this tale born out of a *woman's* desire and a *man's* beauty; the erotic potential which we will see again and again attributed to the woman artist in Victorian culture thus has a surprisingly long history. Eighteenth-century painters loved this story and reproduced it frequently, although its popularity declined sharply after the Romantic period (ironically just as the number of women entering the art world began to rise most sharply) and was only revived by Pater in *Greek Studies* as a tale of the origin of *sculpture* rather than painting. (Pater, however, shifts the focus from the daughter to the father, Butade, who, as the myth explains, filled in his daughter's drawing outline with clay, thus creating the first relief sculpture.)²²

Public disapproval of women painters in the Victorian era shows a marked though unacknowledged unease with the Corinthian Maid's disruption of the traditional erotics of art: a woman holding a brush threatened to disrupt the proper flow of aesthetic desire, placing it in the hands of the female subject rather than relegating women to the role of desired object. The negative discourse found a common solution to this aesthetic problem: by persistently re-eroticizing the woman painter, writers attempted to reinscribe the woman painter within her proper place in the aesthetic scenario. Textual and visual dismissals of women painters in the period suggest that critics of women's involvement in the art world felt that the best way to negate a woman painter's work was to refocus attention on the woman painter herself, as a desirable and beautiful art object in her own right. If the image of a beautiful woman, as Kathy Psomiades argues, traditionally works as a marker of the "private realm" (1997, 7), then this tactic served to redomesticate the woman painter. As she writes, "Because of its private sexual connotations, femininity marks [texts and paintings with images of women] as private objects of desire rather than public agents" (ibid.). While Psomiades's argument refers specifically to British aestheticism and to paintings depicting women, it is readily transferable to other genres and modes in the Victorian period (and beyond, certainly). In Victorian periodical treatments of women painters, for example, we see a common scene of aesthetic judgment in which a male spectator attempts to reinscribe the working woman as a "private object of desire" rather than a "public agent."

A selective tour through some of the negative press (both textual and visual) gives an excellent idea of this persistent eroticization of the woman painter. An 1857 article in *Punch* offers a provocative example of the public disapproval of women painters, and the attempt to defuse their social and aesthetic power by repositioning them as what Psomiades terms "private objects of desire." *Punch* advises its readers thus:

Those who are fond of "the society of Ladies" will rush to No. 315, Oxford Street, and there enjoy an exhibition that is the result of female handiwork. It is not an exhibition of stitching or embroidery . . . or anti-macassars, or floral smoking caps, or sporting slippers with a series of foxes running helter-skelter over the toes. It is not an exhibition of Berlin-wool work. . . . It is not an exhibition of jams, or jellies, or marmalades, or preserves . . . or any other mania that occasionally seizes hold of young ladies' fingers, and makes them, for the time being, excessively sticky to squeeze. You must not expect you are about to be invited to a choice collection of pies, or tarts, or cakes. . . . It is nothing to eat, nothing to play with, nothing to wear, nothing that you can adorn your magnificent person with. ("Let Us Join the Ladies")

The exhibition to which the decidedly male readership of this *Punch* article is invited is the first Society of Female Artists show, held in London in 1857. As *Punch* sees it, the problematic or unusual aspect of this collection of female productivity is its inability to be directly appealing to men. Antimacassars (devised to protect furniture from the ravages of men's hair oil), smoking caps, slippers with foxes, Berlin-wool work—all the items which the reviewer assures the reader he will *not* find at this exhibition—are domestic trifles (not High Art) typically produced by female fingers for the consumption of men.

That women are producing what *might* be (or become) High Art causes the *Punch* reviewer considerably anxiety. The flippant tone of the *Punch* review of the SFA exhibit is one possible way to diffuse the threat posed by such a collection of female artistic productivity. But to restore fully the normal trajectory of gendered production which the SFA exhibit threatens, the *Punch* reviewer sets to work ensuring that one thing at least can be salvaged from the exhibit for the delectation of the male viewer—the female artist's *body*. As the review continues, it becomes quite clear that what can be accessed during a visit to the exhibit—and “enjoyed,” as the opening line of the review suggests—is the “lady-artists” themselves, rather than their artistic products. “Away with regrets in the presence of such delightful company!” the reviewer exhorts; “You are communing with ANNA, JULIA, KATE, AGNES, FLORENCE, FRANCES, and fifty other pretty names! Not a man's ugly cognomen is to be found in the whole catalogue.” The women artists rarely, in the course of the review, receive their surnames—a surname which in the normal course of artistic attribution would supply an artist with respectable patronymic, a social position irrespective of gender. In the final paragraph of the review, where specific paintings and painters at last receive recognition, the artists *are* called by their surnames. But for the majority of the review, it is precisely the patronymic—the “man's ugly cognomen” that the reviewer rejoices not to find at the SFA—which this *Punch* reviewer denies the female artists. The names emblazoned in all caps are not simply random female names, of course, but are in fact the first names of actual exhibitors in the 1857 SFA exhibit: ANNA Blunden, KATE Swift, AGNES Bouvier, FLORENCE Claxton, FRANCES Stoddart all contributed paintings to this SFA show. But the average *Punch* reader in 1857 would be unlikely to be able to supply the missing surnames. By leaving out the last names of the artists, the *Punch* reviewer contributes to the artists' continued lack of public acclaim.

By this erasure of surnames, the reviewer also takes a remarkably personal stance toward the artists, especially in an era where the use of a first name still had social implications (as does using the “*tu*” form in French, for instance). The reviewer seems to imply by this appellation that these women's last names are, in fact, up for grabs—that the artists are young, unmarried

women, available to be “enjoyed” in a marriage that would necessarily result in a transference of patronymic, a switch from the feminine “pretty name” to “a man’s ugly cognomen.” Why should these artists be referred to by their own last names, the reviewer seems to say, when they will all be married soon and change them anyway?

The *artworks* themselves are largely ignored, or indeed looked directly through, to better see the artist beyond. The *Punch* reviewer encourages the male viewer to

Stand with respectful awe before that picture of the tender *Brigand chief*, for who knows, HARRIET may one day be your wife? That *Bivouac in the Desert*, which is glowing before you . . . was encamped originally in the snug parlour of LOUISA—that very same LOUISA, that probably you flirted with last week at a picnic in Birnam Beeches. Be careful of your remarks. Drop not an ugly word, lest you do an injury to the talent of some poetic creature, who at some time or other handed you a cup of tea, or sang you the songs you loved. . . . With GEORGIANA on your right, MARIA on your left; with EMMA gazing from her gorgeous frame right at you, and SOPHIA peeping from behind that clump of moon-silvered trees over your shoulder, be tender, be courteous, be complimentary, be everything that is gentle, and devoted, and kind.

Again, the reviewer refers to actual artists in his romantic scenario: the EMMA who gazes from her “gorgeous frame” is Emma Brownlow; the SOPHIA who “peeps” at the viewer is Sophia Sinnett, whose “Reading the List of Killed and Wounded” garnered special acclaim at the 1857 exhibit. Yet the scene created by the reviewer becomes not one of aesthetic judgment or appreciation of the works of these painters, but rather a romantic scenario of potential erotic attachment and courtship. Here, artworks serve only as conduits back to the physical bodies of their producers; Emma Brownlow, for example, is herself gazing from her frame, even though the picture exhibited was not a self-portrait. The women painters are positioned firmly into their “proper” social and erotic functions: wives, dispensers of tea, or coquettish flirts. The reviewer substitutes a traditional courtship narrative—a narrative set in motion by the hint that HARRIET may “one day be your wife”—for a narrative of artistic production or aesthetic prowess. Yet the artworks named here—*Brigand Chief* and *Bivouac in the Desert*—intervene momentarily in this imagined courtship of artist and viewer. That the works appear to represent a socially radical figure of erotic fantasy (a leader of Bandits) and a foreign military scene (unless there are deserts in England of which I am unaware) suggests that the artworks under scrutiny aren’t nearly as feminine and innocent as the “gentle, and devoted, and kind” reviewer attempts to be. To counter the unfeminine

content of these images, the reviewer mimics and then attempts to diffuse the military terminology by refeminizing and domesticating it: the *Bivouac in the Desert* was “originally encamped in the *snug parlour* of LOUISA” (emphasis added).²³

To further neutralize the danger posed by these women’s works, the *Punch* writer must double the femininity present in the exhibition by insinuating that many of the “lady artists’” works are in fact pictures of other women:

A Frenchman would nickname the Exhibition: *Les Femmes peintes par elles-mêmes*—though it must not be surmised that the painting is in the ungallant sense that a Frenchman would satirically convey. If cheeks are delicately coloured—if lips are strung into the precise shape of Cupid’s bow— . . . if eyelashes are artistically penciled—the penciling and the painting are not upon their own fair features, but on the faces of others; and there is no law as yet laid down . . . by the tyranny of Man, that a Lady, though she may not colour her own adorable physiognomy, is forbidden to paint the face of another.

In addition to the satiric confusion between artist and artwork which permeates the entire review, the suggestion here that the subject matter of these women artists is “elles-mêmes” (the word can imply themselves, as in self-portraits, or one another, that is, pictures of other women) implies that women are interchangeable, that the artist and the art object are so similar as to be indistinguishable, and that the artists merely paint self-portraits or portraits of other women that can replace their own corporeal selves in the public view. In other words, women who paint are in essence painting their own bodies—even when the subject is neither the self nor another woman.²³ The small cartoon that accompanies the review (figure 1.8) reinforces this notion by raising the specter of female vanity. The woman reclines on a circular dais, wearing a stylish gown: in her hand she holds a mirror, the classic symbol of female vanity. Yet she does not look into it; rather, she looks out at the viewer, as if inviting our gaze. The woman artist wants to be admired; the review and the cartoon together suggest that women paint to incite desire rather than to express talent or for economic reasons.²⁴

We see echoes of this throughout the fictional world of women painters. When Rochester, for example, forces Jane Eyre to trot out her portfolio of paintings for his inspection, he is mocking a traditional ritual of polite courtship. A young woman’s artwork was regularly displayed—in addition to her performance on the pianoforte—as a display of the woman’s “accomplishment,” as a visible marker of her desirability as woman, which is precisely how the *Punch* article translates women’s artwork. We shall see similar scenes in



Figure 1.8. Detail from “Let Us Join the Ladies.” *Punch* 29 (July 18, 1857)

almost all the texts featuring an artist heroine which I discuss here; a young woman’s works are viewed by her social community or by a prospective suitor as evidence of desire or as incitements to desire rather than as aesthetically viable, marketable commodities. Explorations of women’s art inevitably become explorations of female desire.

Given such fascinated interest in the corporeality and sexuality of the artists themselves, no aesthetic critique of their artwork seems possible. The *Punch* reviewer writes, “The visitor involuntarily takes his hat off before so much *unknown* loveliness” (emphasis added). This “unknown loveliness” refers more to the beauty of the artistic producers than to the beauty of the artistic products, which cannot be called “unknown” as they are immediately available, visually present, to the reviewer. The woman painter, however, remains hidden behind her picture, tantalizingly evoked but invisible to the leering reviewer. The male viewer’s aesthetic judgment of the artistic products

is curtailed by the “haunting” of each picture by its producer; it is literally Emma Brownlow “gazing from her gorgeous frame” rather than a *picture* by that artist which the reviewer sees inside a gilt frame. The double-entendre on “frame” here makes Emma’s *body* spring into view as one possible object of scrutiny. Each painting somehow doubles a woman’s presence: she becomes both artist and art object. But the *Punch* reviewer attempts to streamline the dangerous multiplicity of women present in the exhibit by focusing solely on the individual artist’s desirable body. The formidable artistic community of women involved in the SFA exhibit pose a threat that can be tackled by positioning the artists firmly into discrete courtship narratives; to foreclose on any complicated doubling of the female into artist and artwork. *Punch* manages to shift the balance in favor of woman-as-artwork, firmly nailing woman back into her traditional position as object-of-desire.

This *Punch* review is characteristic of the persistent eroticization of the woman artist throughout the nineteenth century.²⁵ It’s no accident or surprise, given the nineteenth-century atmosphere, that of the four March sisters in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, the one who wants to be an artist—Amy—is the prettiest one who marries the richest, handsomest man and becomes little more than a museum piece herself. The woman writer—Jo, in this case—is not so erotically represented.²⁶ Alcott is arguably reacting to a very prevalent cultural ideology which collapses artwork into artist; such a collapse recapitulates the overall character of the mid-century discourse surrounding women artists, a discourse which is notable for its fascinated concern for the woman artist’s body, as if the public is confused over what should be the aesthetic object—the art or the artist. A cartoon from a series of drawings titled *The Adventures of a Woman in Search of her Rights* (1871) by Florence Claxton, a painter and engraver active in the battle for women’s rights, offers a humorous representation of this erotic situation (see figure 1.9). The young artist in Claxton’s drawing leans suggestively before her easel, her backside emphasized and her figure sexualized by a bustle and the bow from her painter’s apron. The very clothing that marks her as an artist, then, also serves to heighten her femininity. The caption, which reads “What Tompkins said to Jones: ‘Bother the Old Masters, Look at the young Miss-esses,’” offers multiple verbal puns: at first, of course, there is simply the slippage from the respectful “Old Masters” to the “young Miss-esses,” signaling that the speaker (Tompkins) views the young artist not as an artist, but as a sexually available young woman. The second pun, of course, involves the close proximity of “Miss-esses” to “mistresses,” which in the period could mean either unmarried sexual partner or the respectable Lady of the house. In either case, the young “miss-ess” in the cartoon has lost her status as aesthetic producer and has become for Tompkins

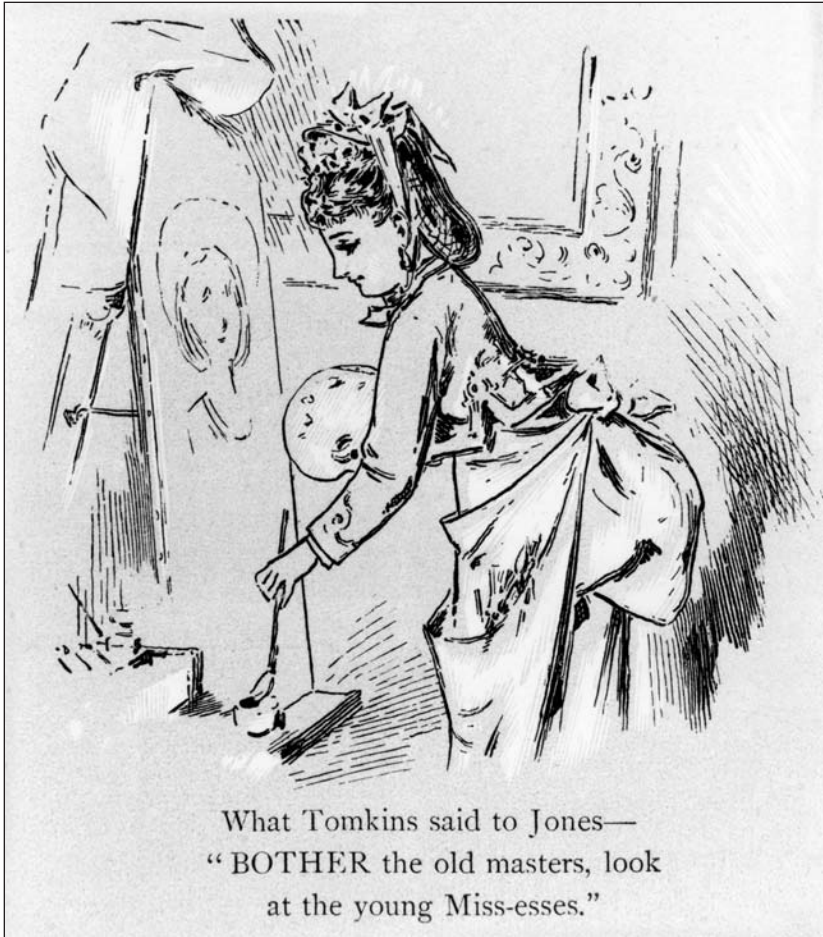


Figure 1.9. Florence Claxton, detail from *The Adventures of a Woman in Search of her Rights* (London: The Graphotyping Co., 1872), 17.

a female object, something to be looked at. “Look at the young Miss-esses,” he says—not “look at the works of the young Miss-esses.”

Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s sketch titled *A Parable of Love (Love’s Mirror)* provides yet another telling exemplar of the erotic charge inherent in female artistic production. The sketch (see figure 1.10) is thought to have been done in 1850, and while there is no firm proof of identity, the two central figures are generally taken to be Rossetti himself and Elizabeth Siddal, Rossetti’s pupil, mistress, and eventual wife.²⁷ Few critics have discussed this sketch even in passing, and those who do mention it neglect its startling gender



Figure 1.10. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *A Parable of Love (Love's Mirror)*, 1850? Birmingham City Art Gallery. Reprinted with permission.

implications. Lawrence Starzyk, for example, foregrounds the “parable” of the title and looks closely at the moral lesson the drawing tells. The simple message of the parable is that the artist draws only one face but the mirror “paints” a better picture—a picture of true love—by including both faces. Starzyk certainly notes the sexual tension implicit in the image; he points out that one of the women on the right side is in a pose “strikingly reminiscent of the woman’s in Hunt’s *The Awakening Conscience*” and argues that the two rear figures look on and suggest that the seated woman is in fact “potentially compromised sexually, psychologically, and artistically” (1999, 179).

What Starzyk fails to note, however, is that the sketch represents not a

love scene but a scene in which female visual potential is literally blotted out by male power: the male teacher's hand is guiding the female student's hand to *paint out her own eye*. As Susan Casteras notes in her brief discussion of the sketch, "the degree of male control of female creativity is extreme in this example" (1992, 216). The male painter has "the upper hand" quite literally and wipes out the very organ that would enable the woman painter to paint. Love, as represented by the dyad in the mirror, is an oppressive force for the woman artist. Significantly, too, it is only the *male* painter here who sees the vision of love the mirror offers; only the male figure looks in the mirror at the pair of lovers. The female painter's gaze remains resolutely fixed on her canvas (now despoiled as it might be). Rossetti's sketch, like the *Punch* review, attempts to eradicate female visual creativity by reinstating romance and erotic desire as central to a woman's experience; Rossetti's sketch, however, at least obliquely suggests that the female painter may refuse to be complicit in this scenario.

Other male painters entered into the representational debate as well. One of the most interesting representations of the woman painter is by John Singer Sargent, whose painting *The Fountain*, painted just after the end of the Victorian era in 1907, can be read as a wonderful joke on women painters (see figure 1.11). The woman in the painting is herself a professional artist, Jane Emmet von Glehn; the man is her husband, the artist Wilfrid von Glehn. Jane was entirely cognizant of the combined satire and respect in Sargent's portrait of her; in a letter to her sister Lydia (6 October 1907) she writes:

Sargent is doing a most amusing and killingly funny picture in oils of me perched on a balustrade painting. It is the very "spit" of me. He has stuck Wilfrid in looking at my sketch with rather a contemptuous expression as much to say "Can you do plain sewing any better than that?" He made Wilfrid put on this expression to avoid the danger of the picture looking like an "idyll on a P. & O. steamer" as he expressed it[.] I look rather like a pierrot, but have rather a worried expression as every painter should have who isn't a perfect fool, says Sargent. Wilfrid is in short sleeves, very idle and good for nothing, and our heads come against the great "panache" of the fountain. . . . Poor Wilfrid can't pose for more than a few minutes at a time as the position is torture after a while. (quoted in Hills 1986, 191)

Wilfrid is "stuck" in the painting to provide the voice of dismissive male critique (which desires a woman to be a domestic seamstress rather than a public artist), but he is also "good for nothing" and, ironically, forced to undergo "torture" to maintain his apparently languid pose. The torture seems



Figure 1.11. Detail from John Singer Sargent, *The Fountain, Villa Torlonia, Frascati, Italy*, 1907. Art Institute of Chicago. Reproduced with permission.

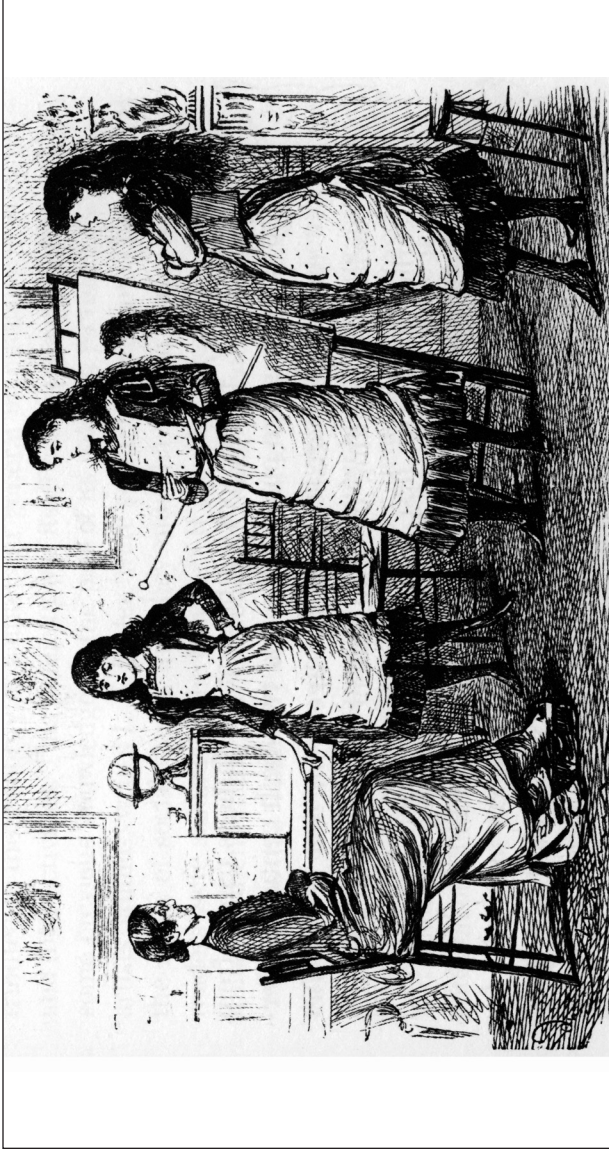
punishment for his “contemptuous expression” as he views his wife’s artwork. Jane herself, on the other hand, has the “worried expression” of an active painter and is anything but idle; her figure in the portrait is bolt upright and focused. We should note that the painting is called *The Fountain*, which is not what the woman is herself painting but what Sargent, the male painter, makes central. In the painting itself, the woman painter is slightly off-center;

the focus is the fountain itself, shooting ridiculously and with sublimely silly connotations out of the reclining male figure's head. The lounging male's ejaculation, Sargent seems to say, is of more force than whatever the woman paints. The erotic relation is reinforced by the physical postures of the two figures: the woman is upright, the man languorous, postcoital. The placement of the fountain also disrupts what could have been a perfectly triangular composition—and the distortion seems caused by the woman painter herself. Since the erotics of art is about a kind of triangulation—male artist, female art object, male viewer—this is certainly another part of the joke. The presence of the woman artist, as we will see so frequently, has disrupted traditional aesthetic and erotic structures.

As these examples suggest, the woman painter in the act of painting was for the Victorians an object of aesthetic pleasure and scrutiny. In countless periodical reviews and in all of the novels this book examines, we find scenes in which a woman artist paints while being watched by another, almost always male, presence. This viewer then consistently attempts—with varying success—to contain the painting woman inside a frame, to turn her back into a beautiful art object. Even when the artist herself is not present (as in the exhibit the *Punch* reviewer discusses), she must be conjured, recreated to stand behind her production, as if only her female body could guarantee the aesthetic attraction of a work of art. The texts I discuss in this book take up this problem, arguing that part of the struggle for women artists must be to avoid becoming art objects themselves.

VI.

Given the prevalence of such dismissive discourse, proponents of women's involvement in the art world had a tough sell. Anyone wishing to celebrate women painters had to negotiate the dual problem of visibility and desirability so as to “excuse” women painters for their public presence, lest they be aligned with those other visually available women: prostitutes, actresses, and the like. The “association between access to public life, freedom of movement, and sexual impropriety” that Harman finds “appears insistently” both in the discourse surrounding the suffrage movement and in the detractors of female doctors and lawyers is no less present in the cultural debates over women painters (1998, 5). In fact, I would argue that the art world drew the link between public professionalism and sexual looseness in women painters even more tightly than almost any other profession (save theater and dance). The cartoon in figure 1.12, for example, singles out painters, musicians, and



REMOVAL OF ANCIENT LANDMARKS.

Lady Guendoline. "PAPA SAYS I'M TO BE A GREAT ARTIST, AND EXHIBIT AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY!"
Lady Yseult. "AND PAPA SAYS I'M TO BE A GREAT PIANIST, AND PLAY AT THE MONDAY POPS!"
Lady Edéigitha. "AND I'M GOING TO BE A FAMOUS ACTRESS, AND ACT *OPHELIA*, AND CUT OUT MISS ELLEN TERRY! PAPA SAYS I MAY—THAT IS, IF I CAN, YOU KNOW!"
The New Governess. "GOODNESS GRACIOUS, YOUNG LADIES! IS IT POSSIBLE HIS GRACE CAN ALLOW YOU EVEN TO THINK OF SUCH THINGS! WHY, MY PAPA WAS ONLY A POOR HALF-PAY OFFICER, BUT THE BARE THOUGHT OF MY EVER PLAYING IN PUBLIC, OR PAINTING FOR HIRE, WOULD HAVE SIMPLY HORRIFIED HIM!—AND AS FOR ACTING *OPHELIA*—OR ANYTHING ELSE—GRACIOUS GOODNESS, YOU TAKE MY BREATH AWAY!"

Figure 1.12. George Du Maurier, "Removal of Ancient Landmarks." *Punch* 82 (June 25, 1881).

actresses specifically for their public appearances; the prim, dry governess is horrified by the thought of “Playing in *Public* or Painting for *Hire*” (italics in original), making the painter’s craft sound precariously like the selling of the woman’s body.

The few art historical texts from the period that offer sustained examination of women painters are forced into remarkable mental gymnastics to overcome the ideological prejudices against women painters. One of the most comprehensive nineteenth-century sources for biographical and ideological information about professional women artists from the Renaissance through the mid-Victorian era is an impressive two-volume compendium titled *English Female Artists*, published in 1876 by Ellen Clayton. That Clayton could amass information on several hundred English women artists, from the time of Charles I to the mid-nineteenth century, speaks volumes both for the history of women artists and for Clayton’s extraordinary research achievements. Clayton’s entries are largely biographical, often fanciful; she tells quaint stories about the early girlhoods of her artists, creating mini-narratives that attempt to position working women artists as “heroines” in a lively and romantic history. Yet Clayton begins her massive compilation with a plaintive gesture of submission and apology, desperately insisting on the invisibility of women artists:

Artists, especially English artists, and above all, English Female Artists, as a rule lead quiet, uneventful lives, far more so than authors. In the majority of instances, their daily existence flows tranquilly on within the limited precincts of the studio, only casually troubled by anxious meditations respecting the fate of . . . minor works . . . or by the unkind slights of a hanging committee. Eminently respectable, they affect little display; they leave surprisingly few *bon mots* or personal anecdotes for the benefit of future biographers.

Our native paintresses, as the old-fashioned art critics and compilers of biographical dictionaries quaintly termed them, have left but faintly impressed footprints on the sands of time. They do not glitter in the splendor of renown, like their sisters of the pen or of the buskin. It is a difficult task to obtain a sparse list of their original works, or glean any scattered remarks on their most valued copies of great masters. Even the most romantic or admired of these fair dreamers on canvas or ivory have scarce an incident beyond the commonplace in the brief record of their public or private career. (1876, 1: 1–2)

This is a far cry from the “power” seen by George Eliot in Rosa Bonheur’s work. Quiet, tranquil, and respectable are Clayton’s “fair dreamers on canvas,”

and so very different from the muscular artist imagined by Ruskin—and markedly different from authors, those “sisters of the pen” who are aligned here with theatrical women “of the buskin,” and thus positioned as more radically public and of questionable respectability. As we have seen, this contrast flies in the face of much of the public discourse surrounding women painters, which represented them as more radical, public, and sexualized than women authors (who still, as plenty of critics have argued, came in for their share of harassment). Clayton insists (and arguably protests too much) that the woman artist is intently domestic, inhabiting the “limited precincts of the studio” rather than venturing into the outside world. Clayton’s artist is also fragile of ego, vulnerable to “slights” (a word more suited to social interaction than aesthetic judgment), and above all remarkably *invisible* for someone involved in visual arts. Women painters are hidden within a studio; they affect “little display”; they do not “glitter”; nor do they leave behind them any mark or trace or echo of their endeavor—they are almost literally weightless and bodiless, leaving “but faintly impressed footprints on the sands of time.”

Similarly, Elizabeth Ellet’s enormous volume, *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries* (1859), represents women painters as gentle, quiet, nonthreatening, and above all feminine.²⁸ Ellet’s book is a compilation of the *personal* histories of as many women artists as she can uncover in the historical record. Ellet writes, “No attempt has been made in the following pages to give elaborate critiques or a connected history of art. The aim has been simply to show what woman has done . . . and to give . . . impressions of the character of each prominent artist” (vi). Biographical information takes center stage here; there are occasional references to an artist’s style, or to a particular work, but these are rare. The overall message is that these are women first and foremost—sweet, kind, loving, and feminine women who just happen to have painted for a living.

Ellet begins her book with a quotation contrasting women painters with women writers: “‘Men have not grudged to women,’ says a modern writer, ‘the wreaths of literary fame.’” (21). An inevitable “but” is of course implied here: women might have been permitted to achieve literary success but have achieved little success in the realm of visual art. Ellet’s extensive research into the lives of women painters is her attempt to suggest that there have been *some* women artists “in all ages and countries” who have excelled at their work; they simply have not been adequately celebrated. Ellet continues her introduction with an insistence that art comes *naturally* to women: women, she writes, have always loved ornament, decoration, and beauty of all sorts. Writers often tried to make women painters ideologically palatable in this way, by appealing to women’s “natural” connection to the world of beauty.

