

Her Representation Precedes Her: Transatlantic Celebrity, Portraiture, and Visual Culture, 1865-
1890

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Abstract

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Analysis of representations of London's professional beauty and the tomboy heroine of the American West reveals the centrality of female celebrities to debates regarding feminine labor, gendered consumer behavior, and racial right to imperial rule during the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain and the United States. In the first three chapters of this dissertation, a consideration of the development of commercial photography and album culture leads to an analysis of how professional beauties, including Lillie Langtry, Mary "Patsy" Cornwallis West, Margaret Wheeler, and Lady Lonsdale harnessed representational tools to create a powerful sense of public intimacy that motivated celebrity culture, threatened expectations of gendered consumer behavior, and risked a visual miscegenation with colonized subjects in the minds and hands of indiscriminate viewers. The final two chapters analyze reports of frontier women such as Calamity Jane (Martha Jane Canary) and sensational dime novel fiction, out of which grew the figure of the tomboy heroine of the American West. A symbol of possibility on an expanding frontier, the Western tomboy heroine found a welcome a home in the popular imagination and was successfully performed by Annie Oakley in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. While a short-skirted

sharp shooter would seem a transgressive female figure for Victorian-era audiences, analysis of her positive reception in Britain during the American Exhibition of 1887 reveals that a return to a more “natural” womanhood was considered a viable alternative to the negative effects of an industrialized urban environment. Utilizing sensitive attention to object materiality, consideration of socio-historical context drawn from primary sources, and examination of various modes of public performance, this dissertation implements a hybrid methodology to interrogate the imaginative fantasies required of and sustained by celebrity and consumer culture. Analysis of these case studies amidst London’s visual ecosystem during the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrates the ways in which representations of women were utilized to illustrate the hopes and anxieties of an imperial era.

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Dedication

To my sister, always my person
To my brother, outdoorsman extraordinaire
To my father and my mother, for letting me take them for granted
And to our home on the range, where I continue to find my heart and my home

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Introduction

In 1880 Valentine Prinsep (1838-1904) exhibited a “charming” and “whimsical” portrait entitled *An Unprofessional Beauty* at the Grosvenor Gallery.¹ **(Figure 1)** An elegant woman leans into a red-velvet covered sofa, her long fingers crossed over a luxurious red drape. Cream-colored lace at her collar and wrists set off the dark green of her skirts and form-fitted bodice. Prinsep has exquisitely modeled her visage, paying particular attention to the subtle gradations from highlighted white skin on her forehead and along her upper lip to the diffuse bloom of her cheeks. The curling halo of her ostrich feather hat nestles on the reddish-brown curls that offset the smooth blushing whiteness of her skin. Carefully arched eyebrows grace the orbs of dark hazel eyes, between which a straight nose ends in delicate nostrils, a carefully delineated septum, and small plump lips. The flat gold tendrils of the wallpaper behind her, watercolor-like in their slapdash bleed, swirl around the statuesque stillness of her face.

The painting was well received. One reviewer wrote that the “choice comeliness” of the young lady rendered it “a brilliant and graceful picture.”² Her beauty is indeed remarkable. The perfectly symmetrical features, low brow, strong chin, and rounded jaw reference the classical Venus de Milo. Her large, dark eyes and small mouth adhere to contemporary standards, such as those published in the illustration by Adelaide Claxton entitled “Types of English Beauty” **(Figure 2)** published in *Lady’s Pictorial* on April 8, 1881. Art historian Lara Perry writes that during the later part of the nineteenth century, “beauty, particularly female beauty, came to be

¹ “THE ROYAL ACADEMY AND GROSVENOR GALLERY. First Notice.” *The Birmingham Daily Post*, Saturday, 1 May 1880, issue 6808, p 5. See also Simon Toll’s essay “Valentine Prinsep” written for the catalogue accompanying the exhibition “Valentine Prinsep, RA (1838-1904: A Jubilee Painter,” (Southwark: South London Art Gallery [now Cuming Museum], 1977.

² “THE GROSVENOR GALLERY.” *The Morning Post*, Tuesday, 4 May 1880, issue 33652, p 5.

understood as a testament to the professional skills of the artist, rather than the appearance of the sitter,”³ and reviewers took this painting as a demonstration of Prinsep’s ability. One commented that it was “worth a dozen such huge things as he has sent to the Academy.”⁴

Prinsep presents the viewer with a visually recognizable type, the “society beauty,” yet complicates our understanding of the subject with the given title. Why is she “unprofessional,” rather than simply a “beauty?” What, in 1880, would the extra descriptor have signified to a London audience? Closer analysis reveals that Prinsep has destabilized a straightforward reading by inserting visual allusions to this woman’s agency and sexuality. She gazes directly out at the viewer, who, if encountering her in this space, must sit or kneel in front of her. Though her body is brought close to the picture plane, and though she meets our gaze, her interlocking Ingres-que fingers and cool, haughty gaze deny our entreaties. A blue-collared King Charles spaniel sleeps on her lap, but, without the properly modulated shadows needed to signal its weight, the dog appears to float over her skirts rather than nestle within them. Prinsep has modeled this canine after the one who sleeps on the bed of the sensual *Venus of Urbino* (1538), mirroring the white-and-brown spotted pattern, the flop of the furry ears, and the tight curl of the small creature.⁵ While such dogs may symbolize fidelity, they have also been

³ Perry, Lara. *History’s Beauties: Women and the National Portrait Gallery, 1856-1900* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 90.

⁴ “THE GROSVENOR GALLERY.” *The Era*, Sunday 30 May 1880, issue 2175. The reviewer may have been referring to Prinsep’s monumental canvas exhibited at the Royal Academy entitled *Imperial Assemblage at Delhi* (1880). It measured twenty-seven feet long by thirteen feet high and was given a full wall of display in Room No. VII. Carline Dakers writes that it was not particularly well received. See her *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 207-8. “The Royal Academy Exhibition.” In *The Art Journal*, June 1880, 186 and “The Royal Academy Exhibition.” In *The Art Journal*, July 1880, 220.

⁵ In the early nineteenth century the King Charles Spaniel was crossbred with the Pug. This is apparent in Prinsep’s painting, for the spaniel has the bulbous forehead and shortened nose indicative of the later type.

interpreted to represent promiscuity and seductiveness.⁶ Prinsep continues the allusion to the *Venus of Urbino* by maintaining the dark green and red seen in the bed and drape of the Venetian painting as well as in its nineteenth century French update, Édouard Manet's (1832-1883) *Olympia* (1865). **(Figure 3)** Prinsep has brightened the vermilion of his palette, however, in the drape that cascades between the Beauty's arms to pool in her lap with the spaniel. Within the midst of its compressed layers, a second fabric painted slightly browner twists outwards before reabsorbing into the carmine. This detail renders the folds doubly sensual, a predecessor to Georgia O'Keeffe's (1887-1986) provocative flower canvases.

The tension in *An Unprofessional Beauty* – between fashionable femininity and covert sensuality, and between a calmly statuesque visage and symbolic allusions to a more passionate blush – correlates with a celebrity figure who emerged in the late 1870s: London's professional beauties.⁷ Lauded as examples of English racial preeminence, the classical features of these women were flung across continents via commercial photographs,⁸ leaving in their wake glamorous fairytales of social-climbing and Society fêtes based on the mystique of beauty and

⁶ Simona Cohen writes that classical and medieval sources often linked the dog with sexual offenses, promiscuity, lechery. Further, "The association of the sensuous nude female and various species of the toy dog in Titian's paintings derives from the iconography of *Vanitas* or promiscuity in fifteenth century Flemish painting." She later concludes that in Titian's work, the dog symbolizes "manifestations of negative human passions or what the church explicitly defined as sins or vices. The animal as a symbol of human bestiality has a long history in the art and literature of the west." Simona Cohen, *Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art* (Boston: Leiden, 2008), 137 and 142.

⁷ In a letter to Laura Beatty dated March 16, 1999, Christopher Jordan, Documentation Assistant at the South London Art Gallery, wrote that Prinsep's painting may have been a response to George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), with whom he shared a studio. "I assume [*Unprofessional Beauty*] is a humorous riposte to [Watts' 1879 *Professional Beauty*], although the interpretation given to me is that Prinsep was plainly making a point by portraying a common prostitute and asking the question, spot the difference." Letter in papers of Cuming Museum.

⁸ "Where will not Beauty penetrate? A tourist at Moscow writes that the photographs of Mrs. Langtry and Mrs. Cornwallis West are to be seen in all the leading photographers' windows, and imitations, 'not particularly bad,' may be purchased in the streets for five copecks, or a penny. Tourist asks one of the street-salesmen who they are. 'Apparently foreign ladies – actresses, queens, or singers. All I know, your Excellency, is that their faces are pretty, and the price is five copecks!'" *The Whitehall Review*, 13 September 1879, 426.

power of consumer demand for fashionable novelties.⁹ The professional beauty grew from preexisting traditions of venerating beauty as a primary feminine accomplishment. But, rather than remaining staidly transfixed in oil portraits at the Royal Academy or Grosvenor Gallery, she stepped off of her pedestal to participate in the enormous demand for her commercial photographic portraits. These then ran amok in the streets of London and beyond, leaving people to wonder about the “great social force”¹⁰ of these Galateas, who, in their ability to harness the power of photography and Society gossip, dared step into the realm of self-fashioning Pygmalions. Critics chafed at how these women utilized photographic commodities, tools of the marketplace, to take advantage of susceptible male desire and thoughtless feminine materialism. Professional beauties, they claimed, encouraged base desires and motivations that signaled the degeneration of British culture during its “Aesthetic age.” Like *An Unprofessional Beauty*, these women were highly fashionable, statuesquely beautiful, and sexually provocative. They were also insidiously omnipresent as modern celebrities.

This dissertation presents a hybrid methodology that utilizes sensitive attention to object materiality, consideration of socio-historical context drawn from primary sources, and various modes of public performance to interrogate the imaginative fantasies required of and sustained by celebrity culture. In her essay “The Secret of England’s Greatness,” socio-cultural and feminist art historian Lynda Nead presents

⁹ I use “Society” to refer to the social elite. By the 1870s, what had traditionally been a rather small group of Court-affiliated aristocratic families (perhaps three hundred to four hundred people at most in the eighteenth century) grew to what was at the time called “the upper ten thousand.” As Hilary and Mary Evans point out, it is difficult to precisely define this diversified group, and write that “though ‘Society’ and the aristocracy were not interchangeable terms, it was nevertheless to the aristocracy that Society looked for its leaders.” Hilary and Mary Evans, *The Party that Lasted 100 Days* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s Publishers Ltd., 1976), 11. See also Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1973).

¹⁰ “Professional Beauties.” *London Society: an Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation*, 36:215 (November 1879), 450.

an experiment in methodology... in finding ways of reading and understanding the meanings of visual images that are not solely concerned with the context of the image but rather work with the materiality of paintings and the imaginative relationship between the spectator and the work of art.¹¹

According to Nead, invoking the visual imagination “as a tool of historical analysis... opens out possible meanings that would otherwise escape the scrutiny of context and historical reconstruction.”¹² I extend her experiment in methodology to include viewers’ imaginative relationships with portraits across media ranging from the humble, such as commercial photographs and dime novel cover illustrations, to the high-brow, including painting and sculpture. Considering imaginative responses to such representations reveals the centrality of the female subjects of this dissertation to nineteenth century debates regarding feminine labor, gendered consumer behavior, and racial right to imperial rule.

Photographic representations of professional beauties, as well as lithographic portraits and paintings in oils, superficially signaled preexisting representational tropes of female types, such as Beauty and Muse, and their associated behavior.¹³ However, analysis of period criticism indicates that the role of viewers’ imaginations risked activating these bodies in threatening ways. According to some, the “base” desires of lower-class men unseated these women from their lofty pedestals as muses and mixed them into a sexually-charged morass of representations of actresses and nearly-naked African women. Further, the notable purchasing power of female consumers indicated not only their sway as cultural taste-makers but also the engagement of their personal desires in pursuit of the sartorial excellence and social esteem made attainable based on

¹¹ Lynda Nead, "The Secret of England's Greatness," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19:2 (2014), 161.

¹² Nead, "The Secret of England's Greatness," 163.

¹³ In thinking of representations of women and womanhood, I am indebted to the scholarship of Susan P. Casteras, particularly her *The Substance and the Shadow: Images of Victorian Womanhood* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1982).

the “evidence” of the success of professional beauties. Such consumer behavior rendered professional beauties omnipresent celebrity figures with a significant, and alarming, amount of cultural clout.

The first three chapters present considerations of the professional beauty, while the last two examine a contrasting but connected American case study: that of Annie Oakley (née Phoebe Ann Moses, 1860-1926) who purposefully adopted the trope of tomboy heroine of the American West and performed it to great acclaim in Britain. These case studies – one glamorous, one heroic, and both spectacular – consider the ways in which women strategically negotiated representational tropes to attempt careers as public figures. The particularities of specific individuals – namely Lillie Langtry (née Emilie Charlotte Le Breton, 1853-1929), Mary “Patsy” Cornwallis West (née Fitzpatrick, 1858-1920), Margaret G. Wheeler (also known as Mrs. Luke Wheeler, dates unknown), frontier woman Martha Jane Canary (1852-1903), best known as Calamity Jane, and Oakley – were, through the repetition of representations and associated implicit and explicit narratives regarding nation, culture, gender, and empire, sublimated into the abstractions of types. These types – the professional beauty and the Western tomboy heroine, the antecedent to the performance cowgirl – added to the representational tropes available to women during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

While commercial photography is given lengthy consideration, this is not solely a photography project, but rather a dissertation about London’s visual ecosystem during the second half of the nineteenth century. I therefore reference a range of visual materials and call upon the scholarship of art historians Nead and Angela Rosenthal to consider the relationships between image, text, imagination, and the sensate body. In “The Secret of England’s Greatness,” Nead considers how, when confronted by a life-size painting in oil of a black man and white woman

and child, the nineteenth century viewer may have imagined interracial touch, “the frisson of a brushing of fingers,” even as oil paint forever arrested the possibility.¹⁴ As will be discussed in the criticism directed at professional beauties, fantasies included imagining contact with diverse, and often unachievable, tactility – including the touch of skin – that grew from the experience of the sensate body. In conversation with Nead’s methodological “experiment,” Rosenthal’s approach in “*Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture*” considers “an image as active and as possessing some of the penetrability associated with real bodies, or as possessing a life of its own.”¹⁵ I extend her analysis to include the visual potency of hand-colored cabinet cards of professional beauties, which risked stimulating viewers’ imaginations in problematic ways, and to consider the degree of legibility of nineteenth century white women’s bodies based on their psychosomatic responses, specifically the blush, to gendered gazes.

Encounters with professional beauties included observing their photographic portraits in shop windows,¹⁶ bumping against them in crowded galleries – including the Royal Academy, which had moved to Burlington House in 1867, and the Grosvenor Gallery, newly opened in 1877 – and watching them accompany Edward, the Prince of Wales (1841-1910, reigned as King Edward VII, 1901-1910) in Hyde Park’s Rotten Row, a path along the south end of Hyde Park

¹⁴ Nead, “The Secret of England’s Greatness,” 165. Nead is particularly concerned with the relationship between black and white bodies in Thomas Jones Barker’s oil painting *The Secret of England’s Greatness* (1863) and that by William Mulready entitled *The Toyseller* (1857-63). Nead also considers Mulready’s mixing of oil paint in thin layers of transparent pigment “a painterly enactment of racial intermixing.” *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁵ Angela Rosenthal, “*Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture.*” *Art History* 27:4 (2004), 565.

¹⁶ Fashionable print seller’s shops and photographers’ studios included Macmichael’s at 42 South Audley Street, Mayfair; W. & D. Downey at 57 and 61 Ebury Street, Eaton Square; and Elliot & Fry at 55 Baker Street.

traversed daily by the fashionable.¹⁷ The bodies and representations of professional beauties were more than “sites for optical consumption,” per Rosenthal, but also forms of “‘specular subjectivity,’ . . . implicated within the processes of fictionalized corporeal encounters.”¹⁸ Such fictional encounters included imagining how similarly pink flesh and black flesh may have felt, or how the clothes worn by a professional beauty would feel on one’s own body.

The streets and parks of London functioned as spaces of spectacle saturated with visual culture and activated by moving bodies and creative minds. This included the Earls Court exhibition complex in West London, purpose-built for the 1887 American Exhibition where Buffalo Bill’s Wild West first performed to an international audience with Oakley as a headliner. Illuminated by electric lights, the twenty-three acres of exhibition grounds were composed of cultivated gardens, art galleries, vaulted architecture constructed of railroad ties, bars serving “American” cocktails and snacks, and the Wild West encampment and performance arena. The Exhibition was alive with sounds of the urban environment – including the railroad tracks around which the grounds had been built – as well as the dust and noise of milling crowds, spinning machinery, North American livestock, and “Yankee” bands. As will be discussed in the fifth chapter, commentators noted the moments in which the Exhibition’s environments fantastically transported them outside of this urban reality to the American frontier of the Wild West, or to a fairyland created by lantern-lit gardens. Amidst this range of sensory experience, attendees were encouraged by accompanying catalogues, posters, public speeches, and news reports to see themselves as part of an implicit narrative of conquest and civilization.

¹⁷ During the nineteenth century, Rotten Row in Hyde Park, London was an ideal venue for people watching, particularly since the fashionable exercised their horses or took a leisurely carriage ride during certain times of the day. Established by William III at the end of the seventeenth century, it was originally termed “Route de Roi,” from which devolved “Rotten Row.”

¹⁸ Rosenthal, “*Visceral Culture*,” 564.

Within this spectacle, and couched in larger anxieties relative to the Old and New World empires, resided the figure of the Anglo-Saxon woman. In Buffalo Bill's Wild West sharpshooter Annie Oakley presented a vigorous tomboy heroine taken from the ashes of the American Civil War and honed on the harsh plains of the American West. Even though Oakley had never lived on the frontier, she was able to perform as the tomboy figure called the "Girl Pard," short for partner, because of her youthful appearance and athleticism. The Girl Pard grew out of dime novel fiction and, like that literature, became part of the myth-making of the American West. As art historian Angela Miller points out, for most eastern (and international) audiences,

the Old West was known not through direct experience... but through representations, reenactments, and performances. The Old West was not a place or a time in history, but a cultural invention that answered a post-Civil War longing for the certainties of heroic action and the permanence of sublime nature.¹⁹

Within these narratives, such youthful heroines typically served as entertaining and titillating sidekicks to handsome heroes. More profoundly, however, their type pointed to concerns relative to the health, vigor, and resourcefulness of white westering women carrying American culture into an expanding frontier.²⁰ Recent research by gender and literary studies scholar Michelle Ann Abate and art historians Lauren Lessing and Sarah Burns have pointed out the increased presence of the tomboy figure in American art and literature over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century.²¹ The popularity of such a figure was tied up with

¹⁹ Angela Miller, "Chasing the Phantom: Cultural Memory in the Image of the West." In *Western Passages: Redrawing Boundaries: Perspectives on Western American Art* (Denver and Seattle: Denver Art Museum and University of Washington Press, 2007), 68.

²⁰ "Westering" is used to refer to women who moved westward into the American frontier.

²¹ See Michelle Ann Abate, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008) and essays by Lessing and Burns in Holly Pyne Connor, ed., *Angels & Tomboys: Girlhood in 19th-century American Art* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications Inc., 2012).

concerns regarding the health of the nation, debates about appropriate models for female maturation, and the effects of women's increased access to education and professional careers. While the realities of westering women's lives may have often been too harsh or too transgressive for the sensibilities of Eastern and international audiences, the sensational Western tomboy heroine – a symbol of possibility on the expanding frontier – found a welcome a home in the popular imagination.

Portraiture and “professional” women

The origins of the phrase “professional beauty” are buried in the Society and gossip papers of 1877,²² the year Langtry was “discovered” at an elite London event, after which she skyrocketed to fame as the preeminent “Reigning Beauty.” The conservative weekly periodical *The Whitehall Review*, which adopted a positive view of these women and lauded their natural beauty and charm, bestowed this title on only two other people: Cornwallis West and Wheeler. However, a series of beautiful women were labeled “professional beauties,” and the majority of these were from the upper classes, including the American-born Lady Randolph Churchill (née Jeanette “Jennie” Jerome, and later Mrs. George Cornwallis West, 1854-1921), Lady Lonsdale (née Constance Gladys Herbert, 1859-1917) and the Countess of Dudley (Georgina Elizabeth Ward, née Moncrieffe, 1846-1929).²³ Most professional beauties, already established within the

²² From the late-1870s into the early 1880s, the phrase referred broadly, though not consistently, to married women who attended elite Society events and whose representations adorned London print sellers' shop windows and gallery walls. Over the course of the 1880s, the phrase was used even more loosely to denote particularly beautiful unmarried debutantes.

²³ The Countess of Dudley had a reputation as a leading beauty since the 1860s. In her memoir, Langtry remembered seeing photographs of the Countess – before she had that title – for sale in a stationer's shop in St. Heliers on the island of Jersey, where Langtry grew up. These were probably cartes-de-visite like the ones of the Countess at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG x10695, NPG x10696, and NPG x132254). For relevant biographical information on Langtry, see her own memoir *The Days That I Knew* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1925), and page 42 for the episode regarding the photographs above, as well as Laura Beatty's *Lillie Langtry: Manners, Masks and Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999). Regarding Cornwallis West, see Tim

upper echelons of British society, did not need or want a profession in the same way that other women striving to enter the skilled workforce did. Therefore, calling these beauties “professional” was a snide demotion. Assumedly, the “profession” of “professional beauty” consisted of divine luck, the complicity of the commercial photography industry, and the ability to manipulate indiscriminate audiences. As photography historian Patrizia di Bello points out, “photographs could elevate any beautiful woman to the status of celebrity in the absence of any actual achievement.”²⁴ While professional beauties may have enjoyed their celebrity, and possibly benefited financially from their notoriety, their success was largely dependent upon the appeal of their appearance, thereby reinforcing the idea that Beauty remained the only, and most important, female achievement. This created very real concerns for female professionals striving for success in male-dominated vocations in the arts, sciences, law, and medicine since it risked reducing their “accomplishments” merely to the appearance of their photographic portraits.²⁵

While professional beauties at first seem passive subjects of a preexisting cultural demand for beautiful women, their reception – which ranged from lauded to denigrated – justifies a closer investigation.²⁶ In *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity in Victorian*

Coates, *Patsy: The Story of Mary Cornwallis West* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003). Other relevant memoirs include, but are not limited to: Mrs. George Cornwallis West (Jennie Churchill), *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill* (Bath, UK: Cedric Chivers, Ltd., 1973 [1908]) and Frances, Countess of Warwick, *Life's Ebb and Flow* (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1929) and *Afterthoughts* (London: Cassel & Co., Ltd., 1931). Famous in the late 1870s and early 1880s, I have been unable to find rudimentary information regarding Margaret Wheeler. Because this is not a biographical project, I leave that work for another time.

²⁴ Patrizia di Bello, "Elizabeth Thompson and 'Patsy' Cornwallis West as Carte-de-visite Celebrities," *History of Photography*, 35:3 (2011), 249.

²⁵ Di Bello specifically considers the highly successful female artist Elizabeth Thompson and her anxieties about having her photograph taken. Patrizia Di Bello, "Elizabeth Thompson and 'Patsy' Cornwallis West as Carte-de-visite Celebrities," *History of Photography*, 35:3 (2011): 240-9.

²⁶ The celebrity of professional beauties, constructed from visual and textual mass media, was not a new phenomenon. Joseph Roach points out that celebrity images had circulated widely in place of religious icons as early as the seventeenth century Stuart Restoration in Britain. Yet the amount of criticism directed at the professional beauty at the apex of her fame reveals that, while celebrity itself may not have been new, her presence

England, art historian Colleen Denney writes that a woman's choice to imagine/image her self into the world risked censure and criticism. "For a woman to sit for a portrait, to collude in the act of portrait-making of a public self," she writes, "meant that she walked a dangerous line in relation to respectability."²⁷ The women of Denney's study chose to "leave behind the private world of home and hearth for a public stage," which meant engaging "in a modernist dialogue about creating individual identity and purpose, to define oneself by one's professional goals rather than as helpmate, inspiration, or living muse."²⁸ Interestingly, professional beauties defined themselves in part *as* living muses. Their social presence extended established traditions of venerating female beauty,²⁹ such as Peter Lely's seventeenth century "Windsor Beauties"³⁰ and the popular nineteenth century gift book *Heath's Book of Beauty*.³¹ How could such a "traditional" role incite the large degree of critical responses to which they were subjected?