What could be more natural than women's desiring to create art that reproduces and preserves such beauty?²⁹

Ellet's biographical histories of women artists, like Clayton's, are so highly emotive or melodramatic as to be a kind of mild romance fiction. In her section on Angelica Kauffman, for example, Ellet writes, "All too quickly, indeed, passed the two years of her first residence in Como; and it was then with poignant regret that she left her beloved home. . . . Even this dreaded change, however, was a fortunate one; for it seemed to be appointed that Angelica's youth should glide away like a stream in the sunshine of happiness" (147). Taken as a whole, Ellet's book (again, like Clayton's) tries to make women artists into personalities—albeit ones characterized by extremely feminine traits. Elisabetta Sirani, for example, is depicted as if she were the heroine of a rather nauseating sentimental novel: "She would rise at dawn to perform those lowly domestic tasks for which her occupations during the day left her little leisure; and never permitted her passion for art to interfere with the fulfillment of homely duties. . . . All praised her gracious and cheerful spirit, her prompt judgment, and deep feeling for the art she loved. . . . Her devoted filial affection, her feminine grace, and the artless benignity of her manners, completed a character regarded by her friends as an ideal of perfection" (69).

Yet overall Ellet's book is surprisingly less personal—and less narratively melodramatic—than Clayton's. Ellet takes the artists she considers more seriously, representing them more frequently as working women. Occasionally Ellet even breaks out into something approaching feminist ire, as when she notes that the emperor refused to award the Legion of Honor to Rosa Bonheur (who was entitled to it when she won a prize for her painting "The Horse-market") "*because she was a woman!*" (277; emphasis in original). Ellet's work also makes a good introduction to the American scene, where women painters—although still facing many of the same struggles as British women painters—were treated slightly more seriously. If one contrasts Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's novel *The Story of Avis* (1877) to Anne Thackeray Ritchie's *Miss Angel*, for example, one can see the distinction clearly. Phelps's novel is much more explicitly angry over the oppressions working women were up against.

Clayton's and Ellet's persistent feminizing and softening is one common technique for Victorian women writers to make palatable the problematic public presence of the woman painter. It was also, as Julie Codell suggests, a way to include women artists in the larger category of "Victorian artist," who, as I discussed in the introduction, were increasingly constructed by popular discourse as domestic and respectable rather than transgressive (as in the Romantic or Modern periods). Codell writes, "Women artists' discretion was

not only a gendered trait but also a part of the larger Victorian domestication of artists, expressed in the theme of the artist's uneventful life, circumscribed within the studio" (2003, 235). Thus, women artists were normalized on two fronts: first, they were represented as appropriately feminine; second, they were depicted as similar to their male counterparts—quiet, respectable, and hard-working.

Women painters themselves, when they wrote their memoirs, adopted similar narrative strategies for excusing their work to a possibly unsympathetic and threatening populace; they emphasized the peaceful, domestic, and quotidian nature of a woman painter's professional existence (even when that was far from their experience). In particular we find that English women painters, in their autobiographies, stress their daily domestic struggles (regularly rendered humorous) rather than focus on their dreams of fame or their aesthetic beliefs.³⁰ They also often focused on economic considerations, as if to represent art as a livelihood first and foremost, rather than any kind of participation in an elevated aesthetic tradition. Louise Jopling's memoir (1925) with its light, cheerful tone offers another way of representing the woman artist: as a kind of social butterfly, a popular and charming woman rather than a hard-nosed professional. Although her *Twenty Years of My Life* records its share of dismal moments (poverty, hard work, family deaths, failed marriages), the bulk of her tale is one of fashionable parties with well-known artist-guests. Indeed, even though she was the primary breadwinner for her family and worked herself to exhaustion on numerous occasions, Jopling represented herself—and was constructed in the public presses which reported artists' doings—as an elegant hostess and a graceful model rather than the bohemian, active feminist, and productive artist she arguably was.

The title of Sophia Beale's (whose name we see blazoned in the *Punch* review) memoir, *Recollections of a Spinster Aunt* (1908), may sound inauspicious for introducing a serious artist, but does serve to render her "safe" for the reading public. What have we to fear from a spinster aunt, one of those amiable creatures who doted on other people's children? But Beale was an active exhibitor at the Royal Academy and the SFA from 1860 to the 1880s, mainly as a figure painter; she was also known as an art writer, author of *A Handbook to the Louvre*, and she signed the Women Householder's Declaration of 1889 supporting women's suffrage.³¹ Her memoir, presented as a "fictionalized" series of letters to a cousin, contains a lively account of the art scene in the 1850s and 1860s and provides insight into what struggling young women artists might have gone through in pursuit of education, fame, and *fortune*.

This last she considered an elusive prize for the average artist. Her

characterization of “the artist” (coded male according to tradition, although she herself and all her friends are women artists) includes such qualities as the ability to live hopefully and cheerfully on the salary of a “dock-labourer,” and the ability to not look on money as the end and aim of existence. “But all the same,” she writes,

filthy lucre is necessary, even for such pleasures as tea accompanied by muffins, to say naught of rent, rates, taxes, butchers, bakers and candlestick makers—though I spend little on *him*. Don't you agree that the greatest curse of this world is gold? The mere fact of one's mind dwelling upon money, or the want of it, is degrading. Was it not Dora Greenwell who said the meeting of both ends was a somewhat sad ideal at which to aim; she would like the ends to tie in a nice bow. So should I. A small, fixed income, increased by the proceeds of work . . . and a nice bow for innocent worldliness . . . is what I desire—and never shall obtain! (1908, 158; emphasis in original)

Here we see a precursor to Virginia Woolf's “five hundred a year and a room of one's own” as the necessary prerequisites for true female creativity. Yet the epistolary style allows for lightness of tone, a kind of flippancy behind which Beale hides her more serious social critiques. Beale's style also relies heavily on ventriloquizing various characters in her life; for example, Beale quotes stories told to her by a model she has hired to sit for her and transplants what is obviously Beale's own serious criticism of the art world into the model's mouth. The model is the widow of an artist whose paintings rarely sold and who like many artists suffered from the public opinion that art and money should not be spoken of in the same breath. The model recounts,

It is droll, too, if it were not so serious, that the public looks upon money in connection with art as degrading; artists being ideal creatures who should be above such vulgar trafficking as money making; “art is not commerce,” they say; but all the same it is only another sort of commerce to groceries, and unless all artists are to have an income provided by the State, I don't see how they are to live without selling their pictures. If exchange and barter were to be revived it would be very delightful; my dead husband always said we should be quite rich then as we had so many pictures we could have exchanged with the butcher and baker and grocers. (117)

The obsession with *groceries* in both Beale quotes is rather telling; throughout Beale's narrative there is a fixation on the simple acquisition of bread which serves as a reminder, amid all her discussions of famous paintings and studio

parties, of the fact that artists, like other people, need to exchange money for food.

Elizabeth Thompson Butler provides a counterexample of a woman painter who played the financial and social game with success and refused to apologize for herself; in her memoir she constructs herself as a dedicated professional, unintimidated by the rich and famous with whom she regularly interacted. Butler erupted onto the British art scene in 1874, when her impressive 8-foot painting “Calling the Roll after an Engagement, Crimea” (popularly known as “The Roll Call”) was accepted by the Royal Academy and hung *on the line*—that is, in the place of greatest visibility (and hence prestige) on the high walls of the Academy galleries. The work was so popular that policemen had to be hired to control the crowds struggling to get a glimpse of her picture at the R.A.—and to protect two paintings by Lord Leighton that had the misfortune of being placed at right angles to “The Roll Call” in one corner and hence were being scraped by turbulent Academy-goers eager to see Butler’s work. In her memoir, Butler calls Leighton’s paintings “two lovely little pictures”—a condescending remark which subtly reduces and feminizes Leighton’s work, especially in contrast to Butler’s huge canvas, its masculine subject, and the violent unladylike response it incited in the crowds (Butler 1922, 112).

In fact, the entire saga of Butler’s artistic success dramatizes her destabilization of gender norms. Even before the official opening day of the Academy, Butler records in her memoirs, “The Roll Call” enthralled the Academicians and set in motion a politely cutthroat bidding war between various art collectors, art dealers, the Prince of Wales, and eventually Queen Victoria herself. Butler had painted the picture under commission for a Mr. Galloway, a Manchester manufacturer and art collector, for £100. Upon completion, he was so impressed he paid her £126 instead of the £100 agreed on and sent the picture to the Academy, where it kindled immediate interest. Galloway had many eager purchasers, some offering him as much as £1000 for a picture he had obtained for £126. (Butler wasn’t the loser by any means; she sold the engraving copyrights to the picture for £1,200.) At last, Queen Victoria exercised her royal privilege and forced Mr. Galloway to cede “The Roll Call” to her. It is neatly ironic that this enormous picture, with its “masculine” subject but painted by a woman, is eventually sold to The Woman—the Queen. The trajectory of the picture seems to dramatize the potential for female control over the art world: not only does the Queen gain control over the painting, but Butler also gains considerable power as an artist after her fame with “The Roll Call.” When Galloway insisted that Butler paint her next R.A. picture for him, and at the *same price* as he paid for “The Roll Call” (£126), Butler was

no fool; she understood perfectly what her sudden popularity could mean. She writes in her memoirs:

I had set my heart on painting the 28th Regiment in square receiving the last charge of the French Cuirassiers at Quatre Bras, but as that picture would necessitate far more work than “The Roll Call,” I could not paint it for that little 126 pounds—so very puny now! To cut a long story short, he finally consented to have “Quatre Bras” at my own price, [£]1,126. (111–12)

One wonders if her setting the price at £1,126—precisely £1000 more than Galloway paid for her first endeavor—was meant as a subtle reproof for his previous radical undervaluing of her artwork.³²

Butler’s no-nonsense approach to her life and her work is unusual; the breezy or earnest styles we find in Jopling and Beale are much more common. Some Victorian women novelists share the strategies we see in these more light-hearted memoirs and in Ellet and Clayton; the woman painter is made safe by a kind of feminization that repositions her within traditional gender roles. But more frequently, as we shall see in succeeding chapters, novelists who chose to depict women painters opted for a more radical vision of their sister artists as disruptive, revolutionary, bohemian, and in general existing outside the norms and regulations of the social order—even if they are eventually represented as folded safely back into this order. As one can see from the above short history of the woman painter and the discourses that surrounded her, women writers would certainly have noted key similarities between their own experiences and those of their sister artists; barriers to success in the art world were just one part of a whole package of well-known ideological oppressions that Victorian women faced. But women painters were a particular case; their experiences highlighted and intensified key problems in the gender politics of the time, especially in terms of their erotic position in the aesthetic scenario. This intensity gave women writers ample opportunity to engage in radical gender debates. Women novelists, as the following chapters show, were highly attuned and attentive to the range of social, political, and aesthetic issues raised by the woman painter in the nineteenth century.

Introduction

1. For an excellent discussion of Eliot's knowledge of and literary use of painting, see Witemeyer 1979.

2. See Nunn 1987, 3.

3. Poovey (1988, 12) traces some of the "contested images" of gender that threatened the precarious (indeed, in her argument, untenable and fantastical) stability of Victorian gender norms. The "border cases" that she investigates "had the potential to expose the artificiality of the binary logic that governed the Victorian symbolic economy." These border cases—divorce, childbirth, the governess, etc.—could "challenge the social arrangement of separate spheres and everything that went with it: the sexual division of labor, the model of moral influence, the notion that there was some boundary to the alienation of market relations." While less markedly a "border case" in that she more overtly challenged the cultural gender hierarchies, the Victorian woman painter was nevertheless very much a contested image—and is arguably as frequent a fictional figure as the governess.

4. I draw frequently on recent developments in art history to explore what nineteenth-century women writers might have been observing in the art world during their lifetimes. My work here has been made easier—indeed has been made *possible*—by a recent body of impressive recovery work on women painters of the nineteenth century. Through the work of art historians including Whitney Chadwick, Deborah Cherry, Paula Gillett, Griselda Pollock, Jan Marsh, Christina Campbell Orr, and others, previously unknown Victorian women artists have been brought to light and given comprehensive histories; serious aesthetic critique has at last been brought to bear on works hitherto dismissed as domestic or feminine art. I am also, of course, indebted to feminist literary scholars, who have made it possible to take seriously the works of many noncanonical writers whom I discuss in this book.

5. The woman painter is overwhelmingly a denizen of the realm of realist fiction. All the texts I consider here fall under the heading of domestic fiction, focusing on the marriage plot to varying degrees. *Jane Eyre* is the only text that strays significantly from the realist path—and Jane’s paintings, while fantastic in their subject matter, are very much a part of the material side of the novel. Nancy Armstrong’s influential *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1990) argues that the domestic realist novel comes into being as a discourse of gendered subjectivity that plays out political issues in the private sphere of domesticity; the early novel’s main concern, she argues, is sexuality and marriage, but these mask socioeconomic and political threads running just below the surface. Helene Moglen similarly argues for the “centrality of sex and gender as the novel’s defining concern” (2001, 1) rather than the more traditional class-based argument, derived from Ian Watt, which locates the novel within the history of capital and the rise of the middle class. In Moglen’s alternate history, changes in the sex-gender system were inextricably tied to the economic and social changes traced by Watt and his followers; the novel both “imposed and resisted” such transformations in gender ideology (4).

Some writers on realism, such as George Levine 1981 and Leo Bersani, argue that realism struggles to repair social fragmentation, to present a (however doomed) picture of a unified subject—a kind of “consolations of fiction” argument. Along similar lines, but with stronger disapproval, D. A. Miller argues that novels (realist and otherwise) are a form of social policing, an effort at containment and ideological domination. Catherine Belsey in *Critical Practice* argues that this aspect of realism is politically dangerous; in this reading, realism is a part of the bourgeois and capitalist project to cover up the fissures in social order and individual identity caused by economic oppression. The novel becomes a way of collapsing social heterogeneity into homogeneity (marriage, stability, closure, etc.).

In response to such critiques, feminist critics of the 1980s and 1990s often turned away from realist texts to the gothic novel or sensational fiction to find evidence of women’s voices. But Penny Boumelha in “Realism and the Ends of Feminism” set out to reclaim realism for feminist critics: Boumelha argues that women writers used the conventions and constraints of realism with purpose, to reveal and critique the social and ideological pressures that limited Victorian women’s lives. If critics were attuned to its nuances, argued Boumelha, women’s realist fiction had radical and transgressive statements to make. I argue similarly that these women writers are actively working through aesthetic and ideological issues, offering critiques of varying stridency.

6. The most obvious kind of direct influence is work-to-work influence, as when a writer (W. H. Auden, for example) writes a poem specifically about a work of art (Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*). In the nineteenth century, we see numerous examples of this, from the Pre-Raphaelites to the poets Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper (“Michael Field”), who wrote several poems “to” or “about” paintings. In the other direction, direct influence also appears in painting when an artist represents a scene from a literary source. Less obvious kinds of direct influence abound, however. One kind is when a *style* from one medium influences an artist working in another medium, as when Katherine Mansfield writes a story explicitly in the style of abstract expressionism. More broad direct influence studies include numerous single-author studies such as Witemeyer’s *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (1979), or (more broadly still) Alexander and Sellars’s *The Art of the Brontës* (1995). Works such as these argue for the direct influence of certain paintings, painters, or schools of painting on the

writings of individual authors. Single-author investigations have been done on most of the “major” writers, particularly in Modernism; era-wide studies are also common. Mariana Torgovnick, for example, notes the way certain Modernist novels exhibit similarities to Modernist art (1985); similarly, Wendy Steiner 1982 traces the influence of cubism on literature.

7. The *Zeitgeist* approach is historically based and again ranges widely in content. *Zeitgeist* approaches argue that writers and visual artists in particular historical periods share some particular characteristics because of their simultaneous position in history. This can be overly broad, vague, and ultimately untenable, as in the work of Wylie Sypher; it can appear in a more subtle form in the works of Roston or Praz; or it can become quite specific and focused, as in Heffernan’s work on the Romantics or Abel’s analogies between Baudelaire and Delacroix. In Murray Roston’s *Victorian Contexts*, for example, the overarching assumption is that art and literature can be discussed *together* as reacting to similar social events; writers and artists of all kinds respond to the shifting matrix of social and cultural concerns of their time. There is no single *Zeitgeist* of the Victorian era; there are, however, a complex series of events and issues to which artists responded—what Greenblatt has called a “shared code” (Greenblatt, 86). Roston writes, “shifts in social mores and changes in commodity culture have a simultaneous effect upon all media” (1996, 1). Artist and writer react to a “central complex of inherited assumptions, of emergent ideas, of urgent contemporary concerns” (3) and each artist adopts or resists or questions them in different ways. Roston labels his methodology a “synchronic approach,” defined as “the focus upon the simultaneous response of writer and artist to current problems” (*ibid.*). In this same vein, Mary Ann Caws argues that “The mutual interference of two objects, a visual and a verbal one, involves a dialogue, which the reader or observer enters into and sponsors, and which with other dialogues forms part of a more general conversation” (1989, 4). *Zeitgeist* approaches can compare anything from iconography to composition style to expressive aims to explicit reactions to discrete historical events.

8. This latter kind of interart analysis also includes studies in literary pictorialism (Hagstrum 1958), histories of ekphrasis (Heffernan 1993, parts of W. Mitchell 1994, Meltzer 1987), studies in representation and narrative (parts of Byerly 1997), spatial form theories of literature (Mitchell 1980, Joseph Frank 1948), and other examples, all of which explore ways in which visual media impact the stylistic and structural universe of specific fictions. Jeffrey Meyers’s *Painting and the Novel* (1975) is another example of this type of interart project that imports definitions from one art into another. Hence he talks of fiction as making use of elements of painting: perspective, composition, foreshortening, foreground, and background.

9. Theories of Visual Culture in general, such as the work of Claude Gandelman (1991), again make use of both literature and art without privileging one or the other. Much excellent cultural studies work likewise uses literature and visual art in equal measure to make sociocultural arguments (see Flint 2000, or Barrell 1986 as examples). Other theories of Visual Culture, such as those by W. J. T. Mitchell (1986, 1994), Mieke Bal (1991) or James Elkins, might be said to have dispensed with both literature and traditional visual art in favor of a discussion of the nature of images. Yet another body of work focuses on questions of aesthetics and ranges across multiple art media, as in the collection edited by Kemal and Gaskell (2000), or in Suzanne Langer’s work (1957). Such theories do not purport to be theories of painting or literature as such, but rather

(in varying ways) are debating the philosophical meaning, social effect, or political role of art.

10. See also Christ and Jordan 1995, introduction.

11. As I suggest in chapter 3, I disagree with Smith's reading of paintings in *Jane Eyre* as "conventional" and used purely to "delineate character." Jane's paintings, in fact, are much more complicated artifacts involved in a complex web of economic, aesthetic, and social interactions.

12. A partial list of British Victorian texts which feature male painters includes: Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; Hardy, *The Well-Beloved* and *Golden Arrow*; Dickens, *Little Dorrit*; Thackeray, *The Newcomes*; Marie Corelli, *The Master Christian*; George Du Maurier, *Trilby*; and George Eliot, *Middlemarch*. There are numerous others in British fiction, and many more in American and Continental novels; see Jeffares and Smith for additional lists. See also Bowie 1950 and O'Donovan 1994 featuring male painters.

13. See L. Lewis 2003.

14. For example, Andres pairs the scene from Collins's *The Woman in White* in which Walter Hartright first sees Marian at the window at Limmeridge with Millais's *Mariana* (noting too that the similarity of names suggests "a deliberate allusion to that painting"); Collins's transformation of that painting, Andres argues, reveals his criticisms of traditional gender constructs (2002, 374).

15. At least not paintings that I have been able to recognize. Several writers—Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot in particular—do often create narrative moments that call to mind paintings by male painters (Andres 2005 discusses Eliot's narrative revisions of several Pre-Raphaelite paintings, for example; similarly, Alexander and Sellars 1995 record that Brontë was heavily influenced by Bewick's illustrations and John Martin's grand gothic canvases).

16. Caroline Levine has argued persuasively that Victorian realism was itself more concerned with *process* than product: "Victorian realism's own theorists focused less on the verisimilitude of the product than on the labor that went into its making" (2000, 75). Rather than valuing the mimetic exactitude of realism, Victorian realists and theorists (like Eliot and Lewes) stressed the power—moral and political—of the struggle to see the world clearly enough to *try* to represent it. As we shall see, women writers often use the scene of painting to unfold and negotiate complex theories of realism (literary and otherwise). See in particular chapters 1, 2, and 4.

17. The *paragone*, or contest, between art forms, is a Renaissance tradition. In Leonardo da Vinci's treatise, painting was the clear victor because of its concreteness and reliance on the noblest sense—sight. In later versions—most prominently Lessing's (1766; 1984)—painting took second place to poetry, which could represent change across time rather than be limited to the static moment.

18. More recently, in *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*, Leonard Shlain argues that women are image-oriented and men word-oriented, that men are linear while women see things all at once, and that the overthrow in prehistoric times of matriarchal cultures was directly related to the institution of the very linear, very masculine alphabet (a somewhat dubious paradigm).

19. See Smick 1996.

20. See Vickers 1985.

21. Wells works with early modern and classical definitions that distinguish between ekphrasis and enargeia; in later periods, enargeia is less prominent and definitions of

ekphrasis tend to include the kind of vibrancy once associated with enargeia. See Kreiger 1992, chap. 1. Wells associates ekphrasis with epic (and enargeia with lyric) and argues that it functions explicitly *against* enargeia, as a way to repudiate the destructive absorption of enargeia. Enargeia can be a description of anything, not just of a work of art (as with ekphrasis); however, the terms are often used interchangeably in the post-Classical period: Wells's description of enargeia as potentially destructive is applicable to many instances of ekphrasis. Enargeia "may be understood as facilitating a dangerous absorption in the feminine; . . . carried away by the force of enargeia, the lyric subject first identifies with the beautiful 'signifier' before him, and then attempts to appropriate it as the signified of his own interiority. . . . This absorption leads (inevitably) to a destructive 'defacement' of both self and other" (2002, 110).

22. In Wells's discussion of enargeia and ekphrasis, she begins the process of retheorizing ekphrasis by asking what happens when the viewer/describer of the object is female (although the producer of the object is not). One result of a "female focalizer of the ekphrasis" (namely Lucrece) is an emphasis on "personal grief and loss rather than, say, the political and historical implications of Troy's fall for Rome's subsequent rise" (2002, 117).

23. We do have numerous descriptions of art in nonfiction prose by women, but this does not specifically count as ekphrasis, which is a rhetorical device specific to fictional genres.

24. For examples of Victorian women's ekphrastic poetry, see Martinez (2003). The twentieth century has more examples of ekphrastic poetry by women (Marianne Moore, Sylvia Plath, May Swenson, Ann Lauterbach, and Barbara Guest have numerous examples), but there are still surprisingly few women writers who write ekphrastically about *women's* paintings. The contemporary poetry journal *Ekphrasis* has occasional excellent examples.

25. In her study of the novel of female artistic development, Linda Lewis writes, "My purpose is to trace the female *Künstlerroman* as developing parallel to but separate from its male counterpart and to illustrate that literary matriarchy proved to be nurturing—not an anxiety of influence—to literary daughters creating their own fictions of female genius" (2003, 4). In Lewis's literary history, Madame De Staël's *Corinne* and George Sand's *Consuelo* functioned as a kind of founding myth for women artists (Western culture and religions offering them none) which subsequent women writers embraced to represent their own artistic desires. I argue similarly that women painters and their works offered women writers positive touchstones for artistic exploration.

26. Other critics have gone further in attempting to recuperate the aesthetic without neglecting social and political concerns. Linda Dowling argues that we have been disposed to consider "the very idea of the aesthetic as mystification, to see all talk of art or beauty as no more than one of the ruses or stratagems through which societies perpetuate themselves as orders of domination" (1996, x). Dowling sets out the terms of the debate: Is aesthetics an evil discourse of cultural domination? Is it inherently apolitical in its very totalizing nature? Or is the aesthetic a field of revolutionary possibility? In arguing for this latter stance, Dowling encourages us to take seriously the view of art held by writers like Ruskin and Morris: that art can and should be morally and socially redemptive. Dowling reads Ruskin, Pater, Morris, and Wilde as aestheticians committed to community formation and individual transformation through art; she also argues against the received notion that Victorian aestheticism—as exemplified by the Art for Art's Sake

battle cry—was not a withdrawal into art and away from politics or an elitist retreat from the masses. On the contrary, Wilde and Pater, like Morris and Ruskin, had “egalitarian impulses” (2); in Dowling’s reading, all the major Victorian aestheticians shared a desire to instill in the masses a feeling for beauty. She does not suggest that they are all successful pleas for democracy, simply that the writers in question shared a belief that art could lead us there, if done right and received properly.

27. Armstrong turns to affective life—“playing and dreaming, thinking and feeling” (2000, 2)—to remake the category of the aesthetic and develop what she, similar to Dowling, calls a “democratic aesthetic” (3) which requires an “uncoupling of the aesthetic and privilege” (4). Armstrong carefully controls her reintroduction of affect into the discourse of the aesthetic; she insists that the return to a consideration of beauty and the emotional power of art be done rationally (as, she argues, Adorno did in his *Aesthetic Theory*), with a strong theoretical base and an acknowledgment of political problems such as class, gender, and race. One of the most useful of Armstrong’s points is that relying on a Kantian notion of disinterest to argue that art can be a space for radical free play is just as “conservative” as an argument that relies on common universal judgments to define art. (In other words, arguing that art is whatever you want it to be because it is a space apart from the real world is just as limited as arguing that art is what certain educated people say that it is.) Both arguments rely on a notion of art as a “special space” (13)—a notion that Armstrong and the Victorian women writers I discuss in this book object to strongly.

28. Subject formation is but one side of the aesthetic coin. Another arena in which aesthetic judgment features prominently is that of community formation. The project of aesthetic democracy, Linda Dowling ably demonstrates, did not originate or terminate with the liberal social theories promulgated by the Ruskin of “On the Nature of Gothic” or the socialist/artisan work of Morris. Aesthetic democracy—the notion that all humans have an innate sense of taste which, if shepherded correctly by a gentle state, can provide the basis for a unified moral community—was forged in the eighteenth century by such thinkers as Shaftesbury, Burke, and Kant. Shaftesbury called this innate sense a *sensus communis*; Burke wrote that “the standard both of reason and Taste is the same in all human creatures” (1990, 11). Nineteenth-century social critics agreed; aesthetic judgment was innate in all men—but rigorous training was needed to bring them all up to speed, and writers like Ruskin worked to school the mass of mankind in art. I use the terms “all men” and “mankind” advisedly here. For though eighteenth-century aesthetics may have been built upon an admittedly fraught belief in the universality of taste amongst *males*, the nineteenth century was not so certain that women contained the same potentiality. This book traces the struggles of women writers and artists to assert their aesthetic subjecthood into a masculine tradition—to be acknowledged as producers, viewers, and admirers of art.

29. As Christopher Prendergast argues, following Raymond Williams, artistic representation and social/political representation are inevitably linked. Prendergast argues that any time a representation (of either kind) is posited, the immediate question (and the one asked most frequently by contemporary theory) is, on *whose authority* does A stand in for B? Prendergast writes, “If representation is the process whereby ‘a’ stands for ‘b’ (where ‘a’ and ‘b’ can be terms in a linguistic system, a literary system, or a political system), by what *authority* does it do so? . . . The principal set of claims concerns a relation between representation and *power* . . .” (1988, 8–9; emphasis in original). The

writers I examine here realize that aesthetic production, perception, and judgment are socially and historically conditioned events that are radically affected by the gender of persons involved therein. These writers suggest that when a woman is doing the painting there is never any possibility of disinterested aesthetic experience, no freedom from the problems of power.

30. In the late Victorian era, aesthetics again shifted; Regina Gagnier points out a “shift in emphasis” in the *fin-de-siècle* period from “an aesthetics of production to an aesthetics of consumption” (1999, 271). This aesthetic shift, she argues in a later work, was tied to shifts in theories of political economy. During the first half of the century, political economists focused on production: “Most people’s subjective and objective identities are centrally related to whether they make automobiles, books, contracts, breakfasts, hotel beds, music, speeches, or babies. The fact that the division of labor also reflects major social divisions of race, gender, and ethnicity, and internationally reflects relations of domination and subordination between nations is also crucial in establishing individual and collective identities” (2000, 3). In the second half of the century, thinkers started focusing on consumption rather than production, and “theory of economics became more psychological than sociological” (4), that is, more concerned with choices (why do consumers buy things?) than with how one’s place in the division of labor impacts one’s identity. The women writers I consider here—even later ones such as Mary Ward—remain steadfastly embedded within the productivist side of aesthetic debate.

31. Consider in this context Walter Benjamin’s classic account of the traumatic etiology of Baudelaire’s poetry.

32. On the other hand, Adorno also locates in this pivotal period the flowering of a kind of art that is most closely integrated into the social order, namely bourgeois realism. Adorno explains this seeming paradox (art in the nineteenth century is, at the same time, both more autonomous from society and more closely tied to it) by insisting that art is “social primarily because it stands opposed to society” (321). In other words, only an art “emancipated” (as Adorno terms it) from society (that is, no longer forced to be useful to society, no longer purely functional) can function as a reflection or critique of society: “this opposition art can mount only when it has become autonomous” (321).

33. Linda Dowling argues against the dismissal of the aesthetic in works such as that of Martha Woodmansee, who blasts aesthetics as “great minds speaking with one another over and above the historical process” (1994, 7); instead, Dowling advocates a turn to material facts and social forces that shaped art worlds.

34. Women artists also entered the art scene just as British concern for the quality of their national art was on the rise. The British were well aware that they had Shakespeare and Milton, but they didn’t have Leonardo da Vinci or Rembrandt. In his introduction to a lady’s drawing manual, one artist writes, “So great is the barrenness of genius in painting among English artists, that I am sure there is every reason to hope that these times may produce some female artists, who will bear the palm from the other sex” (Brookshaw 1801, 4).

35. Siegel explores the emergence of the modern idea of the artist, paying particular attention to the role of institutions (museums foremost, but also art schools and art history as a discipline) in this formation. For Siegel, as for nearly all the writers on “the artist” as an evolving concept in the nineteenth century, the artist is male. While grappling with the shifting meaning of the term “artist” during the 1800s, Siegel writes of the prevailing idea of an artist as “someone who does something (craft) so well that *he* is

in fact doing something else (art)—and thereby becoming another kind of person (artist)” (2000, xvi; emphasis added). The pronoun here is telling, though I do not wish to overreact. On the one hand, one might argue that Siegel uses “he” to refer to the nineteenth century because he (Siegel) wishes to follow that lead; that is, in the nineteenth century the artist in general would be “he,” so Siegel preserves this. However, this is not in keeping with the dictionary entries that Siegel actually quotes, most of which use the gender-neutral construction “one who” in their attempts to define “artist.”