While the exhibition of their painted portraits by notable male artists of the day was fully in keeping of the accepted uses of female beauty and helped draw large crowds to the Royal

and behavior revealed particular anxieties relevant to that historical and cultural moment. See Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

²⁷ Colleen Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity: My Lady Scandalous Reconsidered* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 11.

²⁸ Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity*, 13.

²⁹ Aileen Ribeiro writes that the tradition of collecting representations of "fair women" started with Francois I in the early sixteenth century and extended (assumedly in France and Britain) to the end of the nineteenth century, vanishing by World War I. See Aileen Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty: Painted Women & Cosmetic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 287.

³⁰ Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680) was highly in demand as a portrait artist after the death of Anthony Van Dyck in 1641. He completed a series of ten portraits of ladies from the Royal court in the 1660s. These originally resided at Windsor Castle and are now at Hampton Court Palace.

³¹ Edited primarily by the Countess of Blessington, *Heath's Book of Beauty* featured steel plate engravings of notable aristocratic women accompanied by verse. Created by Charles Heath, the series ran for seventeen years (1832-1849). See the University of South Carolina's [digital collections](#) (accessed 29 June 2015). For a recent account of the Countess of Blessington, please see Susan Matoff, *Marguerite, Countess of Blessington: The Turbulent Life of a Salonnière and Author* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015).

Academy and Grosvenor Galleries, some thought these women too enthusiastically embraced the production of their commercial photographic portraits. In so doing, they “[colluded] in the act of portrait-making of a public self,”³² thereby offering themselves up to critical censure, the marketplace of spectacle, and consumer fantasy. Their engagement in the production of their portraits rendered them collaborators in the “debasement” of their beauty via their photographic portraits “into the same street” as harlots and cads. Put briefly, they too successfully self-advertised.

Two particularly critical essays widely reproduced in excerpts in British newspapers are referenced throughout the dissertation. The first, an essay entitled “Professional Beauties” written by an anonymous author and published in *London Society: an Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation* in November 1879, presented the professional beauty as a symptom of an increasingly degenerate “Aesthetic age.” The second, “Mrs. Cornwallis West at Home” published anonymously in the gossip paper *Town Talk* on 4 October 1879, accused Mrs. Cornwallis West of acting below her station by actively producing photographic portraits for sale. Mr. Cornwallis West sued the author, revealed to be the publisher Adolphus Rosenberg, for libel, and Rosenberg ultimately faced eighteen months in jail.³³ This kind of opprobrium aimed at professional beauties followed on the heels of the widely-read social critic Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-1898), whose 1868 essay “Girl of the Period”

³² Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity*, 11.

³³ Beyond the accusations leveled against Mr. and Mrs. Cornwallis West, on 30 August 1879 Rosenberg named the Prince of Wales as co-respondent in divorce proceedings between Edward and Lillie Langtry. This was the first time that a reference to the liaison between Langtry and the Prince had been published in text, though it had been widely rumored for years. Because of this article, the Langtrys also became involved in the Cornwallis Wests’ libel trial, which began on 25 October. During the trial, Edward Langtry swore that he had never intended to divorce Lillie. See Theo Aronson, *The King in Love* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1988), 78-81.

decried the materialism and superficiality of contemporary young women.³⁴ She opens this essay by describing a former English ideal of womanhood,

a creature generous, capable, modest... neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind; a girl who, when she married, would be her husband's friend and companion, but never his rival; one who would consider his interests as identical with her own... who would make his house his true home and place of rest, not a mere passage-place for vanity and ostentation to pass through; a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress.³⁵

Linton's ideal English woman is submissive and supportive, self-denying rather than self-fashioning. In contrast, the "Girl of the Period"

is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion—a creature whose sole idea of life is fun; whose sole aim is unbounded luxury; and whose dress is the chief object of such thought and intellect as she possesses. Her main endeavour is to outvie her neighbours in the extravagance of fashion. No matter if, in the time of crinolines, she sacrifices decency; in the time of trains, cleanliness; in the time of tied-back skirts, modesty; no matter either, if she makes herself a nuisance and an inconvenience to every one she meets...³⁶

Linton accuses such women of taking as exemplars the fast women of the demimonde rather than their well-bred mothers and grandmothers, the vanishing icons of a formerly great English type.

The figure of the Girl of the Period was upheld throughout the rest of the century as evidence of

³⁴ Linton wrote for the *Saturday Review*, a prestigious conservative journal highly respected for its well-written articles that were often so scathing in their criticism that the authors were referred to as "Saturday Revilers." Nancy Fix Anderson writes that the caustic Linton was a perfect fit for the journal and began her tenure in 1866 as a book reviewer. Her first feature essay was published on 7 December, 1867. "The Girl of the Period" first appeared on 14 March, 1868. Although she authored her bimonthly essays on women anonymously, in 1868 a selection of these were published in the United States as *Modern Women and What Is Said of Them*, and seventy-four essays were collected into the 1883 *The Girl of the Period, and Other Social Essays* published in London. See Nancy Fix Anderson, *Woman against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 119-125.

³⁵ Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays*, Vol. I. (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1883), 1-2.

³⁶ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 2-3.

cultural, social, and racial degeneration, and the figure also proved influential in the United States.³⁷

Linton's work is pivotal to understanding criticisms against the professional beauty as well as Oakley's positive British reception. While the professional beauty, from a Lintonian perspective, represented all that was wrong with overcivilized modern (urban) culture, Oakley fit into a discourse promoting young, vigorous, white girlhood in the purity of Britain's pastoral spaces, described by Nead as "the heart of the imagined indigenous community, of British civilization that is whiter than white and purer than pure."³⁸ In her essay "Nymphs," Linton presented the figure of a rural nature-bound girl who can be read as a positive alternative to the Girl of the Period as well as a romanticized British type comparable to the American tomboy. While at first a potentially transgressive sharpshooting and short-skirted female performer, Oakley's presentation fit within a maturation narrative that, like Linton's "nymph," metaphorically and literally returned the female body to nature and its biological imperative.

Victorian studies scholar Gail Marshall writes that at the root of Linton's Girl of the Period "is the charge that the young woman is seeking to be self-made, to remake herself according to her own desires and observations, that is, to override the Pygmalion-rights of men."³⁹ Feminist art historian Linda Nochlin has used the Ovidian myth to frame the nineteenth century's "most perfect rationalization" of "the complex of beliefs involving male power, naked

³⁷ For a consideration of the Girl of the Period figure in America, see Sarah Burns, "Winslow Homer and the Natural Woman" in T. J. Jackson Lears, ed., *American Victorians and Virgin Nature* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2002): 16-38.

³⁸ Lynda Nead, "The Secret of England's Greatness." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 19:2 (2014), 173.

³⁹ Gail Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 26. In the Ovidian myth, the sculptor Pygmalion fashions a beautiful statue (Galatea) with which he falls in love. After Pygmalion's supplication, Venus brings the statue to life. For a consideration of this myth in nineteenth century literature, see Marshall and Essaka Joshua, *Pygmalion and Galatea: The History of a Narrative in English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

models, and the creation of art.”⁴⁰ Posited as “merely the humble servant of a higher cause, that of Beauty itself,”⁴¹ it was the prerogative of the male artist to study Beauty’s body and translate its form. Thus, when professional beauties agreed to sit for notable artists of the day, they were participating in the expected gendered dynamics of fine art production and allowing others (primarily men) to define the terms of their representation. This dynamic is also illustrated by the use of a classical rhetoric to describe professional beauties. While this privileged their beauty and, according to racial theories of the time, provided evidence that ancient Greece and Rome were part of imperial Britain’s heritage, Marshall writes that this “apparently time-defying Classical mode [absorbed] the contradictions between eternal ideals and temporal female forms, whilst absorbing also the life and autonomy of the female model or celebrated woman.”⁴² The Pygmalion myth was powerfully grafted onto pervasive assumptions about gender, thereby reinforcing expectations that men would be creative, vocal, and autonomous, while women would be decorative, passive, voiceless, and and supportive.

In many ways professional beauties might be considered Galateas brought to life by powerful Pygmalions (the artists, photographers, and lovers who memorialized them). However, they exercised a surprising degree of agency, at least according to the critics who decried their omnipresence. Further, public demand for their portraits rendered consumers complicit Pygmalions in the perpetuation of their fame. Per Rosenthal, the Ovidian myth “invokes the spectator as the quintessential connoisseur and, literally, *amateur*, in whose imagination the work

⁴⁰ Linda Nochlin, ‘*Women, Art, and Power*’ and *Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 18-19.

⁴¹ Nochlin, ‘*Women, Art, and Power*’, 18.

⁴² Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage*, 3.

of art comes alive.”⁴³ A multitude of Pygmalions, male and female, contributed to creating and sustaining the fame of professional beauties: women who negotiated the tension between self-erasure and self-creation.⁴⁴

Celebrity and consumer culture

This dissertation considers the intersections between performance, representation, and body in the creation of a celebrity figure’s social, cultural, and historical fascination. Scholar of English literature and drama Joseph Roach provides a useful formulation of celebrity culture in his book entitled, simply, *It*. A primary component of “It” – that mysterious combination of charm, beauty (sometimes), and mass fascination – is public intimacy, or the illusion of availability.⁴⁵ The roots of public intimacy extend past modern capitalism and find themselves “deeply rooted in traditional religious doctrine and, more deeply and lastingly, in popular religious feeling.”⁴⁶ In the cultural milieu of late-nineteenth century London, Aestheticism was posited by some as a kind of popular, and problematic, religion: a cult whose devotees worshipped to excess at the shrine of Beauty. The Grosvenor Gallery was considered the “temple” of this movement led by larger-than-life “prophets” including James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898), and George

⁴³ Angela Rosenthal, “Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture.” *Art History* 27:4 (2004), 564.

⁴⁴ Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007) and Gail Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁵ “It,” he writes, is composed of “public intimacy (the illusion of availability), synthetic experience (vicariousness), and the It-Effect (personality-driven mass attraction).” Roach, *It*, 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

Frederic Watts (1817-1904).⁴⁷ Some critics blamed the “Aesthetic age” for engendering a context in which beautiful objects (and professional beauties) were raised to levels of worship that became unhealthy obsessions. This kind of all-encompassing hedonism risked cultivating undesirable narcissism in popular women whose actions directly influenced their female peers and male admirers. Langtry’s association with Wilde only reinforced this kind of criticism, though Langtry was by no means representative of the Aesthetic movement. In fact, none of the women of concern to this project would have been considered Aesthetic women, although they were invariably linked with a problematic decadence and obsession with appearance. Thus, the use of “Aesthetic age” is used here to preserve the critical, and often overgeneralized, stance taken by particular commentaries.⁴⁸

Commercial photographic portraits of professional beauties enabled the construction and diffusion of a powerful sense of public intimacy. As Denney points out, “photographs, prints and paintings work in an intertwined fashion to create a comprehensive vision of the figure’s physical presence and public fame.”⁴⁹ Functioning as “artefact, image, and metaphor,”⁵⁰ these humble

⁴⁷ For scholarship on the Grosvenor Gallery, see Colleen Denney, *At the Temple of Art: The Grosvenor Gallery, 1877-1890* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000); Susan P. Casteras and Colleen Denney, *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ As will be discussed in the second chapter, Wheeler’s features struck some viewers as having the lines of both classical and Aesthetic beauty, the latter of which referenced the low-browed moody type popularized by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s (1828-1882) portraits of Jane Burden Morris (1839-1914). However, like the other professional beauties, Wheeler did not to my knowledge wear Aesthetic dress or profess to an Aesthetic lifestyle, a consideration of which may be read in Kimberly Wahl’s *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013). See also Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007) and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty’s Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity*, 9.

⁵⁰ Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 11.

portrait objects represented highly potent talismans that helped “reenchant” the modern world by stimulating powerful imagined fantasies. Their purposeful collection resulted in photograph albums that reinforced real and imagined social networks. Commercial photographs grew out of deeply engrained traditions of image production and dissemination, and their aesthetic preserved enough of the mystique of their daguerreotype predecessors to function as secular icons. Like the dime novel of relevance to the final chapters, commercial photographs were cheaply obtained and easily discarded, but their content left lasting impressions on the public imagination.

Because of the small scale of the two most popular sizes of commercial photographs – the 4 by 2 ½-inch carte-de-visite and the 6 ½ by 4 ¼-inch cabinet card⁵¹ – it was necessary to get “up close and personal” with these representations for them to be legible. They were rarely seen from a distance, and more often held within the arm span of a human body. Roach writes that such representations rendered celebrity bodies seemingly “at once touchable and transcendent,”⁵² and the physical existence of the commercial photograph (as opposed to later filmic and digital images) provided a crucial tactility that permitted intimate physical proximity.

The analysis of a selection of photographs of professional beauties in the second chapter demonstrates how strategic framing, cropping, posing, and scale brought their faces and forms close to the picture plane to enhance a sense of public intimacy. This contrasts with carte-de-visite portraits of the Royal Family, discussed in the first chapter, in which the space between royal subjects and the camera reinforces the literal distance between viewer and monarch. Even if the Royal Family “dressed down” in middle-class attire and pose, they remained appropriately

⁵¹ These measurements refer to the size of the card stock on which albumen prints were pasted. Measurements often vary slightly depending on the card manufacturer.

⁵² Roach, *It*, 16.

remote and elevated. In contrast, professional beauties were often posed as if sitting next to, gazing at, or just about to turn to the viewer. Their portraits hover on the edge of movement or capture the alluring gaze indicative of public intimacy that Roach traces from Lely's seventeenth century beauties to Uma Thurman's 2003 photo on a *GQ* magazine cover. The latter image fascinates, he writes, "not merely because she looks to be nearly naked, but also because she looks to be completely alone."⁵³ This representational trope is repeated in many photographs of concern here, which allude to the possibility of interaction, as if the viewer could transcend the skin of the albumen print and step into the clear photographic window delineating the celebrity body. Fundamentally, they remained "fixed" images, static and inaccessible, yet powerfully influential to the imagination that activated them.

A fantastical version of the body and personality of the celebrity figure is brought into existence by the imagination of the beholder witnessing the "evidence" of that figure's visual and textual representations. Roach uses the term "effigy" to describe such fantasies, which are not less "real" or less potent simply because they exist in the mind rather than in physical space.⁵⁴ He writes that celebrity images "circulate widely in the absence of their persons... but the very tension between their widespread visibility and their actual remoteness creates an unfulfilled need in the hearts of the public."⁵⁵ The effigy thus grows from such desire and results in

mental pictures or ideas, not reducible to any single one of the materially circulating images of the celebrity, but nevertheless generally available by association when

⁵³ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁴ Roach's use of "effigy" takes its meaning from the rarer verb form, which means to evoke an absence and body something forth, rather than from the noun form, which typically refers to a sculpted or pictured likeness. His effigy refers to the celebrity figure imagined in the minds of individual viewers. Such beholders construct a "spectral other" from the physical representations – visual and textual – of the celebrity. See Roach, *It*, 235 (footnote 26).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 17.

summoned from the enchanted memories of those imagining themselves in communications with the special, spectral other.⁵⁶

The effigy – the fantasy of communion with an imagined celebrity persona generated by ubiquitous representations sold as photographic commodities and gossip papers – is predicated on desire, and therefore supports and informs the permanent state of longing that sociologist Colin Campbell argues has been a motivating force of modern consumerism since the Romantic era.⁵⁷ In an effort to explain the novelty-to-obsolescence cycle of fashion,⁵⁸ Campbell writes that such a cycle cannot be fully explained by “traditional” hedonism, the desire for and pursuit of primarily physical pleasure. Rather, he argues that consumer desire since the late eighteenth century has grown more powerfully from the pleasurable sensations of emotions generated when *imagining* the possession and display of a desired good or service. He calls this “modern autonomous self-illusory hedonism.”⁵⁹ Modern hedonism, he writes, centers on

emotionally generated sensations. In fact, modern hedonism centers on the covert rather than the overt consumption of sensations, with individuals enjoying the sensations that stem from an environment that they have provided for themselves. That is to say, they conjure up scenes in their imagination that effectively cause them to experience a chosen emotion, and it is then this emotion which yields the stimulation that in turn provides the pleasure. This is self-illusory hedonism, or day-dreaming, an activity that enables the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁷ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

⁵⁸ Campbell’s consideration of the motivations of modern consumerism grew out of his frustration with many economists’ dismissal of historical context in their own theories and was inspired by the perceived return to romanticism during the 1960s and 1970s. These cultural revolutions were not at all in keeping with theories of consumerism based on rationalism (Weber) or emulation (Veblen), nor did any preexisting theories explain “why novelty should be so highly valued and desired,” even though many theories focused on novelty as the primary distinguishing mode of modern consumption. Colin Campbell, “*The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*: reflections on the reception of a thesis concerning the origin of the continuing desire for goods,” in Susan M. Pearce, ed. *Experiencing Material Culture in the Western World* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 37.

⁵⁹ In his 1987 book, Campbell refers to this as “modern autonomous imaginative hedonism,” while in his 1997 reflection he uses the phrasing “modern autonomous self-illusory hedonism.”

individual to experience pleasure at any time and place, and is thus quite independent of the nature of the real environment.⁶⁰

Similarly, the celebrity effigy is predicated upon the visual and textual evidence provided by the real environment of the celebrity's body and life to feed imagined interactions with the spectral celebrity personality, thereby generating pleasurable emotions of intimacy, communion, longing, and desire.⁶¹

Effigies of professional beauties were given life at the intersections of Society papers, portraits, and the "mass effervescence"⁶² of "mobbing" audiences. Crucially, the living bodies of professional beauties circulated in a geographical area – central and west London – that also comprised the highest density of their visual representations. It would not, therefore, have been an impossibility to stand in front of a print seller's window admiring the new cabinet card portrait of a professional beauty and daydreaming of seeing her "in the flesh," and then walk to Hyde Park to see her riding with Edward, the Prince of Wales. Such daydreaming supported the creation of ever-present effigies and propelled the purchasing power stimulated by modern autonomous self-illusory hedonism. In viewers' imaginations, the professional beauty united the imaginative longing that propelled both the celebrity industry and the consumer market.⁶³

⁶⁰ Campbell, "The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism: reflections," 37-8.

⁶¹ Campbell makes a distinction between day dream and fantasy, arguing that a day dream focuses on the possibilities of the immediate environment and thus is much more powerful than a fantasy, which remains too far out of reach to be realistically desirable. While I acknowledge the relevance of this distinction for Campbell's project, in this dissertation I utilize the word "fantasy" to consider imagined situations that are both personal and collective and probable and improbable.

⁶² Emile Durkheim uses the phrase "mass effervescence" in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), which is analyzed by Chris Rojek in *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001). As used by Durkheim, "effervescence" refers to the collective experience of religious ecstasy. Roach explains that Durkheim's analysis presents a "basis of examining the religious dimensions of putatively secular cultures." Roach, *It*, 19.

⁶³ In the later 1880s the relationship between fame and advertising became more blatantly linked when some professional beauties provided celebrity endorsements for specific commodities. See Catherine Hindson, "'Mrs. Langtry Seems to Be on the Way to a Fortune': the Jersey Lily and Models of Late Nineteenth-Century Fame," in *In the Limelight and under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity*, ed. Su Holmes and Diane

Chapter overview

The fame and notoriety of professional beauties grew in large part out of their engagement with phototechnology, and thus the first chapter begins with a consideration of the history, technique, aesthetic, and socio-cultural networks of viewing and exchange of commercial photography up to the 1880s. A focus on materiality, rooted in a consideration of the development of the medium, reveals a productive tension between the highly-detailed representational authority of commercial photographs and their physical inferiority as cheaply mass-produced objects: essentially, between their simultaneous existence as icons subject to visual contemplation and ephemera subject to physical manipulation. Captured by the “objective” eye of the camera and developed in crisp detail, the commercial photograph presented an apparent authority belied by the reality of its existence as a disposable manufactured commodity.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, London’s West End thrived amidst commercial expansion. Women were increasingly prominent as consumers, but also provided attractive observational fodder for men-about-town such as George Augustus Henry Sala (1828-1895). Cultural historian Erika Rappaport highlights his 1879 observations of the newly-developed Westbourne Grove in West London, which he described as a kind of “sensual Eastern marketplace” in which the women focus on shopping and the men focus on observing the women.⁶⁴ His gaze is demonstrably that of “the probing ‘colonizing’ gaze of the white heterosexual man”⁶⁵ upon the largely female crowd that he imagines as an Orientalized

Negra (New York: Continuum, 2011): 17-36 and Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁶⁴ Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21.

⁶⁵ Rosenthal, “*Visceral Culture*,” 582.

marketplace. Di Bello has pointed out that women's moral character relied upon modesty and self-effacement,⁶⁶ and thus part of Sala's enjoyment would have been witnessing the blush of a demurring woman, a typical psychosomatic response to the gendered dynamics of such a gaze, which "secures the object-subject hierarchy of traditional Western amorous tropes, of the Pygmalion-like agency of the man and the materiality of the woman."⁶⁷ However, in a context in which "modern culture had set up a base of operations in the marketplace,"⁶⁸ women played increasingly prominent roles as taste-makers, trend-setters, and purveyors of goods and services. Active agents within London's bustling West End, professional beauties did not necessarily blush and look demurely away from the gazes of curious men. Rather, as women who were self-consciously on view as aesthetic objects of contemplation, they not only returned such gazes but also captured and controlled them.

The second chapter turns to a selection of photographic portraits of professional beauties to consider how such images operated within London's ocular spectacle. Per Denney, the act of having a portrait done is a kind of public performance, and one that put the sitter's body under constant scrutiny. "Her portrait," writes Denney, "mirrored the public's relentless inspection of her person, standing in for her individual body."⁶⁹ Such a performance, per Roach, consists "of struggle, the simultaneous experience of mutually exclusive possibilities – truth and illusion,

⁶⁶ This was in contrast to men with public profiles, such as Royal Academicians, who were expected to self-promote in order to cultivate "manly confidence." See Di Bello, "Carte-de-visite Celebrities," 240-49.

⁶⁷ Rosenthal, "*Visceral Culture*," 582.

⁶⁸ Art historian Sarah Burns refers in particular to Whistler's man- and media-made public personality. See Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art & Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 236.

⁶⁹ Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity*, 7.

presence and absence, face and mask.”⁷⁰ The second chapter thus considers the “mutually exclusive possibilities” embodied by the figure of the professional beauty. Opinions regarding the merits of these women flourished between opposing poles of praise and criticism, thereby keeping them present in the public imagination. These dichotomies, including that of goddess versus prostitute and innocent ingénue versus femme fatale, unsurprisingly reference the two-dimensional stereotypes that Denney writes are most common of women in a patriarchal culture.⁷¹

“Ambivalent” is perhaps the best word to describe the reception of these figures, who were easy targets for critics while also some of the most sought-after female celebrities of their day. A study of their reception reveals contested ideas relative to women’s work, the performance of femininity, and the meaning of female beauty. The key issues concern these women’s public performances and the mass media tools they used to generate international fame. The *London Society* critic declared “The professional beauty need not be rich, she need not be highly born, she need not even be well educated, provided she have sense enough to escape from committing any glaring solecisms.”⁷² However, her fairy tale was contingent upon modern consumer culture, the burgeoning advertising industry, the interest of powerful men, and the good graces of a mercurial public. Concerned with the intersection of culture and marketplace, the second chapter focuses on how professional beauties interacted with consumer marketplaces not only as (typically female) consumers, but also as dynamic agents within producer/consumer

⁷⁰ Roach, *It*, 9.

⁷¹ She writes that “patriarchal culture seems to be threatened by women who have multiple identities, as evidenced by the prevalence of two-dimensional stereotypes we see in the press both then and now.” Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity*, 4.

⁷² “Professional Beauties.” *London Society: an Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation*, 36:215 (November 1879), 450.

networks. Their representations fueled powerful fantasies necessary to drive and manipulate the modern marketplace, but this form of “advertising” also associated them negatively with a taint of trade that too easily linked them with the “oldest profession.”

The collection and display of photographs influenced individual and collective identity, particularly that of families, social groups, and nations. To consider the motivations for participating in the social networks, real and fabricated, attendant on disseminating and collecting photographic portraits, I call upon the work of historian of art and photography Patrizia di Bello. Her scholarship considers the socio-cultural context of the creation and dissemination of photographs in Britain in the nineteenth century and presents compelling psychoanalytical readings of desire and loss in the creation of women’s photograph albums. This shares affinity with the work of photography historian Elizabeth Seigel, who presents American family albums as shared portraits of a nation, and with poet and literary critic Susan Stewart’s reading of the dollhouse as a malleable space interpreted as a reflection of individual interiority in her book *On Longing* (1984). The act of having one’s portrait taken rendered the resulting photographic objects vulnerable to the gaze and touch of others. The transgressions enabled by the indiscriminate circulation of these images within and between malleable album interiors in some cases risked destabilizing a static image of imperial hierarchy.