Chapter One

1. Such an arrangement was not without its dangers, however: in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, the drawing master Walter Hartright is hired to teach young Laura Fairlie, with whom he falls in love. The erotic potential inherent in the male teacher/female student scenario is frequently represented in fiction—in Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, Miss Arrowpoint marries her music teacher Herr Klesmer; the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* eventually marries her tutor; examples are numerous.

2. See (Mrs. E. M.) Henrietta Ward 1925, 196–203.

3. See Prieto 2001 for an excellent history of the rise of American artists during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

4. See Nunn 1995, 139–56, for an account of the debate over women painting and exhibiting nude female figures. For an excellent history of female art education, with discussion of nude models, see Dodd 1995. See also Cherry 1993, 53–64; Gillett 1990, 158–72.

5. See Nunn 1987, chap. 3, for the best discussion of the SFA’s checkered history.

6. At its founding in 1768, the Royal Academy boasted two female members, Mary Moser and Angelica Kauffman (whose story so fascinated the nineteenth century that Anne Thackeray Ritchie published a fictionalized account of the artist’s life, titled *Miss Angel* [1876]). The famous painting of the founding of the Royal Academy offers a symbolic scene indicative of the social status of these two founding women artists: neither woman is physically present in the painting, which shows R.A. members in various poses in one of the Academy painting rooms. Instead, Moser and Kauffman are present only as dim, formal, framed portraits on the back walls, because Moser and Kauffman, as women, could not be present in a room where “life class” was under way (indicated by a nude model in the painting’s foreground). But it is ironic that, of course, all the other R.A. members depicted are themselves merely portraits of the “real” men in question—they are portraits, however, unbounded by frames, unfettered by the conventions that kept women artists from full membership in this prestigious academy until the twentieth century.

7. For painting prices, see Reitlinger 1961.

8. See Gillett 1990, chap. 2, for more information on the increasing social prestige of the painter in the Victorian era.

9. *Ibid.* 18ff.

10. As Harman suggests, the public/private sphere distinction is dismantled consistently and insistently by women’s forays into the public world; hitherto seemingly stable gender categories are thereby forcibly redefined in novelistic scenes that dramatize female characters’ “defining public moment” (1998, 9). Although not “feminine *politi-*

cal novels” in the sense that Harman defines them (“texts in which female characters participate in the public universe conventionally understood to be owned and occupied by men—the world of mills and city streets, of labor and strikes, of Parliament and parliamentary debates, of national celebrations and urban investigations, of outdoor public speaking and political activism” [8]), the texts I examine in this study do make the art world a public arena that engages with social and cultural debates.

11. And the woman writer could, famously, hide her endeavors, as the tale of Jane Austen covering her manuscripts when anyone entered the parlor suggests.

12. The standard chronology for Royal Academy shows was this: The R.A. Summer Exhibit—the big one, of contemporary art—opened to the public on the first Monday in June and ran until the first Monday in August. The Wednesday before public opening was reserved for the reporters; on the Saturday before opening was held The Banquet, a male-only gathering of R.A. members, literati, politicians, art patrons, and wealthy Society members. Also preceding the public opening was the Royal Private View, for the queen and her family. Immediately after the Royal Private View was the Private View, “the first major social event that was an official exhibition function” (Gillett 1990, 209). This was the high-society event that marked the official opening of the elite London season (of parties, etc); tickets to the Private View were hot commodities and essential to anyone who wanted an entrée into the fashionable world.

The R.A. Winter Exhibit featured works by old masters, or perhaps recently deceased English artists. In the first week of April, artists put the finishing touches on whatever works they intended to send to the R.A. for possible exhibition. R.A. Members (about sixty total in any given year) were guaranteed acceptance and their paintings were generally hung “on the line”—that is, at eye level or slightly above (the best position for viewing). Nonmembers submitted their paintings to the selection committee and hoped for the best. The bulk of each exhibition consisted of nonmember pieces: for example, the 1862 Summer Exhibit showed 1,142 pieces: 146 were the work of Academicians, 996 the work of outsiders (Nunn 1987, 91). Women exhibitors at the Royal Academy show were, of course, in the “nonmember” category, since women were not admitted to full membership in the R.A. until the twentieth century. Of the thousand-plus works that the average R.A. show exhibited, between forty and one hundred women artists were represented. For more information on the ins and outs of the R.A., see *ibid.* 192–241, and Nunn 1987, 88ff.

13. See Gillett 1990, chaps. 1 and 2.

14. For information on Osborn, see Casteras 1992, 219–25. For an excellent analysis of this painting, to which my reading is much indebted, see Cherry 1993, 78–81.

15. Ward was a member of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women’s Suffrage; Jopling campaigned for women’s rights within the Society of Portrait Painters.

16. The declaration was originally published in *Fortnightly Review* (July 1889, 123–42). See also Cherry 1993, 93.

17. For an excellent biography of Bodichon, see Hirsch 1998, 1995.

18. Eliza Fox was also a well-known artist—her portrait of Bodichon still hangs at Girton College, which Bodichon helped to found. Mary Howitt was a writer, friendly with the Pre-Raphaelite circle, who often wrote on various art subjects—her novella “Margaret von Ehrenberg, Artist-Wife” is discussed in chapter 2. Mary’s daughter, Anna Mary Howitt, was a painter, and part of the “pre-Raphaelite sisterhood” of women who

worked with and around the better known Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Anna Howitt also married a painter and was the author of *An Art Student in Munich*, an account of her art education in Germany. Anna Howitt's serialized story "Sisters in Art" is discussed in chapter 3. Another signer, Amelia Edwards, was a novelist, journalist, and Egyptologist, but her involvement with the artists involved in the MWPA (and in particular her friendship with Barbara Bodichon) influenced her fiction: the heroine of Edwards's *Barbara's History* is a practicing artist. The art critic Anna Jameson was another signer; others were actresses, writers, and other professional women.

19. In her lifetime Bodichon exhibited roughly 250 works of art, mainly watercolor landscapes. Her paintings are airy, subtle, full of shadows and light and mood, always with a feeling of vastness characteristic of Romantic landscape art. Her main influences were the Romantic English landscape artists, such as Cox, Prout, or Turner. She was impatient with formal history painting, and she followed the dictates of the contemporary Barbizon school, which popularized out-of-doors painting. As an independently wealthy woman, Bodichon (unlike the majority of the fictional artist-heroines we shall encounter) had unusual access to varied landscapes because of her extensive travels. Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote that Bodichon's intrepid *en plein air* drive meant she thought "nothing of climbing up a mountain in breeches, or wading through a stream in none, in the sacred name of pigment" (quoted in Hirsch 1995, 176). Bodichon was a friend and supporter of the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as a colleague: she, Rossetti, and Anna Mary Howitt began the Folio Club, in which each member would contribute a painting or drawing before passing it along to the next member.

20. One possible reason for this backlash—or more appropriately backsliding—is that in the later parts of the century, the issues surrounding women's involvement in the art world became less interconnected with political feminist movements; aesthetic considerations (generated and sustained by the Aesthetic movements) largely overshadowed social concerns. Feminist agitation focused more on issues of suffrage than on education or professional interests; art was pressed into service (in the form of banners, posters, etc.) for feminism, rather than the more reciprocal relationship of the middle decades. See Nunn 1987, 211–23.

21. For an excellent discussion of the myth in the eighteenth century, and its relationship to (specifically French) women artists, see Wetzlauber 2004. See also Rosenblum 1957 and Bermingham 1992 for information on the eighteenth-century interest in Dibuade.

22. *Punch* briefly lists other artworks in the exhibition but goes into little or no detail, and the litany sounds very much like a collection of classically *amateur* achievements, rather than the offerings for sale at a public exhibition:

There are, also, watercolors, and copies from the Old, and a Tennysonian picture by Mrs. Ward, and a *genre* subject by Miss Breadstreet, and wonderful portraits of lace collars and Crinoline dresses . . . and oil paintings, large and small, modest and ambitious, and such suctorious birds'-eggs and glorious odoriferous flowers by Mrs. Harrison, that you suspect she must have borrowed the palette and brushes of Hunt to have painted them. ("Let Us Join the Ladies")

Watercolors and copies, a scene from a poem, a genre subject, feminine lace and

crinoline, birds' eggs and flower pictures—all are traditionally the realm of the amateur. Only the oil paintings—which *Punch* does not describe in any detail, merely offering dimensions—stand out as the usual medium for serious artists. But all the other works mentioned have for their subjects traditionally female objects.

23. Actual self-portraits by Victorian women painters were, as Casteras 1992 and Yeldham (1984, 1: 167–68) note, surprisingly rare.

24. Although the market does make its shamefaced appearance briefly at the very end of the *Punch* article. After the brief list of the exhibit's subject matter, the *Punch* reviewer remarks, "Besides these, there are . . . an infinity of agreeable pictures, the majority of which are ticketed in the corner, "Sold." And, for a picture, many consider the height of criticism is to be "Sold!" and, in truth, but few artists go beyond it, while hundreds of poor struggling fellows never get so far." The market concerns of the art world, and woman's place within the market, form a sort of narrative counterpoint to the art-as-enticement-to-desire theme discussed earlier. For middle-class women in the nineteenth century, art provided a valuable alternative to the scarce money-making ventures offered: working as a governess, acting as a paid companion, schoolteaching, or writing. In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, Anna Mary Howitt's writings, Dinah Mulock's *Olive*, Mrs. Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks*, Charlotte Yonge's *Pillars of the House*, Mary Howitt's "Margaret von Ehrenberg, Artist-Wife," and Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *The History of David Grieve*, we are offered female figures who paint for money, whose various forays into the market economy are the subject of intense scrutiny.

25. Other negative portrayals of women painters in fiction, with heavy emphasis on erotic themes, can be found in George Moore's novel *A Modern Lover* (1883); Henry James, *Roderick Hudson*; and Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*.

26. Another of Alcott's novels, *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, features a pair of women artists who live and work together. The sculptor Rebecca Jeffrey is depicted as a strong, feminist woman who is at work on an Amazonian-size sculpture; her friend Lizzie Small "is an engraver and designs the most delightful little pictures" and is described as meek, quiet, dainty—and engaged (Alcott 1870, 225).

27. Siddal was an accomplished painter; for information about her life and work, see Pollock 1988, 91–114; Marsh 1985, 16–78, 133–35, 210–15; Marsh and Nunn 1989, 65–73.

28. Ellet begins as far back as "the Fair Egyptians" and proceeds century by century, finishing with a discussion of her contemporary sister artists. Ellet focuses mainly on European artists (mostly French, Italian, and German) with a few forays into Scandinavia and several chapters on nineteenth-century American women. No native British women are discussed at any length (few are even mentioned); the closest would be Angelica Kauffman and Mary Moser, both of whom worked in England for much of their professional careers, but neither was English-born. Yet Ellet does admit to being greatly indebted to English women *writers*: in her preface she admits that some of her information on contemporary artists has been taken, "with a little condensing and shaping, from late numbers of that excellent periodical, 'The Englishwoman's Journal'" (1859, v).

29. Ellet also tells the story of the Corinthian Maid as another means of emphasizing the naturalness of woman's drive-to-art (Ellet 1859, 2).

30. A glaring exception to this tradition is the Russian artist Marie Bashkertseff, whose memoir (1919) is anything but quotidian and domestic. Bashkertseff follows the

Romantic tradition of the tortured, melancholy, melodramatic artist to the letter in her stunning memoir.

31. For information on Beale, see Cherry 1993, 93.

32. Butler's fame was so great that, even as a woman, in 1879 she was just two votes away from being elected to membership in the Royal Academy. However, she was beat out by Hubert von Herkomer, a little-known painter whom some of the voters didn't even know, but preferred to vote for in preference to a woman artist (Gillett 1990, 109).

Chapter Two

1. Portions of this article were previously published as "The Professionalization of the Woman Artist in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (*Nineteenth-Century Literature* 58 [2003]: 1–41). Many thanks to *Nineteenth-Century Literature* for permission to reprint selections from this article.

2. Leading the way in this rediscovery—or reevaluation—of Anne's works were Naomi Jacobs 1986, Margaret Mary Berg 1987, Juliet McMaster 1982, and Elizabeth Langland 1989.

3. See especially Nash and Suess 2001. Such an extraordinary collection notwithstanding, some Victorianists still persist in devaluing Anne's work; Terry Eagleton's chapter on the Brontës in his recent *The English Novel* (2005), for example, contains but two paragraphs on Anne (and three pages on Branwell).

4. *Tenant* was first published in three volumes in June 1848 by T. C. Newby and was reprinted in July in one volume, and again in August with a preface by Anne. Charlotte's publisher, George Smith, eventually secured the rights to Anne's and Emily's works from Newby, who had served the two sisters no good turn in his treatment of their works.

5. See Alexander and Sellars 1995, introduction, for an excellent account of the Brontë family's artistic activities and interests.

6. Helen's diary, recording her courtship and marriage with Huntingdon and her eventual escape from him, forms the central portion of *Tenant*. Its extensive frame narrative is told by Gilbert Markham, the young farmer who falls in love with Helen after she has fled from her husband and come to live as the elusive "tenant" of the derelict Wildfell Hall.

7. Compare this with the comment of Gilbert (Helen's second admirer) while watching Helen paint: "If I had but a pencil and a morsel of paper I could make a lovelier sketch than hers, admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me [namely, the artist rather than her subject matter]" (88).

8. Recent *Tenant* scholarship has considered the novel in light of the "social problem novels" of the period 1840–60. In these readings, the social problems in question are marital abuse and drunkenness. However, I would argue that the problem of female aesthetic production is another "social problem" that *Tenant* tackles, and the one most closely aligned to the novel's own aesthetic. Another, equally central, reading of this novel would center on the heroine's role as *mother*. See Gruner 1997. I see many connections between Helen's role as mother (producer of children) and artist (producer of paintings).

9. The fact that the editor and introducer of the novel feels compelled to criticize it in this manner speaks volumes for Anne Brontë's place in the literary canon.

10. See Jacobs 1986 for an excellent summary of the opinions of the few critics of *Tenant* as regards the relative importance or quality of the frame narrative and nested diary.

11. Carnell's broader argument, however, sees Brontë's novel as politically reactionary, harking back to an earlier model of humanism and rationalism: "Brontë ultimately sought wholeness and integration between the sexes through an eighteenth-century ideal of the public good in which most women might participate indirectly as instructors and nurturers of their husbands and sons" (1998, 20). While I agree with Carnell's critique of the separate spheres doctrine, I do not consider the novel's ending to be a suppression of Helen's voice or a retreat into "a nostalgic vision of domestic harmony within the Enlightenment public sphere" (23). Critics who consider that the "end" of the novel is somehow Brontë's last word fail to take into account several crucial factors: first, there is no actual textual evidence that Helen gives up painting. Second, Helen has left one husband already in the course of the novel, and she is *absent from home with the children* while Gilbert writes his extremely extended letter to his brother-in-law. A small point, but Brontë does seem to be telling us that Helen has taken the children somewhere and is gone long enough for Gilbert to write a 300-page letter. We have only Gilbert's word that the marriage is the "nostalgic vision of domestic harmony" that Carnell sees, and Gilbert has not proven himself to be an entirely trustworthy narrator. Finally, the convention that privileges the outer frame narrative (the "beginning" and the "end") as the final answer over the inner narrative of Helen's diary is precisely the convention Carnell has successfully dismantled in her essay. Brontë has already, within Helen's diary, critiqued the narrative tradition of ending a tale with a marriage by showing us the breakdown of Helen and Huntingdon's marriage—we should not fall victim to the fantasy that marriage to Gilbert is meant to be Helen's final destiny.