The third chapter considers the photographer’s shop window, which functioned as a barometer of celebrity and current events that often indiscriminately interchanged the faces and bodies of subjects ranging across class and ethnicity. During the 1879 London Season, photographs of professional beauties mingled with those of Zulu women while details of the Anglo-Zulu War (January – July 1879) gripped the headlines of major newspapers. A disastrous British loss to Zulu forces in January 1879 kicked off nearly six months of conflict and “thrust

the Zulu people and their king, Cetshwayo kaMpande, to the forefront of British public attention.”⁷³ The shop window was a critical space for constructing an imagined geography of the empire, which relied upon consistently reinforced racial and cultural distance between colonizer and colonized, metropole and colony, white and black, clothed and naked. Scholarship by film historian Richard Dyer and cultural and literary critic Sander Gilman demonstrate that categories of race are constructed, variable, and unstable.⁷⁴ Viewers’ imaginations easily collapsed the apparently rigid visual hierarchy of the shop window, thereby risking a threatening visual miscegenation that pointed to broader anxieties regarding British imperialism.

Hand-painted cabinet cards of professional beauties reinvigorated the sepia tones of their photographic representations. At the same time, however, the painted blush of pink skin, by alluding to the living vitality of flesh, reinforced problematic associations between the perceived sexual misbehavior of professional beauties and that of “primitive” Zulu women. A sculptural metaphor appeared to present one antidote: invoking classical marble alluded to calm self-composure and reinforced hypothesized links between imperial Britain and an ancient Aryan race that had given rise to Greece and Rome. However, such sculptural rhetoric could also signal the hardening, rather than the strengthening, of a woman’s body and heart. The chapter concludes by considering the moral petrification of fictional professional beauty Vivian Vivash in Annie Edwardes’ (née Cook, c. 1830-1896) 1880 novel *Vivian the Beauty*, first released in 1879 as serialized fiction in *Temple Bar*. As an art historian, I pay careful attention to Edwardes’

⁷³ T. J. Tallie, “On Zulu King Cetshwayo kaMpande’s Visit to London, August 1882” in Dino Franco Felluga, ed. *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* at http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=t-j-tallie-on-zulu-king-cetshwayo-kampande-visit-to-london-august-1882 (accessed 27 June 2015), 1.

⁷⁴ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997) and Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. H. L. Gates Jr. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985): 223-61.

invocation of modeling, wax, sculpture, and the decorative arts in her descriptions of Vivian's appearance and behavior. My reading argues that, according to Edwardes, the excessive attention given by professional beauties to their exterior presentation had compromised their moral and emotional health. Further, their incessant desire for novelty, entertainment, and attention ultimately rendered them unfit to aspire to the roles of wives and mothers. To reinforce her point, Edwardes throws the superficiality and moral decay of the professional beauty, a result of urban influences, into stark contrast by placing the titular character in the healthier climes of primeval German forests.

This thread of thought regarding the countryside as the most appropriate geographical space for nurturing a healthy female body finds its way into the development and dissemination of the Western tomboy heroine, best embodied in popular spectacle by Annie Oakley. The fourth chapter therefore sojourns into the vast spaces of the American West as it was popularly reimagined in dime novel fiction during the second half of the nineteenth century. Such fiction had profound ramifications for cultivating a positive attitude towards vigorous female adolescence, as long as it remained appropriately distanced in the frontier. As the West became increasingly cultivated and settled, the idea of the "Girl Pard" and her Western hero tapped into a potent nostalgia for a purer, nobler era of American history. Oakley understood this trope and, due to her charisma, athleticism, and extraordinary skill with a rifle, performed as a youthful Western heroine in the performance ring. Upon exiting, however, she stepped demurely into the lengthened skirts of an appropriately feminine woman, thereby reassuring audiences that a tomboy youth amidst expansive natural spaces encouraged the growth of resourceful, healthy women.

The fifth chapter concludes the project by returning to London where Oakley performed her routine with Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the headlining spectacle of the 1887 American Exhibition. It first considers the ways in which Exhibition organizers carefully emphasized the similarities between American and British culture, thereby linking these "cousins" in a shared mission of imperial expansion. While a sharp-shooting short-skirted Western heroine could have offended British sensibilities, analysis of Oakley's reception reveals the extent to which British audiences had already ingested decades of popular fiction regarding the American West. Further, her performances found ready approval from an audience who believed in the necessity of female resourcefulness on imperial frontiers tempered by appropriate femininity and domestication upon marriage and motherhood.

Each chapter of this dissertation interrogates expectations of femininity, female labor, and female representation. Beneath the glamorous and entertaining topics of beauty, wealth, leisure, spectacle, performance, and celebrity, lies a consistent concern with empire and race. The second half of the nineteenth century marked a period of social and cultural change due, in part, to Britain's imperial agenda and resulting colonial conflict, and in America to the closing of what had seemed a limitless frontier. Analysis of these celebrity case studies therefore consider the ways in which representations of women were utilized to illustrate the hopes and anxieties of an imperial era.

Chapter One:

Commercial Photography and Album Culture

This chapter presents a consideration of the development of commercial photography in Britain, with some discussion specific to portraiture and album culture extended to include the United States, from the 1840s to the 1880s. Analysis of the historical, technical, and cultural development of commercial photography and its attendant systems of collection and meaning provides foundational knowledge of a representational medium relevant to ensuing chapters. A widespread preference for cartes-de-visite and cabinet cards during the second half of the nineteenth century reflected consumer desire for apparently unmediated mechanically produced prints. Per historian of art and photography Joel Snyder, richly-detailed images created using the collodion (wet plate) process and glossy albumen paper (finely-grained paper dipped in egg white) “[produced] the impression in the viewer that the prints [were] machined, exactly reproducible, rather than handmade.”⁷⁵ The clearly detailed forms rendered in finely modulated tones of sepia and purple on the smoothly burnished surfaces of these prints appeared to reflect the “objective” eye of the camera apparatus composed of a box, lens, and glass plate covered in light-sensitive salts. These images presented seemingly stable representations that conformed to systems of viewing and assessing others based on ingrained phrenological and physiognomic ideas absorbed into evolutionary and racial thought throughout the nineteenth century that will be important to understanding ensuing discussion regarding types of beauty and their virtues.

However, the seemingly static boundaries of these objects and legibility of their images were confounded by the malleability of larger narratives activated by viewers’ imaginations. Per

⁷⁵ Joel Snyder, “Inventing Photography” in Sarah Greenough et al., *On the Art of Fixing a Shadow: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Photography* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1989), 22.

art historian Marcia Pointon, “the connotations of stability, reassurance and predictability... are part of portrayal’s betrayal.”⁷⁶ The materiality of nineteenth century commercial photographs rendered them subject to the whim of consumers, viewers, and commentators. This risked destabilizing the meaning of (by changing the context of) their apparently static image. A consideration of the medium must therefore examine the ways in which their physicality influenced their appearance, display, dissemination, and meaning, for their existence as disposable objects ultimately betrayed the assumption of safe assurance built into the supposedly objective photographic portrait. Victorian commercial photographs existed in a liminal space between the authority of a seemingly “scientific” and thus legible record of a person, attendant with codes pertaining to class and character, and the reality of a material existence as cheaply obtained and easily disposable commodities.

This chapter establishes the development of commercial, or “professional,” photography, as opposed to that of amateur photography. “Amateur” in this context refers to moneyed and educated men (and some women) “who loved an activity or, rather, who pursued many different activities with enthusiasm, ease, and confidence, who appreciated the arts and [were] curious about the natural world,” and generally conducted enquiries and experiments without a supporting commercial or institutional structure.⁷⁷ Amateurs played a crucial role in the development of photography, particularly in Britain where independently wealthy men such as William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) published work in multiple scientific fields and established networks in which photographic prints and processes were exchanged and discussed.

⁷⁶ Pointon, *Portrayal*, 9.

⁷⁷ Grace Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 3. Our contemporary use of the word “amateur” may refer to someone who engages in a pursuit on an unpaid basis but more often carries negative connotations of general ineptness. In the mid-nineteenth century, “amateur” embodied less the negative aspect of dilettantism and more the interests of the leisured and educated upper classes.

However, the reasons for which amateurs and professionals produced photographs differed significantly: amateurs pursued this new “art science” for the pleasure of invention and often with the lofty goal to contribute knowledge to humankind. Professionals, on the other hand, capitalized financially on the widespread demand for portraits produced cheaply and quickly.

From the 1850s through the end of the century, an extraordinary number of studio photographs produced in Britain and the United States were created using glass plate negatives and printing paper coated with albumen (egg white). The richly detailed images rendered in purple-and-gold sepia tones resulted from a combination of light-sensitive salts, carefully manufactured lenses, bright lighting, and finely woven paper. Because of the delicacy of this paper, most prints, such as this example of Genevieve Ward taken by C. D. Fredericks & Co. (**Figure 1.1**), were pasted onto stronger card stock for retail sale on the back of which the photographer’s log was often embossed. (**Figure 1.2**) These commercial photographs quickly and thoroughly saturated European and American visual culture after the official announcement in 1839 of the daguerreotype, one of the earliest successful photographic processes, and radically changed the way modern culture looked and communicated. In 1841, “photographer” was not yet a profession recognized by the London census. By 1851 there were twelve registered photographers, and by 1861 that number had expanded to 2,534.⁷⁸

Two of the earliest successful photographic processes date to the late 1830s. These were the daguerreotype, developed in France by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765-1833) and his business partner Louise-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851), and photogenic drawing and the calotype in England by Talbot. While both processes shared the same goal to “draw” with light, their procedures, aesthetics, and historical practice differed. Daguerreotypes consisted of unique

⁷⁸ These figures are taken from Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 34.

images captured and developed on a metal plates polished to a mirror-like shine. Talbot, on the other hand, used sensitized paper, and these resulted in some of the first photographic negatives. Although Talbot waxed his paper negatives, the resulting transparency of which rendered more crisply delineated prints, the texture of both the printing-out and negative paper impeded the kind of detail possible in a daguerreotype. Paper calotype prints were often considered atmospheric and artistic, while daguerreotypes seemed to present a more “objective” view of the subject rendered in stark clarity. Talbot maintained close control over licenses to use his calotype process, while Daguerre received a French government pension in exchange for the publication of his process. As a result, the daguerreotype spread throughout Europe and North America, resulting in “daguerrotypomania,” while Talbot’s calotype remained for the most part restricted to wealthy amateurs.

At first photographic technology did not accommodate the mode for which it would become best known – portraiture – because of long exposure times.⁷⁹ Historian of photography John Szarkowski notes that many inventors “were remarkably vague about what functions [photographs] might serve.”⁸⁰ were they tools of the arts, or of the sciences? Could photography be considered a fine art medium in its own right? Regardless of such debates, the masses rushed to be photographed once lenses, chemicals, and processes improved enough to record portraits.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Early practitioners did, however, realize that portraits would be profitable. As Pam Roberts points out, in an 1835 letter to Niépce, Daguerre wrote that portraits would be good for business. See Pam Roberts, *PhotoHistorica: Landmarks in Photography* (New York: Artisan, 2000), 16.

⁸⁰ In *The Pencil of Nature*, Talbot seemed to consider his process a kind of drawing tool, especially because the roots of his early experiments stemmed from his own frustration with trying to sketch a landscape. Daguerre did not seem to have any purpose in mind, though Paul Delaroche, a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and member of the committee appointed by the French government to determine whether or not Daguerre’s invention was worth purchasing, considered it a tool that could render immense service to the arts. John Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 27 and 35.

⁸¹ During the heyday of daguerreotypy in the 1840s, better lenses and chemistry (which increased the light sensitivity of plates) allowed for the creation of portraits, given appropriate lighting conditions. Other experiments

In the 1840s, daguerreotype operations specializing in portraiture opened around the world, and “daguerreotypomania” ensued, thereby embedding the photographic image within the social and cultural fabric of France, Britain, America, and beyond. By 1850, an estimated three million daguerreotypes were produced annually in the United States alone,⁸² and scholars agree that around ninety percent of daguerreotypes produced were portraits.⁸³

It was not until Frederick Scott Archer (1813-1857) developed his wet plate (also called collodion) technique and published it without copyright or patent restrictions in 1851 that the desired detail of the daguerreotype and the endless repetition allowed by the negative of the calotype process were united in a single process. The wet plate process dominated the commercial market from the 1850s until the 1880s when wet plates were ultimately replaced by dry plates. In 1854, André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri (1819-1889) patented a method for taking commercial photographs more quickly and cheaply in the format of the carte-de-visite (measuring 2 ½ by 4 ½ inches). “Cartomania” followed closely in the footsteps of “daguerreotypomania” and ensured the commercial photographer an established professional position. The slightly larger cabinet card format (measuring 4 ¼ by 6 ½ inches) became popular from the 1870s onward.

Understanding and interacting with these small photograph formats was an experience defined by the limits of the physical body: whether viewing loose images or those collected in albums, interaction with the photographic object most often occurred within one’s own reach,

improved the quality of photographic images: for example, gilding a daguerreotype with gold chloride strengthened the surface (all-too-easily scratched and usually kept under glass) and produced richer color tones.

⁸² As reported by the New York *Daily Tribune* in Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1939-1889* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1938), 63.

⁸³ See John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 43 and Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 37.

held close to the face and body and probably within one's own hand. Further, photographs constituted a physical record of the body of another via the direct reflection of light. Where most light was reflected off of the body, the corresponding area on the glass negative, hit by this light, darkened. Where less light was reflected, the negative remained transparent. The fact of this process is recorded in the name of the medium itself, "photo" from the Greek for "light," and "graph" from the same for "drawing." The physicality of the photographic object, and its supposed honesty in recording the physical realities of a specific body, culminated in the understanding that photographs were not "merely" representations, but also physical talismans of a particular person. As such, they functioned as icons of the sitter, supposedly presenting visual legibility of that person's reputation, taste, and class, categories which greatly concerned Victorian viewers.

A nineteenth century photographic portrait's fundamental purpose was directly linked to its ability to reference its sitter. To Victorian audiences, the direct correlation of the sitter and the sitter's photograph, united by the touch of light, presented the most direct, most powerful, and most accurate transcription of the human face and body. Further, because of this direct communication between sitter and representation, the photograph became a physical extension of self: it represented *both* subject – an icon of genealogy, taste, physiognomy, and stature – *and* a physical extension of a physical body. In his well known *Camera Lucida* of 1981, Roland Barthes stated that "a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see."⁸⁴ The most immediate part of a photograph, at least in a culture that privileges looking, is its entirely ephemeral, and often quickly-fading, image. What we often fail to see, and to which Barthes points our attention, is the condition of the photograph as a made object. The physical

⁸⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 6.

“thingness” of the nineteenth-century photograph cannot be overlooked as a necessary driving component of its widespread popularity as well as the instigator of anxiety regarding the loss of control over one’s representation.

The development of photographic processes

Early photographic processes utilized the camera obscura, a projection tool used by artists for centuries composed of a box, lens, and mirror. Curious inventors had been experimenting with sensitized salts at least since the early eighteenth century. As early as 1727 Johann Heinrich Schulze had discovered that silver nitrate darkens when exposed to light, and experiments in chemistry and natural philosophy further revealed that certain salts of silver were sensitive to light.⁸⁵ Thomas Wedgwood (1771-1805), son of the famous potter, and Sir Humphry Davy (1778-1829) appear to have succeeded in creating a kind of photograph around the turn of the nineteenth century using salts on paper and leather, but they did not know how to fix their images, and thus the same source of light that had created them inevitably destroyed them.⁸⁶ Niépce’s 1827 *View from his Window at Le Gras*, which may have required about eight

⁸⁵ Specifically addressing the claim made by Helmut and Alison Gernsheim in their *The History of Photography from the Camera Obscura to the Beginning of the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955) that the “delayed” invention of photography is one of the greatest mysteries of its history, a sentiment also supported by Peter Galassi in *Before Photography* (New York, 1982), Joel Snyder points out that although the components were in existence, their demand was not: many were unavailable in the kind of quality and quantity that were necessary for early photographic processes until after the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Snyder states that three criteria were necessary for the birth of photography: the camera, a tool already well-developed by the middle of the eighteenth century, knowledge or at least awareness of the possibility of the agency of light, and “the availability of diverse and reasonably predictable chemicals.” Snyder further states that although the chemical action of light had been noted for over two thousand years, “the systematic study of the chemical action of light began in the late seventeenth century with the development of chemistry, which accompanied the growth of various manufacturing industries.” He concludes that it is, in fact, “stunning” that photography arose “so soon after the discovery of some of its basic chemical materials.” Snyder, “Inventing Photography,” 8 and 35 (footnote 17).

⁸⁶ Sir Humphry Davy described the creation of Wedgwood’s “sun pictures” in an article for the *Journal of the Royal Institution* in 1802, but these images darkened to obscurity when exposed to light. Wedgwood resorted to keeping them in the dark and showing them only by candlelight. None of his “sun pictures” remain. See Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982 [1949]), 13.

hours for full exposure on a sensitized pewter plate, is now considered to be the earliest photograph in existence.⁸⁷ Around this time he met Daguerre, already famous for his diorama,⁸⁸ and in 1829 they legally entered into a ten-year partnership, communicating in code between Paris and Gras. Niépce died only four years into the contract, passing his legal partnership onto his son Isodore.

Daguerre continued the experiments that ultimately culminated in his announcement, published January 6, 1839 in the *Gazette de France*, that he had learned how to fix images so that they were “no longer transient reflections of objects,” but rather “their fixed and everlasting impress, which, like a painting or engraving, [could] be taken away from the presence of the objects.”⁸⁹ The daguerreotype required a highly polished silver-plated sheet of copper swabbed with nitric acid (to eliminate organic matter from its surface). The plate was sensitized by being exposed to iodine fumes, which produced a coating of silver iodide. Later experiments revealed that additionally exposing the plate to bromine fumes resulted in a more sensitive silver halide coating. After positioning the sensitized plate in a light-safe holder inside the camera, the

⁸⁷ Niépce used the term *heliograph* (sun drawing) to describe his work. It is possible that he was successful in his experiments much earlier than 1827, but these images do not exist. See Newhall, *History of Photography*, 1982, 13. For the estimated exposure time, based on the migration of shadows in the image, see Snyder, “Inventing Photography,” 9.

⁸⁸ Using 46 x 27 foot paintings, semitransparent theatrical gauze, and a variety of lighting effects, Daguerre recreated scenes to thrill audiences. See Newhall, *History of Photography*, 15.

⁸⁹ Quote taken from Newhall, *History of Photography*, 18-19. Daguerre negotiated with the French government over rights to his process before publishing the daguerreotype guidebook *Historiques et description des procédés du Daguerreotype* in September 1839, immediately after which *Mechanics Magazine* published a translated version in England. On January 3, respected scientist and politician François Dominique Arago had presented Daguerre’s work to the Académie des Sciences while carefully concealing its process. As a member of the Chamber of Deputies, Arago’s championing of Daguerre’s process most certainly aided his negotiations with the French government. Daguerre sold his rights to the daguerreotype process to the French government for a life annuity of 6,000 francs. Isodore Niépce, who remained Daguerre’s legal partner after his father Joseph Nicéphore Niépce’s death, received a life annuity of 4,000 francs. Daguerre’s English patent expired in 1853, and by that time other processes had overtaken the market. See “Bill Presented to the Chamber of Deputies, France, June 15, 1839” in Vicki Goldberg, *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 31 and Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 27.

photographer arranged the subject and removed the lens cap, allowing light to hit the plate for as long as the photographer deemed necessary given the lighting conditions before re-capping the lens tube. The early daguerreotype required long exposures – twenty minutes or more, depending on environmental conditions – although improved chemistry, lenses, and equipment throughout the 1840s diminished that time to just a few seconds to minutes. The plate, once embedded with the invisible latent image, was then removed and developed using mercury fumes, thereby revealing the embedded image. A solution of common salt, and later sodium hyposulfite, “fixed” the image by removing any remaining light-sensitive silver halides. The resulting daguerreotypes were unique mirror representations laterally transposed on highly polished metal plates.

These images entranced viewers. The eminent British scientist Sir John F. W. Herschel (1792-1871) wrote to his friend Talbot in May 1839 that

It is hardly too much to call [daguerreotypes] miraculous. Certainly they surpass anything I could have conceived as within the bounds of reasonable expectation. The most elaborate engraving falls far short of the richness and delicateness of execution, every gradation of light and shade is given with a softness and fidelity which sets all painting at an immeasurable distance.⁹⁰

This “delicateness of execution” rendered the daguerreotype “something that almost passed as a fragment of the real world,”⁹¹ a unique and mysterious delineation of physical facts transmitted via the undeniably lucid power of sunlight. Kept in hinged cases, many of them elaborately engraved and gilded, these images occupied a secular space evocative of miniature medieval relics.

⁹⁰ Taken from Newhall, *History of Photography*, 23, who references the quote from D. B. Thomas, *The First Negatives* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1964), 6.

⁹¹ Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 37.

Herschel's letter reflected more than passing interest, for since 1834 polymath Talbot had been experimenting with sensitized salt paper. Talbot placed botanical specimens upon a piece of writing paper coated with salt and a solution of silver nitrate and left them in the sun. Wherever the light hit, the paper darkened, while the areas blocked by the specimen remained white. Once the silhouette was appropriately defined, Talbot coated the paper with a second layer of salt to impede further darkening.⁹² During the late 1830s, Talbot's experiments with sensitized paper in small cameras placed around his home Lacock Abbey resulted in the earliest photographic negatives.⁹³ Talbot did not widely share his experiments, however, until after having read Daguerre's January 1839 announcement. He then wasted no time in presenting his work on January 31 to the Royal Society of London under the title "Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing."⁹⁴ These announcements aroused Herschel's scientific and intellectual curiosity, whose experiments revealed that the sodium hyposulfite (commonly known as "hypo") he had produced earlier in the century acted as an excellent "fixer" for arresting the deterioration of an image from over-exposure to light since it thoroughly washed away any remaining light-sensitive silver salts. In February 1839 Herschel shared this fact with Talbot, who published it, with Herschel's consent, in the French Academy of Sciences' *Cômpte-rendu*. Daguerre quickly adopted the practice. Herschel additionally proposed that "photograph" (light drawing) replace "photogenic drawing" and implemented the terms "positive" and "negative" to describe the original exposure (negative) in Talbot's process and their subsequent reproductions (positives).

⁹² These are called "photogenic drawings." See, for example, Talbot's photogenic drawing entitled *Wrack* (1839) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number 36.37 (25).

⁹³ See, for example, a photogenic drawing negative at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, entitled *The Oriel Window, South Gallery, Lacock Abbey* (c. 1835), accession number 1997.382.1.

⁹⁴ Some of his images were displayed on 25 January, though he did not give his talk until the 31 January. See Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 28.

In 1841 Talbot announced his talbotype or calotype (“beautiful picture”) process and secured an English patent for the invention. Talbot had managed to decrease exposure time from hours, required for his earliest images, to only a few minutes or less. The calotype process consisted of dipping a piece of finely-woven writing paper into nitrate of silver and iodide of potassium, which combined to form the sensitizing material silver iodide. After an exposure of thirty seconds to five minutes, a wash of gallic acid and silver nitrate revealed the paper’s latent image.⁹⁵ The paper negative was then fixed with hypo and waxed, which rendered it more transparent. The increased transparency aided the reproduction of details in the positive images created from sunlight-exposed negatives in printing frames placed atop sensitized paper. Talbot traveled extensively during the early 1840s and sent negatives back to England, where his wife Constance and former domestic staff member Nicolaas Henneman printed thousands of positives. In 1844 these images were published in his well-received *The Pencil of Nature*, the first book to include photographic prints.⁹⁶

Talbot strictly monitored licenses purchased for his patent. As a result, use of the calotype process was largely restricted to his own circle of amateur scientists, friends, and relatives. To those outside of these elite circles, Talbot’s strict control over the practice of his process appeared to hinder the progress of photography.⁹⁷ From Talbot’s perspective, taking out a patent, which he only did after Daguerre took out an English patent in 1841, protected his

⁹⁵ It appears that Daguerre and Talbot separately stumbled upon the fact of the latent image, Daguerre by fuming an exposed plate with mercury fumes, and Talbot after having experimentally used gallic acid as an ingredient in the sensitizing process and leaving the apparently image-less paper in a darkroom. Upon returning, he saw a developed image and eventually realized that gallic acid acted as a developer by converting silver salts into silver. See Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 26 and 31.