12. Remember too that Moore complained that "Anne broke down" midway through her novel. By referring to the novelist by her first name rather than by her last, Moore compounds his familiar treatment of Brontë. Furthermore, the phrase "broke down" suggests a physical, or even a neurotic, breakdown.

13. If anything, the novel is *two* love stories—which is part of the problem. Another reason for Moore's concern over the structural break in the novel is that he is jealous *for* Gilbert. The tale is one of repeated jealousy—Gilbert is consumed with it (that's the heat *he* feels) and that becomes a base from which readers can't escape. So when Helen's diary begins to detail her intense passion for the young Huntingdon, the reader (still in Gilbert's shoes) is angry and jealous on his behalf. The dual love story in which a prior love (Helen and Huntingdon) breaks in on a later but narratively immediate one (Helen and Gilbert) is intensely unsettling.

14. Moore, it must be remembered, is writing during the decade that experienced the emergence of and furor around the New Woman, whose ambivalent sexuality (some contemporary detractors saw her as oversexed, some as frigid) was a central issue for debate. Similarly, the New Woman raised the specter of female professional identity, of which Moore did not approve. His explicit link between gender, aesthetics, and erotics was rarely so explicit in writings on women in art from Brontë's era, but (I argue) serves to make visible one crucial component of the debate over female artists.

15. Though the pictures are not described as watercolors or sketches or paintings in oil, we know that Helen paints in oil because Gilbert notes "bottles of oil" and canvas (rather than paper for watercolors) in her studio, and later in the novel she attacks one of her husband's randy friends with her palette knife. Both suggest the use of oil paints that

need scraping and mixing with a knife, while watercolors were sold in cakes. That Helen paints in oil rather than watercolor or pen and ink further removes her from the “typical” feminine artists of her time, who were more likely to use the “feminine” medium of watercolor than smelly, messy, and expensive oil paint.

16. The house in fact belongs to her brother, Mr. Lawrence, who is the same “somebody” we will meet later who takes Helen’s paintings to London to sell them.

17. Alexander and Sellars makes compelling connections between the Brontë sisters’ artworks and Martin.

18. See Bicknell and Munro 1988 for an excellent discussion of drawing manuals for young women. Also see Ruskin 1857.

19. See Mrs. E. M. Ward 1925, Butler 1922, and Jopling 1925 for autobiographical accounts of female artists’ negotiations between art and social life.

20. In contrast, popular photographs and paintings of male artists’ studios show clearly that their painting space is for painting—socializing is secondary. See Gillett 1990, chap. 1.

21. Helen’s artwork is but one of the hotly contested kinds of property that circulates in *Tenant*. Arthur Huntingdon marries Helen for her considerable property (in money and land); he later takes possession of Helen’s moveable property (jewels, artworks, etc.) to prevent her from leaving him. Part of their marital strife surrounds another sort of property: their son. And much later in the novel, after Arthur’s death, Gilbert struggles to propose to the now wealthier Helen in spite of her property; though he is loud in his protestations of his dislike for her wealth, their marriage under British law does make him sole possessor of Helen’s considerable property.

22. For a more detailed account of the married life and political activities of Caroline Norton, see Holcombe 1983, chap. 4; see also Poovey 1988, chap. 3, for an excellent reading of the political and social significance of Norton’s story; for a complete biography, see Perkins 1910.

23. Meredith’s heroine in *Diana of the Crossways* is also loosely based on Norton.

24. See Nunn 1986, 19–25. For a fictional sketch of Mary Howitt, see L. E. Landon’s *Romance and Reality* (1847).

25. The novella contains about a dozen illustrations, labeled as portraits by Margaret herself. That the novella reproduces her portraits but not her other works suggests that even in fiction, portraiture may be more valuable than other genres of art.

26. The chapter on the Brontës in Eagleton’s recent compendium *The English Novel* (2005) displays similar disregard for *Tenant* and for issues of gender. In fact, Eagleton begins the Brontë chapter—in a book about the English *novel*, it should be remembered—with a long recuperative discussion of the merits of *Branwell* Brontë. He also spends considerable time lauding *Patrick* Brontë’s nonfiction works. Anne Brontë merits *four sentences*.

27. Paintings, obviously, can be and were viewed in galleries with the artist someplace else entirely, but in the nineteenth century the presence of the producer was frequently expected—often, the sale or viewing of art was done in the artist’s own studio. Similarly, exhibition in a public gallery required the artist to be present at “Varnishing Day” and other public events.

28. Because there is no omniscient narrator, the novel is effectively devoid of a stable point on which to place the scales that measure truth. Gilbert’s letter, Helen’s diary, Helen’s letters—all are written with a personal bias that makes both their representation

of events and their subsequent judgment of them untrustworthy. It is a typical Brontë family tactic, the unreliable narrator; but in *Tenant* this unreliability radically unsettles a purportedly realist text. The frame-within-a-frame structure of the novel calls into question the ability of any one frame to contain or represent “truth”—each frame tells a different story.

29. Later in the preface, Brontë narrates another scene of uncovering and discovery—this time not a gendered discovery, as before, but a literal discovery *of* gender. She writes,

I would have it to be distinctly understood that Acton Bell is neither Currer nor Ellis Bell, and therefore, let not his faults be attributed to them. As to whether the name be real or fictitious, it cannot greatly signify to those who know him only by his works. As little, I think, can it matter whether the writer so designated is a man, or a woman as one or two of my critics profess to have discovered. (31)

Just as housecleaning raises some dust, so too does the writing of fiction. The end product, the works, cannot simply be taken at face value; speculations as to authorial identity or difference (Acton is not Currer is not Ellis) and authorial gender must intervene. That womanhood is something one must discover—that it is not immediately obvious—becomes Brontë’s basis for an androgynous theory of art, offered at the end of the preface. She argues for a complete irrelevance of the sex of an author—not, as Virginia Woolf was to state decades later, because genderless art could be objective, measured, reasoned, but because of a more radical belief in the similarities between the sexes:

I am at a loss to conceive how a man should permit himself to write anything that would be really disgraceful to a woman, or why a woman should be censured for writing anything that would be proper and becoming for a man.

Coming from a century that spent an enormous part of its time dissecting the differences between the sexes, and prescribing guidelines for masculine and feminine behavior, this calm philosophy shocks. Yet as we leave the preface and enter the world of the novel, moments such as this will become more and more common. Brontë’s modus operandi, when it comes to gender, is to quietly ignore (“I am at a loss to conceive”) and simply refuse to refute traditional gender norms.

30. The connection between female artists and monstrosity or deformity will be important later on as well, when I discuss Yonge’s *Pillars of the House* and Craik’s *Olive*, both of which contain female artists who are in some way physically deformed.

Chapter Three

1. See, for example, Gilbert and Gubar 2000, chap. 5. See also Gezari 2000, 85–86, and Maynard 1984, 138–40.

2. Jane performs a similar maneuver earlier in the novel when, after the marriage of Miss Temple, Jane stands at her window at Lowood and looks out: “My eye passed

all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks: it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary seemed prison-ground . . . I traced the white road . . . vanishing in a gorge between two [mountains]: how I longed to follow it further” (74).

3. This way of reading is very much in keeping with the radically Jane-o-centric readings that the novel has generated since its publication. Everything in the novel is considered an emanation of Jane’s psyche—and rightly so, on many levels. Even the dominant reading of the novel’s structure—best represented by Gilbert and Gubar’s discussion in *The Madwoman in the Attic*—takes Jane as the source of all actions and events in the novel. When Bertha comes down from her attic the night before Jane’s (first, failed) wedding and rends the bridal veil, it is read as a displacement of Jane’s anger against Rochester and her ambivalence toward sexual initiation. Even Bertha herself is often read as almost not “real”—that is, she is read allegorically as Jane’s alter ego, her angry double.

4. Two little-known novels whose plots borrow heavily from *Jane Eyre*—an 1866 novel by Eliza Tabor called *Hester’s Sacrifice*, and *Barbara’s History* by Amelia Edwards (1864)—both take up the question of women’s interior aesthetic vision where Brontë leaves off. In both novels, the heroine paints with more professional seriousness than in *Jane Eyre*, but both Tabor and Edwards embroil their heroines in similar romantic scenarios. Tabor’s novel in particular follows *Jane Eyre* surprisingly closely—except in its ending, which kills off the English artist-heroine and the West Indian former mistress in a fire, and leaves the Rochester-type hero to mourn them both. These refractions of Brontë’s plot gives additional insight into the narrative potential that the figure of the woman painter has to articulate the relationship between desire and aesthetic production. Both novels allow us to see how other female writers similarly transformed ekphrasis—in Edwards’s case a particular and radical kind of kinetic ekphrasis—into a tool for female liberation and power.

5. Even in the opening scene with the Bewick illustrations—which Jane does not herself create—it can easily be argued that Brontë represents the illustrations as in some sense a product of Jane’s own imagination. Jane might not have painted them herself, but her interpretation of them is so powerful as to become an appropriation of the images. This seems to be good training for the young Jane, who will later produce her own images frequently.

6. For a discussion of Renaissance ‘blazoning’ in *The Rape of Lucrece*, see Nancy Vickers’s influential article (1985).

7. If we consider this description from an ekphrastic point of view, we see that word and image work in tandem: the image shows us the unsubmerged portion of an object while the word hints at the remainder.

8. In addition to the symbolic readings by Starzyk 1991, Smith 1995, Byerly 1997, Gilbert and Gubar 2000, and others, critics have also speculated frequently on the possible sources for the paintings. The Brontë family was familiar with the wild and sublime works of John Martin as well as the illustrations of Bewick; both are possible influences on the style and content of Jane’s watercolors.

9. Since *Jane Eyre* and *Tenant* were written at the same time (1846–47) by sisters who regularly read one another’s work-in-progress, one assumes that the comparable scenes in the two novels are in dialogue.

10. We think of furniture normally as chairs, tables, and the like, moveable objects

to sit on, eat off of, etc. For Brontë, furniture would have had a similar connotation but would have had an extended meaning, encompassing furnishings, such as curtains and bed linens (which were sometimes called bed-furniture), wallpaper, even such things as door handles. It was also used to imply that something was fitted up properly, with all the elements; to comment on someone's "mental furniture" was one way of describing personality characteristics. Taken this way, Rochester's remark that internalizes Jane (her life is both inside her head and inside a room) should remind us of the early window-recess scene, and other enclosure scenes—Jane in the Red Room, in the alcove during the fancy evening revels, inside her curtained bed, in her little schoolroom later in the novel (the schoolroom that she furnishes and cleans just as she likes); and finally to her culminating, after her legacy, in cleaning and redecorating Moor House. This reference to a well-furnished interior space also might make us think of Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own*—which is precisely what Rochester suggests Jane possesses on a metaphoric level because, on a social level, she does not own a room of her own.

11. Review of Society for Female Artists exhibit, *Athenaeum*, no. 1588, April 3, 1858, 43. The same *Athenaeum* review that bemoaned the "unimaginative" nature of women's art significantly favored one particular drawing in the Society of Female Artists exhibition and in addition showed how Jane's unusual subject drawings made their way into the popular press. The *Athenaeum* reviewer uses Jane's drawings as a problematic touchstone for female aesthetic excellence: "For pungent caricature, sarcastic and yet playful, we have seldom seen anything better than Scenes from the Life of a Female Artist, by F. A. Claxton—the child drawing from the looking glass, the studio with the strong-minded woman, and the rejected picture, are such sketches as Jane Eyre would have made had she painted instead of written." This description of Florence Claxton's work represents it as decidedly different from the reviewer's earlier characterization of the bulk of women's artworks: Claxton's "Scenes" represent neither spaniels, nor roses, nor firstborns, nor anything else in the dismissive litany quoted above.

The *Athenaeum*'s reference to Jane Eyre carries with it ironic complications as well. The reviewer remarks that Claxton's drawings are "such sketches as Jane Eyre would have made had *she painted instead of written*" (emphasis added). The reviewer seems to have forgotten that Jane Eyre *does* paint (as well as "write" her memoirs); it's Charlotte Brontë who only "writes." Additionally, the *Athenaeum* reviewer fails to note that Jane Eyre's actual artwork bears no resemblance whatsoever to Claxton's realistic sketches. The radical subject matter of the three watercolors has been conveniently ignored. The reviewer seems to be taking "Jane Eyre" as a symbol for a certain kind of aesthetic style—"sarcastic, yet playful" with a tinge of feminism. But Brontë has carefully shown Jane to be a very different kind of artist.

12. We saw in chapter 2 that Helen Graham, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, runs up against similar problems of subject matter—but her way out is different. She takes trips, moves through the landscape, discovers new locales rather than sitting at home painting the same thing again and again. Her persistent uprooting—her inability or disinclination to be domestically static—is both reflected in her art productions and made possible by them.

13. In further contrast to Ellis's paeans on the benefits of painting, Jane does not keep her productions to herself (though commanded to exhibit them to Rochester, Jane *further* exhibits them to the reader, in detail).

14. That Lewes considered Bertha to be a jarring, unrealistic element in the narrative

is painfully ironic when one considers the public gossip surrounding “Curren Bell’s” dedication of *Jane Eyre* to Thackeray, who unfortunately *did* have a mad wife—though not in his attic. When Brontë heard of this circumstance, she wrote apologetically, “Well may it be said that fact is often stranger than fiction!”

15. Charlotte Brontë to W. S. Williams, quoted in *Jane Eyre*, Norton Critical Edition, 438.

16. Latmos (or Latmus) is the mountain where Endymion kept his sheep and where Selene, goddess of the moon, fell in love with him and cast a spell over him so that he would sleep and have vivid dreams of, among other things, herself (Hamilton 1999, 118).

17. Brontë revisits this kind of symbolic painting when Jane makes four sketches when she returns to visit the dying Aunt Reed. To occupy herself, she makes four vignettes very much in the manner of Bewick, whose volumes she has just seen “occupying their old place on the third shelf” (*Jane Eyre*, 200) of her Aunt’s bookcase: “A glimpse of sea between two rocks; the rising moon, and a ship crossing its disk; a group of reeds and water-flags, and a naiad’s head crowned with lotus-flowers, rising out of them; an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow’s nest, under a wreath of hawthorn-bloom” (204–5). Again, we can sort out these images symbolically with relative ease (which is not to say that my interpretation is correct or the only one, only that the images are rich enough to suggest narrative connections quickly). Most of the figures in the vignettes can be read as images of Jane or her experiences; the third sketch is particularly readable as Jane, the naiad crowned with flowers “rising out of” or above a group of reeds (i.e., Reeds). The final sketch of the elf, too, can be taken as an image of Jane herself, whom Rochester likens to all manner of supernatural things (fairy, sprite, etc.). This elf appears to have found some manner of flowery domestic bliss, albeit borrowed, temporary, and possibly prickly—as Jane’s will turn out to be, because of her volatile and bigamous bridegroom—from another species.