⁹⁶ *The Pencil of Nature* was published in six installments between June 1844 and April 1846. See Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 51.

⁹⁷ Szarkowski writes that Talbot charged 20 pounds sterling for a calotype license in 1840, which would have been quite a lot of money at the time. Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 41.

financial and intellectual investments in the calotype process.⁹⁸ However, Talbot's defense of his patent, which "sometimes verged on cruelty,"⁹⁹ turned public opinion against him. In 1852, Lord Rosse (President of the Royal Society) and Sir Charles Eastlake (President of the Royal Academy) published a cordial letter to Talbot requesting that he lift the patent.¹⁰⁰ In response, Talbot renounced rights over the works of amateurs but insisted on maintaining control of licenses purchased by commercial photographers. In the wake of this decision, calotypy amongst amateurs flowered, thanks in large part to the formation of the Photographic Society of London (which later became the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain),¹⁰¹ while professional photographers, shut out from calotypy, increasingly used glass-plate negatives.

⁹⁸ Szarkowski defends Talbot's decisions, writing that "Less than two years earlier Talbot had given to the world the basis for a radically new picture-making system [photogenic drawing], and had heard in response an endless chorus of gratuitous praise of the daguerreotype." Talbot was not at first interested in taking out a patent, even though some friends, such as the scientist Sir David Brewster, advised him to do so. Talbot even went so far as to publish his method of photogenic drawing (though he kept the technical details fairly vague). Daguerre's decision to take out a patent in England in 1841 directly influenced Talbot's decision to finally take out his own. Szarkowski also argues that, although Talbot was indeed a gentleman of some means, he may not have felt financially secure after having moved back into his ancestral home Lacock Abbey, a manor in need of improvements. See Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 31-2. Further, Talbot's family pressured him to make money from his invention: Jennifer Green-Lewis cites a letter from 1839 in which Talbot's mother, Lady Elisabeth Feilding, remonstrates against her son for having publicized the secret of Photogenic Drawing, which may have compromised both a potential fortune and the legacy of the family name. See Jennifer Green-Lewis, "The Invention of Photography in the Victorian World," in Anne M. Lyden, *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2014), 9 and 11.

⁹⁹ Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Szarkowski points out that the presentation of exceptional American daguerreotypes and French calotypes at the Crystal Palace in the 1851 Great Exhibition compounded the idea, especially amongst frustrated amateurs, that British photography lagged behind its international competitors due to strict patents within Britain's borders. Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 43.

¹⁰¹ Outside of Britain, and significantly in Scotland and France, photographers were not held to calotype patent restrictions of the 1840s and 1850s, and Louis Désiré Blanquart-Évrard (1802-1872), Gustave Le Gray (1820-1884), David Octavius Hill (1802-1870), and Robert Adamson (1821-1848) were among those who utilized (and, in some cases, improved upon) the process. Blanquart-Évrard's experiments inspired other Frenchmen to take up the practice, including Le Gray, who waxed his paper negatives before exposure in order to absorb the sensitizing chemicals more evenly and thereby capture crisper details.

According to historian of art and photography Grace Seiberling, two events of 1851 drastically changed photography and resulted in increased professional (as opposed to amateur) practitioners: first, the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London featured photographs, daguerreotypes, and the equipment needed to make them, thereby educating a large section of the public about the merits and possibilities of photography.¹⁰² Second, Archer published his wet glass plate collodion process in *The Chemist* without patent restrictions. Although others had experimented with glass plate negatives and collodion, a clear syrupy liquid formed from dry nitrocellulose soaked in ether and alcohol, Archer was the first to publish a successful process. His motivations, he wrote, were to avoid the “imperfection of paper photography” in favor of a substance featuring “fineness of surface, transparency, and ease of manipulation.”¹⁰³ He pointed out that albumen, though most commonly used as glass plate emulsion,¹⁰⁴ was too delicate, and inadvertent manipulation risked ruining the image. The remainder of his short article outlined advice for mixing collodion with silver salts, pouring and evenly spreading the mixture on a glass plate (which “cannot be done too quickly, for the ether rapidly evaporating would prevent

¹⁰² Grace Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Six million visitors toured the Great Exhibition over the course of five and a half months. The fact that photography was represented both in Class 10, Philosophical Instruments and Processes, and Class 30, Fine Arts, demonstrates the continued debate regarding the definition of its purpose. An estimated seven hundred photographs were on display throughout the building. See Anne M. Lyden, “A Young Monarch, a New Art, and the Introduction of the Photographic Exhibition” in Anne M. Lyden, ed. *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2014), 31.

¹⁰³ Frederick Scott Archer, “On the Use of Collodion in Photography,” *The Chemist* Vol. II (1850-51): 257.

¹⁰⁴ Claude F. A. Niépce de St. Victor, a cousin of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, had begun using albumen and glass plates in 1847 and published his process in 1848, but, although albumen did work as a medium to adhere silver salts to smooth glass plates, the plates (used once the albumen had dried) often required long (something like thirty-minute) exposures and tended to reproduce excessive contrast. As Archer pointed out in his 1851 article, they were nearly too delicate to handle. After the publication of Archer’s process, the use of albumen migrated to printing out paper. The popularity of this paper meant that tens of thousands of eggs were used on a daily basis; Newhall states that the Dresden Albumenizing Company, one of the largest, used sixty thousand eggs a day. See Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography*, 60.

the collodion running evenly over the surface of the plate, from becoming too thick”¹⁰⁵), submersing the collodion-covered plate into a bath of nitrate of silver, washing the plate, exposing it while still wet,¹⁰⁶ and developing it in order to create a glass plate negative. Although this technique was but one of many processes recommended in published texts by photographic experimenters, and although it still required bulky equipment and often dangerous materials,¹⁰⁷ Archer’s collodion process became standard for professional photographers for the next thirty years and established photography as a print-based medium rooted in the concept of multiple reproductions while reinforcing a preference for glossy, highly-detailed surface images.

Both the daguerreotype and the calotype, whose patents expired in Britain in 1853 and 1855 respectively, fell out of favor as Archer’s more efficient and standardized process took hold. However, if analyzed from the perspective of efficiency and ease, it is surprising that Archer’s process became most popular considering some of the other published improvements of the time. In particular, Gustave Le Gray’s (1820-1884) waxed paper negative process – in which paper negatives waxed to transparency could be sensitized in advance, easily transported, and developed long after exposure – presented a decidedly more convenient method than that of cumbersome wet plates, which had to be sensitized, exposed, and developed on-site. If printed using the albumen-coated paper developed by Louis Désiré Blanquart-Évrard (1802-1872), which rendered a sharper positive image by keeping silver salts strictly in the surface emulsion

¹⁰⁵ Frederick Scott Archer, “On the Use of Collodion in Photography,” *The Chemist* Vol. II (1850-51): 258. The [website for ART21](#), a PBS series, features collodion process photographer Sally Mann demonstrating the process, which requires both speed and accuracy (accessed 30 July 2014).

¹⁰⁶ For this reason, the collodion process is also called the wet plate process.

¹⁰⁷ The materials utilized in nineteenth century photography are shockingly dangerous. Nitrocellulose, for example, a combination of nitric acid, sulfuric acid, and cotton, is highly flammable when wet and liable to spontaneously combust. It was sometimes called “gun cotton” because, in its slightly safer dry form, its explosion was more forceful than black powder and produced less smoke and less heat. It was therefore used in the mid-nineteenth century for blasting. Ether, another important component of collodion, is also highly flammable.

(rather than letting them sink into the body of the paper), photographers could achieve the finely-detailed images desired by consumers and critics. Ultimately, however, Archer's process was the fastest – up to five times faster than paper-based methods for a good exposure – and the flat, glossy images produced by glass plate negatives on albumen paper became more widely preferred: these produced “the satisfactory illusion that all was revealed, nothing withheld.”¹⁰⁸

Debates about the merits of different photographic processes were often about “truthfulness” to detail and sensitivity to composition. The clarity and precision of the daguerreotype aligned it with a seemingly more scientific Pre-Raphaelite attention to detail, while the atmospheric calotype evoked the expressive hands of Grand Masters such as Rembrandt and Reynolds. Those who recognized the fine art potential of the calotype, especially British amateurs during the 1840s and 1850s, tended to work within established traditions of the picturesque and to focus on landscape and architectural subjects. In 1853, Sir William J. Newton gave a paper at the Photographic Society entitled “Upon Photography, in an Artistic View, and in its Relations to the Arts” suggesting that photographs which sacrificed some detail by being slightly out of focus were artistically desirable since they more fully suggested the true character of nature.¹⁰⁹ This opinion was hotly debated. Those who disagreed rebutted that it was the nature of photography to record detail precisely, and that a clear, crisp aesthetic was truest to the medium. This opinion privileged expectations of precision, established by daguerreotypy, and ultimately triumphed amongst commercial practitioners as collodion became the most widely

¹⁰⁸ Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now*, 71.

¹⁰⁹ Newton was a skilled miniature painter popular in the early nineteenth century and employed by William IV and then Queen Victoria. It is perhaps not surprising that Newton promoted a photographic aesthetic that would present the least amount of competition to his own profession, which received a drastic blow once commercial photography enabled the cheap production of portraits. See Snyder for a discussion of the hotly debated aesthetic purpose of each medium within the Photographic Society of London. Snyder, “Inventing Photography,” 20 and 37 (footnote 56).

preferred process. The perceived roughness of calotypes largely fell out of favor, except within some amateur circles, since they did not correspond to a widespread notion that a clear, perfect image signaled an unmediated record of reality.¹¹⁰ Flawless glossy surfaces, achieved by pressing an albumen print between a metal plate and hot metal cylindrical burnisher, with clean detail and rich tones of sepia, purple, and brownish-black became the ideal for glass plate photography from the 1850s onward. Albumen prints created from glass plate negatives preserved the kind of detail first revealed by the daguerreotype, but substituted legible, static warm brown tones for the elusive mirror surfaces of polished metal plates. Standardized hues identified albumen prints as machine-made, distancing them from other forms of (largely hand-made) print media and placing them squarely within industrialized Victorian commodity culture. Although they preserved the richness and modelling of mezzotint portraits, the mediation of the camera, a machine, supposedly captured a truer physical likeness than did the hand of an artist.

In 1854 enterprising French commercial photographer Disdéri patented a method of making eight separate exposures on a single collodion plate using a four-lens camera with an internal mechanism for sliding the plate back and forth.¹¹¹ After development, the glass negative was printed onto albumen paper and cut apart, resulting in images measuring 2 ½ by 4 ½ inches that could be produced rapidly and cheaply. The photographs were then mounted on card backings embossed with the photographer's logo. Imitating the tradition of leaving cards when

¹¹⁰ Snyder, "Inventing Photography," 19-22. This is not to say that everyone agreed on photography's practical uses and aesthetic. Julia Margaret Cameron's (1815-1879) expressive use of calotypy was seen as eccentric at the time, but now is hailed as some of the finest portraiture of the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1889 Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936) shocked the photographic world with his *Naturalistic Photography* by claiming that, rather than seeking constructed sentimental and picturesque subjects, photographers should look directly to nature for truthful, realistic, and powerful images. Additionally, he suggested that practitioners should emulate the ways in which the eye sees nature, and therefore take pictures slightly out of focus according to optical theories of the time.

¹¹¹ Disdéri obtained his patent in 1854. For an excellent source on Disdéri's biography that includes an analysis of the relationship between photography and French Second Empire (1852-1870) portrait painting, see Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *A. A. E. Disdéri and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

making house visits,¹¹² this format became known as *carte-de-visite* (calling card). By the late 1850s, commercial photographs in this format were so cheaply available and widely coveted that the resulting trend was called “cartomania.”¹¹³ In Europe and the United States, sitting for and exchanging photographic portraits became a significant social ritual closely allied with traditions of calling cards and album culture.

In 1860, John Jabez Edwin Paisley Mayall (1813-1901) published *The Royal Album* featuring fourteen *cartes-de-visite* of Queen Victoria and her family, the tremendous popularity of which enlivened “cartomania” in England. Millions of prints specific to this album sold within a few years, and immediately after its release publisher A. Marion received orders for sixty thousand additional royal portraits.¹¹⁴ By the 1860s, the reduced size of the *carte-de-visite* and the efficient assembly method employed by most studios ensured that larger segments of British

¹¹² Traditionally, a visiting card with one’s name on it was delivered to announce the making of a house call and was bound up within highly ritualized social activities of the middle and upper classes. The use of a photographic image as a calling card is attributed to the Duke of Parma who, in 1857, put his name on the back of small photographic portraits and used them instead of traditional *cartes-de-visite*. See Taft, *Photography and the American Scene*, 139.