18. In Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, Lucrece herself reenacts Aeneas’s absorption in the same images; as Wells argues, “The poem seems to invite an appreciation of the difference between male and female absorption” (1997, 111). She asks, “What difference does it make that Lucrece views these pictures of fallen Troy *as a woman*?” (112; emphasis in original).

19. In addition to offering a “private release for her own emotions,” as one critic has suggested (Byerly 1997, 95), Rochester’s portrait also functions as a very *public* statement of Jane’s erotic life for the benefit of Eliza and Georgiana, the Reed sisters, who hover in the background as Jane recalls and reproduces Rochester’s features. Jane draws in a public place, in the sitting room with both Reed sisters present. She makes a show of “hiding” her drawing only *after* the sisters have seen it and commented on it. With a similar desire to make visual artifacts public, Jane chooses not to detail her three strange pictures to us at the time of their inception—a holiday at Lowood—but instead waits to unveil them before a more populous audience (namely, Rochester, in his drawing room).

20. Jane’s earliest attempts at ekphrasis show this same use of the rhetorical device to articulate her own opinions rather than to provide an objective description. Of the Bewick illustrations, Jane says: “The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms. The fiend pinning down the thief’s pack behind him, I passed over quickly: it was an object of terror. So was the blacked horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows” (40).

21. In Gezari's *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct*, for example, each of Brontë's novels becomes linked to a body: hands for *The Professor*; the stomach for *Shirley*; the mouth or voice for *Villette*. In *Jane Eyre*, it is the "prominence of the eye" that draws Gezari's attention, "the powerful move according to which *Jane Eyre* conceives of the threat to the 'eye' as a threat to the 'I.'" When Charlotte Brontë began *Jane Eyre*, her second novel, her father was being treated for cataracts, and the manuscript of *The Professor* had just been rejected and returned. Gezari writes, "*Jane Eyre* registers these two events—the denial of Brontë's vision as a writer and the threat to her father's sight—not only in one of its central events, the blinding of Rochester, but also in its representation of seeing, being the object of sight, and looking as the essential forms of relatedness at every stage of *Jane Eyre*'s experience" (49). These real-life attacks on vision (literal and metaphoric) stimulated Brontë to a relentless shoring up of vision, such that Jane's vision comes to contain or obliterate all others in the course of the novel.

Chapter Four

1. The well-documented and varied problems encountered by governesses in the period were caused, in part, by this social prejudice against women who were forced to work. See Poovey 1988, chap. 4, and other works on governesses in the period.

2. For more detailed information on Howitt's life, see Nunn 1986, 19–25.

3. See Nunn 1986, 20. Painting was prevalent in almost all of Howitt's fictional work. Howitt's third novel, *School of Life*, tells the intertwining stories of two young male artists, Leonard Mordant and Johnny Wetherley, in their struggles to overcome class boundaries and family disapproval to become artists. There are no female visual artists in the novel; there is a woman writer, Agnes, a hard and unsympathetic character who lacks the imaginative and ethical force Howitt always gives to her painter-characters.

4. See for example Burke 1990, 11–12, and Kant 1992, §§20–22.

5. See Nunn 1987, 44–48 and n. 66.

6. See Lambourne for a discussion of design and craft in England during the Victorian period.

7. Charles Eastlake (1836–1906) was the nephew of Sir Charles Eastlake, who was president of the Royal Academy from 1855 to 1865. It was Sir Charles, not his nephew, who was married to Lady Elizabeth (Rigby) Eastlake, who wrote the scathing review of *Jane Eyre*.

8. One "danger" of Judaism for Daniel, at least according to the Christian leisure classes in the novel or among its Victorian readership, is that his embrace of his parents' culture is coded in the language of occupation. He might not "convert" officially to Judaism, but it does become, in every sense of the word, Deronda's "calling." He *professes* it, and it becomes his profession. Late in the novel, after Daniel has discovered his Jewish heritage, he visits Kalonymos to discover more about his grandfather. When Kalonymos asks, "What is your vocation?" Deronda is embarrassed, as he "did not feel it quite honest to allege his law-reading as a vocation." He answers, "I cannot say that I have any," and Kalonymos tells him, "Get one, get one. The Jew must be diligent" (*Deronda*, 620). Before this, he belongs (and yet does not quite belong) to the leisure class—and his idleness is ridiculed with a bitterness strange for Eliot, who otherwise lavishes praise on her young hero. When Daniel is rowing on the Thames, just before he finds Mirah, the narrator

begins dreamily, “He was in another sort of contemplative mood perhaps more common in the young men of our day—that of questioning whether it were worth while to take part in the battle of the world.” But suddenly the tenor shifts from dreamy to derisive: “I mean, of course, the young men in whom the unproductive labour of questioning is sustained by three or four per cent on capital which somebody else has battled for” (156). Furthermore, the name that Deronda conspicuously does *not* carry, Mallinger, bears a resemblance to the word for sailors or workers who invented ailments or problems to shirk their work: “malingerers.” One who malingers gets out of work by devious routes, and the Mallinger family represents the idle rich—though some of them, like Sir Hugo, are amiable. But Grandcourt—or Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt to give him his full title—incarnates lethargy and represents what Deronda might possibly become if he does not find himself an occupation.

9. See Byerly 1989 for a discussion of the significance of music in *Daniel Deronda* and other works by Eliot. See Marshall 1999 for a reading that considers references to actors and the theater in the novel.

10. For Eliot’s art historical knowledge, and a list of the artworks she saw, see Wite-meyer 1979, chap. 2.

11. Sophia Andres (2005, 98–101) argues that Eliot was also influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Burne-Jones, so that in *Daniel Deronda* she relied heavily on mythological figures, casting Gwendolyn as a series of mythological women that the Pre-Raphaelites had immortalized in paint (Pandora, the Magdalene, Proserpine, Medusa, etc.).

12. This summary of the relationship between the Meyrick brother and his sisters sounds surprisingly similar to the situation the Brontës found themselves in. Branwell was given money—at the expense of the sisters, who were forced to work for their living—to follow his inclination toward art. Branwell, like Hans Meyrick, did not succeed as an artist—the true story of Branwell’s ill-fated attempts to enter the Royal Academy of Arts in London is unknown, but, as Jane Sellars writes, “The general theory is that he lost his confidence when faced with the realities of the great metropolis . . . and, having squandered his money in public houses, came home” (Sellars 1995, 77). Branwell became, before his death from opium and alcohol, an unsuccessful provincial portraitist—a branch of art we see Hans “descend” to at the close of *Daniel Deronda*. But Hans, unlike Branwell, shows no sign of becoming in any way debauched or a trial to his loving sisters; in Hans Meyrick, Eliot has revised the Brontë legend so that nothing occurs to mar the happiness of the sisters in art, even though Hans, like Branwell, never succeeds in becoming a truly talented painter.

13. Likening Eliot’s prose to cabinet pictures is oddly ironic, considering it is a cabinet picture that terrorizes Gwendolyn at Offendene and disrupts her dramatic tableau.

14. But by using the word “charter” at the last, the Alcharisi subtly opens out the other side of the argument, as the word heightens the *political* implications of her statement. Eliot’s fiction is filled with scenes surrounding the Chartist movement of the early 1800s; the Alcharisi’s statement that her nature gave her a “charter” hints at the existence of a nascent “working *women’s* charter” to supplement the better-known Working Men’s Charter.

15. Note that the sister paints a scene from the popular *Arabian Nights* while the brother tackles classical history. Yet Hans’s series of paintings are considerably less successful than his sister’s works.

16. But pictures are also people: the art on the Meyrick's walls—the “glorious company of engravings” (312)—participates actively in the life of the women living between the walls. Literally the pictures do become “company” in the sense of guests or companions rather than an assemblage or group of things. When Klesmer takes his leave after approving Mirah's singing, the narrator paints the following picture of the scene:

Thereupon Klesmer bowed round to the three sisters more grandly than they had ever been bowed to before. Altogether it was an amusing picture—the little room with so much of its diagonal taken up in Klesmer's magnificent bend to the small feminine figures like images a little less than life-size, *the grave Holbein faces on the walls, as many as were not otherwise occupied, looking hard at this stranger who by his face seemed a dignified contemporary of their own.* (416; emphasis added)

The “small feminine figures” of the Meyricks are here again made to seem doll-like, dwarfed by the enormity of Klesmer's genius. But, lest he entirely overwhelm the tiny Meyrick family, the “grave Holbein faces” of the Meyrick's engravings look upon Klesmer and, by claiming kinship to him, draw this “real” individual into a canvas-life, much the way the narrator does when she prefaces this scene with, “altogether it was an amusing picture.” The Holbein faces aren't the only faces enclosed within a frame: Klesmer shares this fate as well.

17. When her family loses their income, Gwendolyn forms the romantic plan of going on the stage. She summons Klesmer for advice and tells him, “We have lost all our fortune . . . I must get my own bread. . . . The only way I can think of is to be an actress—to go on the stage. But of course I should like to take a high position, and I thought . . . to study singing also. . . . Naturally, I should wish to take as high a rank as I can” (215). She has no concern for art, of course—her desires are for money and fame. Klesmer responds with the language of True Art, the exaltation of struggling without return for an “inward vocation.” Gwendolyn, who cannot believe she doesn't possess all talents, insists, “I don't mind going up hill. It will be easier than the dead level of being a governess” (217).

18. For an introduction to Oliphant and the recent critical debates, see Losano 2002. Portions of this chapter are drawn from that article. Also see Elisabeth Jay's impressive critical biography, *Mrs. Oliphant: A Fiction to Herself* (1995).

19. The system of political economy that Lucilla purports to follow might not, in the novel's first volume, be recognized as political at all—though certainly “economy” is a good metaphor for Lucilla's management of Carlingford's social resources. Lucilla's political economy is derived roughly—very roughly, and very ironically in parts—from the well-known theories of Comte (as translated and popularized by Harriet Martineau). Comte sought to apply the methods of experimentation and observation used in the sciences to disciplines not traditionally considered scientific: religion, philosophy, social science. Social reform, he believed, could be achieved only through the scientific method. At first glance, Lucilla might seem the ultimate utilitarian, and hence influenced as well by the theories of John Stuart Mill or Bentham: she is always considering the greater social good, as when Mr. Cavendish switches his attentions to Barbara, and the women of Carlingford urge Lucilla to oust Barbara from the “evenings.” Lucilla refuses and remarks placidly: “After all, there are thousands and thousands of gentlemen,

but it is not so easy to find a voice that goes with mine. All my masters always said it was a quite peculiar second I wanted; and suppose Barbara is foolish, that is not to say I should forget *my* duties" (110). But one would not attribute a laissez-faire position to Miss Marjoribanks; her theories are utilitarian only in the sense that she believes she, as monarch, can provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number. When a beggar woman approaches the Marjoribanks' house in Grange Lane, Lucilla refuses to dispense money, "for that was contrary to those principles of political economy which she had studied with such success [at school]" (54). Instead, Lucilla says to the beggar woman, "If you are honest and want to work, I will try to find you something to do" (54).

20. Lucilla's great plan for Carlingford, the narrator is careful to imply, involves little more than organizing "Thursday Evenings"—social gatherings of the town's more well-to-do members at which music, food, and talk are enjoyed. Lucilla thinks that she has made great strides in her mission, but the narrative gives the reader no real markers of any great success. In fact, Lucilla's endeavors are very often marked by failure of one kind or another—individual humans (like Mr. Cavendish, who cannot squelch his attraction for Barbara Lake) turn out to be just beyond her manipulation. She has succeeded, however, in impressing on the citizens of Carlingford the *belief* that she is their sovereign; she has succeeded in acquiring power itself, if not in transforming actual events or individuals (although she does, in essence, influence the outcome of a parliamentary election—an event that should have profound significance but is drawn rather irrelevantly by Oliphant's satirical pen). But no matter the actual tally of success or failure, Lucilla *feels* that she has accomplished great things; and when, at the end of her career, Lucilla prepares to marry and leave Carlingford, she disdains the town's fate: "They will go back to their old ridiculous parties, as if they had never seen anything better. . . . That will be the end of it all, after one has slaved like a—like a woman in a mill!" (317). Here Lucilla, daughter of a prosperous doctor, compares herself to a factory worker, and compares the "work" of organizing genteel parties with manual labor; and other wealthy women in the novel also bemoan their lot as laborers: Mrs. Centum asks: "I should like to know what they [men] would do if they had what we have to go through: to look after all the servants—and they are always out of their sense at Christmas—and to see that the children don't have too much pudding, and to support all the noise. The holidays are the hardest work a poor woman can have" (109). At the close of the novel, Lucilla plans to continue her career as a social innovator after her marriage. When Lucilla and her betrothed (her cousin Tom Marjoribanks—Lucilla will not change her name upon marriage, significantly) are discussing their future, she remarks, "The thing that we both want is something to do." And he replies quickly, "That is what *I* want. But as for you, Lucilla, you shall do nothing but enjoy yourself, and take care of yourself. The idea of *you* wanting something to do!" Whereupon "Miss Marjoribanks regarded her betrothed with mild and affectionate contempt" and tells him, "Do you know that I have always been doing something, and responsible for something, all my life?" (315). Lucilla and Tom pool their money and buy the derelict estate—Marchbanks—which has a village near it that needs Lucilla's managerial touch. She dreams of her new occupation as the novel ends: "It gave her the liveliest satisfaction to think of all the disorder and disarray of the Marchbank village. Her fingers itched to be at it—to set all the crooked things straight, and clean away the rubbish, and set everything, as she said, on a sound foundation" (321).

21. Lucilla is often accused of acting a part: "'She is such an actor, you know,' Barbara said; 'she will never give in to let you know how she is feeling'" (166). Barbara thinks

Lucilla must be heartbroken by the loss of Mr. Cavendish, when in fact, Lucilla is characterized by a sincerity so rigid as to be unintentionally humorous.

22. The young artist's name suggest her intimate connection to the art world. The name "Rose Lake" is the name of a paint color—similar to Rose madder—which would have been regularly used in Oliphant's time. See *The Dictionary of Art*, vol. 18, ed Jane Turner, entry under "Lake."

23. "À l'Académie," *Journal des femmes* 8 (July 1892): 1, quoted in Garb 1994, 43.

Chapter Five

1. See, for example, the fictional treatments of her life by Susan Vreeland (2002) and Alexandra Lapierre (1998), as well as the film versions (1998 dir. Merlet, and 1992 dir. Clarkson) of her life. Anna Banti is also discussed in Wendy Wasserstein's play *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988).

2. The *Companion* was recently revised to become *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*. The third edition, published in 2004, offers a new entry for Kauffman which includes much of the same information but adds a list of names of "other distinguished men who were charmed by her" (373). It also claims that her large paintings have "prettiness" and "great charm" but are "insipid," and that "she was much more successful with ladylike decorative vignettes" (373). No doubts about her gender here.

The 2000 *Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* runs along similar lines. Kauffman's entry has no references to her appearance—but still mentions her two marriages. Likewise, the entry for Frida Kahlo includes the following information: "She had met Rivera when he was painting a mural at her school; in 1929 she married him and though their married life swung between passion and conflict and both had relationships outside it (in 1939 they divorced; in 1940 they remarried), they were emotionally dependent upon each other" (ed. Langmuir and Lynton 2000, 362). Rivera's entry, on the other hand, mentions Kahlo in this manner: "In 1928 he married the painter Frida Kahlo" (2000, 595). The love lives of women artists obviously remain a matter of abiding interest.

3. The staging of the choice itself nods toward the well-known (at the time) allegory of Hercules choosing between Vice and Virtue. The scene was painted frequently and was used by Shaftesbury as *the* allegorical representation of art itself, which in his aesthetic system had to choose between private aims (Vice) and the public good (Virtue) (See Barrell 1986 and Shaftesbury 1710). In her self-portrait, the real Kauffman places herself in the idealized position of Hercules; and while neither music nor painting is explicitly Vice, she still suggests by the classical allusion that her choice between media is a noble and (possibly) immortalizing one. See Burlin 1986 for an excellent discussion of how women writers and painters used this scene in their works.

4. For brief discussions of Ritchie's influence on Woolf, see Trodd 2000; Gerin 1981, 241–43, 279–84; and Mackay 2001, 82. Fuller exploration of the literary relationship between these two writers will hopefully be undertaken as Ritchie scholarship increases.

5. Ritchie may also have been attracted to Kauffman because of her (Ritchie's) close friendship with Julia Margaret Cameron, the photographer. Cameron's biography does not in the least resemble Kauffman's, but it is possible that Ritchie's interest in Kauffman as a female visual artist was strengthened by her interest in her friend's profession.

6. Historical fiction and so-called “romantic historiography” (Simmons 1990, 53) peaked in the 1830s and 1840s and was in serious decline by the 1860s, due in part to the previous deluge (which sated the reading public), in part to the rise of realism, and in part to a new kind of professional historiography which came into vogue in the second half of the nineteenth century (*ibid.*, 58). Although writers were still writing historical novels in the 1870s, it was rare: outright history was more popular.

7. Trodd writes that *A Book of Sibyls* begins with a kind of “ghost story, and invokes the supernatural throughout as a means to describe the occult presence of women in literary history, the difficulty of evaluating its traces, and her worries about women’s relation to the official literary tradition” (2000, 196). Ritchie’s many memoirs and biographies made her “increasingly associated with the re-creation of the lives of dead writers” (*ibid.*). Ritchie’s ghost story in *Sibyls*, Trodd argues, initiates a long tradition—from Ritchie and Oliphant to Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker—of figuring past women artists as occult presences, working in secret and hidden from history.

8. Anne Seymour Damer (1749–1828) was a well-known cultural figure. The caption of the cartoon, placed on the pedestal (“A Model to make a boy from”), suggests that Damer’s well-placed chisel is causing the cartoonist considerable anxiety.

9. Ritchie was acquainted with Ruskin personally; they had several meetings and were correspondents. Ritchie also wrote an article on Ruskin, first published in *Cornhill* and *Harpers* and later in book form in *Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning*. She had attempted to write something on Ruskin earlier but was incapable of it—certainly he was influential enough in her life and thinking to be a force to be reckoned with.

10. Jeremy Maas’s excellent survey of the subject, *Victorian Painters* (1969), has a brief discussion of portraiture, as does John Walker’s historical overview *Portraits: 5,000 Years* (1983, chap. 9).

11. For obvious reasons, Kauffman’s life in England, for example, provides the bulk of Ritchie’s book—when in fact it was just over a decade. Additionally, the character of “Lady W—,” based on the real historical figure Lady Wentworth, becomes a fully realized, detailed figure whose machinations have serious plot repercussions in Ritchie’s narrative, while in other sources she is either mentioned briefly or elided entirely.

12. For more on Dicksee, see Cherry 1993, 2000.

Chapter Six

1. Dinah Maria Mulock Craik (1826–1887) wrote fiction, periodical essays, and children’s literature. She believed in equality in marriage and was a champion of many women’s causes. Her book, *A Woman’s Thoughts about Woman* (1858), argued for increased job opportunities for women. See Mitchell 1993.

2. Charlotte Mary Yonge (1823–1901) wrote over two hundred books. Influenced heavily by Keble and the Oxford Movement, Yonge’s fiction emphasizes middle-class domesticity, the importance of spiritual discipline, and family affection. Though generally conservative, her novels often show intermittent veins of more radical views on the nature of the family and the role of women in society. See Mare and Percival 1948.

3. Perhaps because of their already monstrous state, women were thought to influence the physical appearance of their offspring when this appearance was unusual

in any way. (Thus we find the famous traditions of the pregnant woman who looked at a picture of John the Baptist in furs giving birth to an excessively hairy child or the folk tradition that a harelip on a child was caused by the mother seeing a rabbit during pregnancy.) Serious deformities were thought to be divine punishment for some parental crime—the most famous Greek cripple, Hephaistos (Vulcan), was the product of Hera's sole creation, in revenge against Zeus for giving birth to Athena all by himself. Hera's hubristic parthenogenesis, in an era when the male seed was thought to be the primary creator of new life, results in a deformed offspring. But Hephaistos became an artisan, a skilled worker in valuable materials. His artistic talent was thought to be restitution for his physical imperfections—and the famous myth in which he traps Aphrodite in Ares' arms symbolizes the triumph of his arts over the lusts of the more perfect divinities (see Garland 1995, chap. 3).

4. Eighteenth-century aesthetics continued the idea of deformity as incompleteness. In Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, for example, the issue of deformity arises in relation to his struggles to define beauty. Proportion, says Burke, has nothing to do with beauty; the common belief that beauty lies in proportion stems

from a wrong idea of the relation which deformity bears to beauty, to which it has been considered as the opposite; on this principle it was concluded, that where the causes of deformity were removed, beauty must naturally and necessarily be introduced. This I believe is a mistake. For *deformity* is opposed, not to beauty, but to the *complete, common form*. If one of the legs of a man be found shorter than the other, the man is deformed; because there is something wanting to complete the whole idea we form of a man. So if the back be humped, the man is deformed; because his back has an unusual figure, and what carries with it the idea of some disease or misfortune. (93; emphasis in original)

Oddly, we see that the two disfigurements we are dealing with, the ones unified in Jenny Wren, seem to be the most common illustrations for deformity—"queer" legs and humped backs. These deformities are coded not as "ugly" (opposed to beautiful) but rather as "incomplete."

5. Many writers have explored this connection between women and deformity; Craik and Yonge inherit a rich tradition of representations of deformity, gender, and art from the eighteenth century and from early Romanticism. For example, in Sarah Scott's feminist utopia *Millenium [sic] Hall*, published in 1762, a colony of the deformed and disfigured people find refuge and occupation in the enclave Millenium Hall, a retreat from capitalist patriarchy run by six women who renounce marriage and motherhood in favor of "sisterhood" and the arts. The proximity of the deformed and the female correlates the two as similarly deviant from the perfections of the masculine; at Millenium Hall, however, the aesthetic model is transformed and deformity becomes an aesthetic virtue, while beauty is despised. As Felicity Nussbaum writes, "at Millenium Hall the culture's devaluation of deformity is reversed" (1997, 166). The unmarried, the disfigured, the independent woman—these become icons for perfection in this feminist utopia.

6. This accretion of deformity makes these characters almost monstrous. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen 1996 offers "Seven Theses" postulating the position of the monster—

anything or anyone deformed, disfigured, outside the boundaries of the normal—in culture. The seven theses are:

1. The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body (that is, monstrosity is a cultural construct)
2. The Monster Always Escapes (cannot be pinned down, permanently captured)
3. The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis (monsters evade categorization)
4. The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference
5. The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible (monsters serve as visible cultural borders, representatives of boundaries not to be crossed lest we become like them)
6. Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire (the repulsive/seductive structure)
7. The Monster Stands at the Threshold of Becoming (by their difference, monsters incite change)

The disfigured artist-heroines in this chapter support all seven of these theses. They are “monsters” in their deformity, and in their marginal cultural status; they are also monsters because they fracture gender codes and attack the very foundation of aesthetics.

For other discussion of the monstrous, the deformed, or the grotesque in literature, see Harpman 1982 and Russo 1995.

7. As, significantly, does another *Jane Eyre* take-off, *Hester's Sacrifice*, which contains the same plain heroine-artist pitted against a cast-off West Indian wife. In this 1866 novel by Eliza Tabor, however, both women drown together in a shipwreck (caused by a fire started by the West Indian wife); the “hero” survives and no one lives happily ever after.

8. When we consider his progeny, we must call into question the “purity” of the father's blood. Indeed, Craik offers a powerful critique of paternal purity. Olive's mother may be represented as physically impure (and indeed she herself becomes disabled—blind—in her middle age), and Christal's mother may be “impure” because of her racial difference, but both mothers are finally represented as victims of Angus Rothesay's so-called pure blood. On the one hand, his racial purity is linked to the depredations of imperialism; on the other, his physical perfection is not balanced by human warmth or sympathy (which his “impure” child and wife possess).

9. Hemans is another woman writer—like Caroline Norton, Anna Jameson, or Margaret Oliphant—who was forced by circumstances to support herself and her children with the proceeds of her writing. When she was in her teens, her father left the family; several years later Hemans's own husband followed suit, leaving her with five children to support.

10. Kauffman (Swiss, 1741–1807) is discussed in chapter 5. Prosperia Rossi (sculptor, Italian Renaissance), was the only Italian woman artist to become famous for works in marble (she is the subject of a poem by F. Hemans). Elisabetta Sirani (Italian, 1638–1665) opened her own school for women painters; her early death caused her entire native city of Bologna to go into mourning.

11. For a well-documented and detailed(!) explication of the historical connection between women and the particular, see Schor 1987, esp. 11–22.

Chapter Seven

1. For more on women artists in the period 1880–1920, see Cherry 1993, 73–77, 86–95. See also Elliott and Wallace 1994.

2. Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, was an amateur watercolorist and illustrator who exhibited frequently at the Grosvenor Gallery and other venues. For more information on Lady Waterford, see Nunn 1987, 174–86. Annie Robinson Swynnerton was one of the founders of the Manchester Society for Woman Painters in 1876 and exhibited briefly at the Royal Academy. Henrietta Ward, wife of E. M. Ward (a Royal Academy member), was a popular artist and art teacher who painted both domestic and historical subjects (see Cherry 1993, 93–130). Laura Alma-Tadema was the wife of Lawrence Alma-Tadema; she painted primarily domestic subjects (see Cherry 1993, 41–43).

3. For more on the Macdonald sisters, see Cherry 1993, 203–7; Helland 1996; Marsh and Nunn 1989; and Burkhauser 1990.

4. Other New Women painters of the period tackled the problem of feminine sexuality by controlling their own *self*-representation, crafting their images as resolutely professional. Margaret Foster Richardson's self-portrait, *A Motion Picture* (1912), suggests the unfettered possibility represented by the New Woman painter. She is ready for work, brushes in hand, moving toward the light. The painter has effaced all markers of feminine sexuality: her smock and severe collar are androgynous; she wears glasses and has drawn-back hair, in contrast to the Gibson Girl poufs of the period. She strides, showing purpose; her glance at the viewer doesn't break her motion. Similarly, Dorothy Carleton Smyth's *Self-Portrait* (1921) shows her working, smocked; she will have none of the ornate outfits we see in earlier self-portraits or portraits of women painters, in which the artist's sexuality was still present for appreciation (compare, for example, the painter's outrageous outfit in *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils* by Adelaide Labille-Guiard from 1785. Would an artist paint in blue satin?).

5. Ward was the granddaughter of Dr. Thomas Arnold (the headmaster of Rugby) and the niece of Matthew Arnold. Her husband, Thomas Humphry Ward, was a tutor at Oxford and later art critic for the *Times*; her husband's writing career seems to have contributed to her knowledge of and interest in the visual arts.

6. For more discussion of Ward's relationship to feminism and her anti-suffrage activities, see Sutherland's excellent biography of Ward (1990, 301–6) and Sutton-Ramspeck (1999).

7. Elsmere to Patricia Meyer Spacks's use of Ward's *Robert Elsmere* as a test case in a discussion of books which were once bestsellers but are now considered "boring." Spacks argues, among other things, that shifts of taste in literature "tell us what ideas we can no longer afford to admit to consciousness, as well as what forms of literary embodiment have come to seem meaningless" (1994, 289). Ward's particular treatment of the professional woman artist fits into precisely this category for twentieth- and twenty-first century feminist academic readers (who would be the main ones to recuperate and re-read Ward).

8. The character of Elise Delaunay was modeled on the Russian émigré Marie Bashkirtseff, a young artist whose extraordinary journal and letters were known to Ward. See Collister 1984.

9. Lewis's reading equally overplays Ward's sympathy for David; Lewis argues that Elise is punished "for the pain she has caused David" (2003, 239). However, Ward tells

us that David, after steeping himself in French and German Romantic literature, travels to France ready and willing to indulge himself in a grand, tortured passion—which is precisely what he gets. His adoration of Elise is founded not on what we might call “true love” or rational knowledge of his loved object, but rather on a desire for a fantasy-based, essentially fictional woman.

10. Buying a poor woman’s artworks behind her back is also in part a structural counterpart to another common narrative device: buying a poor woman a piano. Frank Churchill does it for Jane Fairfax in *Emma*; Colonel Brandon does the same for Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*; and in *Little Women*, the wealthy Mr. Lawrence gives a piano to the shy Beth March. In all these instances, the gift is obviously based on economic superiority, but the action also implies masculine control over female creativity. Where visual artworks are concerned, the wealthy man cannot control the woman’s production, so he limits, instead, her access to the market. In both cases—music and painting—the result of the male characters’ action is to ensure that the artistic production of the women serves male pleasure. Churchill and Brandon do not offer pianos to their beloveds so that they can practice and become famous public musicians, but rather so that they can entertain within the home.

11. Ward’s oeuvre offers other instances of women who dream of becoming professional artists of one kind or another. In *Robert Elsmere*, Robert’s pious wife Catherine’s sister Rose trains as a professional musician—which serves, as Spacks writes, “mainly to make her attractive to London society and to draw two men to her” (1994, 293). Rose marries in the end, but as with Lydia and Elise, the reader is not at all certain that the marriage will be a happy one. Rose “has clearly established her longing for more than ordinary social life has to offer” (*ibid.*, 296); her artistic temperament and training would seem to make her marriage destined for difficulty if not failure. Curiously, the artistic pretensions of one of the few writers in Ward’s work, Lydia’s sister Susan in *The Mating of Lydia*, who is attempting to write a verse tragedy (possibly in Greek; Ward is unclear), are consistently dismissed. Susan has “gone overboard,” so to speak; she has become a suffragette and hence (Ward suggests) can neither produce good art nor become a suitably romantic female character for fiction.

Coda

1. See White 2005 for excellent discussions of these novels and other twentieth-century fiction featuring women painters as characters.
2. *Artemisia* (film), directed by Agnes Merlet (Miramax, 1998); television production, directed by Adrienne Clarkson (Canadian Broadcasting Company, 1998).
3. For discussions of the fictionalized versions of Artemisia’s life, see Benedetti and Elizabeth Cohen.



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