¹¹³ Although A. Marion & Co. had announced the availability of photographic *cartes-de-visite* in England in June of 1858, it was not until Disdéri published photographs of Napoleon III in *carte-de-visite* format in 1859 that the style became widely influential abroad.

¹¹⁴ Individual *cartes* from this sitting could be purchased separately from the album. Sixty thousand was an enormous number: consider, for example, that the typical *monthly* sale of nonroyal portraits numbered around fifty thousand. When Prince Albert died the following year in December 1861, seventy thousand prints of his portraits were estimated to have been sold. See Anne M. Lyden, “‘As We Are’: Exploring the Royal We in Photographs of Queen Victoria,” in Anne M. Lyden, ed. *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2014), 137-40.

society could afford *The Royal Album*,¹¹⁵ the success of which established the carte-de-visite as an acceptable form of genteel portraiture.¹¹⁶

Commercial photographers produced enormous numbers of these glossy albumen prints. Historian Jennifer Tucker points out in her book *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* that the growing number of commercial practitioners during the 1850s caused anxiety amongst amateurs, who lamented the questionable quality of images produced at the hands of “professionals,” bemoaned the corruption of experimentation for its own sake rather than for a greater good, and warned of the debasement of society at the hands of capitalist enterprises. Indeed, many professionals were inadequately trained, if at all, with little consideration for any kind of “artistic” merit. Behind this anxiety resided unresolved questions regarding photography’s social and cultural purposes. The trajectory of discovering its chemical formula and technical process did not necessarily reveal its ultimate scientific, social, or artistic uses. Per Snyder, the characteristics of the photographic medium were “results of certain historically addressable practices of photographers”¹¹⁷ not to be confused with the technology itself. During the mid- to late-nineteenth century, these practices served to reinforce and validate preexisting gender and racial ideologies, especially under the pretext that the camera was an

¹¹⁵ Studio employees required little training if hired to execute only one aspect of production. Tasks thus became specialized, resulting in a strict division of labor. One person may have developed the prints, while another prepared the collodion plates for exposure. Another assistant would have cut the developed full-sheet prints into carte-de-visite-size images, while another pasted them onto cards. Studios often also employed assistants to hand-paint albumen prints, a topic to which I shall return in the following chapters. The photographer him or herself was often only responsible for posing the sitter, assessing lighting conditions, and opening and closing the lens cap, lending credence to critics’ accusations that a photographer could not be considered an artist since s/he did not fully participate in the entire production. When demand became excessive, photographers would often send their negatives to printing companies, a practice that Talbot had used since the early 1840s.

¹¹⁶ Helmut Gernsheim estimates that between 300 and 400 millions cartes were sold annually in England in the early 1860s. See Helmut Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* (Dover Publications, New York, 1986 [1965]).

¹¹⁷ See Snyder, “Inventing Photography,” 35 (footnote 17).

objective tool. Albumen prints created from glass plate negatives privileged the assumption that the camera was an impartial machine. These prints, pasted and burnished onto standardized cards by studio assistants, appeared to erase any trace of potentially biased human hands, leaving only the crisply-detailed and seemingly stable machine-and-light-made icons of a physical body.

The overwhelming number of photographic portraits produced during daguerreotypomania and cartomania (1840s through the 1860s) signaled a cultural paradigm shift regarding the use and relevance of cheaply reproducible visual culture, a topic which has deservedly received serious scholarly attention. Historian of photography Peter Hamilton writes that photography's ability to fix a moment in time provided stability during an era marked by changing class structure and industrialization. Because of these bewildering changes, rituals achieved a new prominence and reflected efforts to organize the chaos of modernity. The marriage service, for instance, became formalized in order to affirm respectability and underline the social importance of family, and photography helped ritualize, document, and control these events.¹¹⁸ Former director of the Museum of Modern Art's photography department (1940-47) and curator and director of the George Eastman House (1948-58, 1958-71), Beaumont Newhall ascribes this compulsion to the fact that from 1840 onward photographs were relatively cheap and thus a novelty item available to large swaths of the middle and lower classes.¹¹⁹ Historian of art and photography John Tagg considers the photograph a tool used to create, channel, and reinforce class-based and institutional systems of power. He states that the portrait is "a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity."¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ See Peter Hamilton, Roger Hargreaves, eds., *The Beautiful and the Damned: the Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001), 10.

¹¹⁹ Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982 [1949]).

¹²⁰ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 37.

Thanks to the photographic portrait, the middle classes could emulate previous traditions of portraiture, then only available to the upper classes, thereby visually reinforcing their wealth and social significance. This idea is in keeping with economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen's (1857-1929) theory of conspicuous consumption: the moneyed upper classes, having moved so far beyond the basic needs of subsistence, marked their wealth by conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption, that is, by demonstrating wealth through purposeful idleness and the accumulation of luxury goods. "The motive that lies at the root of ownership," he wrote, "is emulation,"¹²¹ and finally the middle classes could emulate traditions in portraiture formerly reserved primarily for the elite. Photography historian Anne McCauley writes that the *carte-de-visite* reflected the importance of establishing good breeding and moral character through supposedly "scientific" visual representation.¹²² Broadly, these arguments highlight two important aspects of photographic manias relevant to this project: the accessibility of photography to a wide swath of society due to its low cost, and its use as a tool to classify, categorize, and even control others while activating one's own identity within a social and familial network. Photographic reproducibility guaranteed these factors by keeping costs low and ensuring the repetition of images for continuous dissemination.¹²³

High mortality rates during the mid-nineteenth century, especially among infants, presented another impetus for making portraits, and it was not uncommon to photograph the recently deceased – posed appropriately, often as if sleeping or propped up with living family members – for future reference, one way in which appearances were not always what they

¹²¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973 [1899]), 75.

¹²² McCauley, *A. A. E. Disdéri*, 30.

¹²³ Photographers retained glass plate negatives to accommodate future orders. In the case of popular subjects such as the royal family or celebrities, photographers sometimes sold their glass plate negatives to larger firms that had the capacity to reproduce and sell them by the tens of thousands.

seemed. During Britain's involvement in the Crimean War (1853-6) and America's Civil War (1861-5), awareness of mortality in the face of conflict sent many soldiers to the photography studio. Family members retained their portraits safe at home while soldiers marched into potential danger with photographs of loved ones tucked into their pockets. Photography served as a tool of remembrance and icon of the deceased: widows were sometimes photographed in mourning holding the image of their dead husbands,¹²⁴ just as Queen Victoria was photographed holding the image of Prince Albert and standing next to his portrait bust after his death. The coldly detailed machine aesthetic of commercial photographs was tempered by the warm and softly modelled sepia tones of albumen prints. Further, its often unforgiving record of individual faces and bodies is exactly what endeared these portraits to their beloveds

Dressing down

During the mid-nineteenth century, gender roles were strictly codified both in practice and in representation. For example, when turning through the pages of hand-labeled carte-de-visite-size photographic proofs in Camille Silvy's daybooks at the National Portrait Gallery,¹²⁵ certain props and poses are clearly affiliated with each sex: in Volume 4 of his Daybooks, a

¹²⁴ Photography historian Geoffrey Batchen explores and complicates photography as memory in his *Forget Me Not* from 2004. Summarizing what Roland Barthes stated in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, a photograph may actually block the sensation of memory: memory is an incomplete, fuzzy thing, while photographs are concrete historical information. His book, which accompanied an exhibit at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, focuses on ways in which people have tried to make photographs something "more than" just a picture, for instance by framing it, writing on it, making it into a wearable jewelry piece, essentially modifying the image so that the sensation of remembrance via the photograph is enhanced. Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

¹²⁵ The National Portrait Gallery's collection features twelve Daybooks kept by photographer Camille Silvy (1834-1910). These document daily visitors to his studio in Bayswater and are arranged chronologically with four images per page arranged in a grid. Beneath the images, handwritten notes identify the sitters. I had the opportunity to study the fourth volume on October 15, 2014. The entirety of this collection is available online at <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/about/photographs-collection/photographic-holdings-albums.php> (accessed 15 December 2015). For sources on Silvy, see Mark Haworth-Booth, *Camille Silvy: Photographer of Modern Life* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2010).

particular potted plant crops up regularly with female sitters. The texture and pattern of the fabric of their hooped skirts and bodices reproduce in exquisite detail, and they are often posed in a way that highlights their small waists and long, sloping shoulders: while standing, one arm is crossed in front of the bodice, with the elbow of the other arm on top of it. The hand of the vertical forearm rests under the chin or along the face.¹²⁶ Men, on the other hand, often enjoy the company of classical statuettes and stand with feet firmly on the ground, perhaps with a hand on a table or back of a chair. Their somber coats and jackets delineate appropriately masculine square-shouldered and straight-legged silhouettes. Such poses conform to established traditions in portrait painting, perpetuate expectations regarding the ways in which men and women present themselves, and maintain associations between specific props and gender.

Mayall's *Royal Album* is no exception and functions as a sanitized visual construction of the epitome of a Victorian family, one that at first seems familiar – and even mundane in its middle-class clothing and poses – but that ultimately resists expectations of intimacy. The Harry Ransom Center's Gernsheim Collection holds a complete *Royal Album*,¹²⁷ which makes up for its diminutive size (6 inches tall x 5 1/4 inches wide x 1 1/4 inches thick) with an imposing red-leather-bound double-clasped exterior upon the cover of which is emblazoned the royal coat of arms and title. The original frontispiece and contents page have been preserved within the first two sleeve windows along with the fourteen original portraits taken by J. E. Mayall and published by London-based A. Marion & Co. The photographs are unsurprisingly organized by hierarchy of age starting with the Queen and Prince Consort and ultimately ending with Beatrice,

¹²⁶ For an excellent example of this pose, consider the 1845 portrait of Louise de Broglie, Countess d'Haussonville by Jean-August-Dominique Ingres.

¹²⁷ Collected by the Gernsheims, it is inscribed, in Helmut's hand: "14 photographs as published in August 1860 / The first photograph album published in England / extremely rare".

the youngest. All members of the family, with the exception of Princess Victoria, are given fairly equal treatment: the Queen features in three photographs, the Prince Consort in two, Princess Beatrice in two, the Prince of Wales in two, the Princess Alice in two, Prince Alfred in one, Princes Helena in two, Princess Louisa in two, Prince Arthur in two, and Prince Leopold in one.¹²⁸

The portraits are full-length and, for the most part, full-body, the only exceptions the occasional truncation of clothing or feet. Indeed, in some cases the space given to the sitters seems to overwhelm them, such as in the portraits of the youngest children Arthur, Leopold, and Beatrice. Rather than bringing the subject closer to the sitter by cropping down to a portrait bust, Mayall distances the camera in order to see the entirety of the Royal bodies kept whole upon the draped studio dais. This wholeness, however, renders the details of their faces and bodies harder to see: indeed, using a magnifying glass brings welcome relief.¹²⁹ Portraits of the male children feature them dressed in trousers and jackets as well as kilts. The Queen and female children wear clothing appropriate to their ages, including crinolines and long-sleeved bodices: Beatrice wears a short skirt with hair down, Helena and Louise wear ankle-length skirts with hair pulled back, and Alice and the Queen wear full-length skirts with hair parted down the middle and pulled back in the style of the 1860s. **(Figure 1.3)** Professor of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Margaret Homans writes that the Queen's choice to "dress down" as a middle class wife "[reinforced] her ideological rule" creating an "ironic distance between her

¹²⁸ Princess Victoria had been married in 1858 to Frederick, Crown Prince of Germany and Prussia, later Frederick III, German Emperor and King of Prussia, and was therefore not in London during Mayall's sitting. The nine children by birth order are: Princess Victoria (1840-1901), Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales (1841-1910), Princess Alice (1843-1878), Prince Alfred (1844-1900), Princess Helena (1846-1923), Princess Louise (1848-1939), Prince Arthur (1850-1942), Prince Leopold (1853-1884), and Princess Beatrice (1857-1944).

¹²⁹ The least faded photograph of the fourteen, a portrait of Alfred, provides the best example of the level of detail possible, but even here a magnifying glass is helpful in order to see his face and attire clearly.

appearance and her status as Queen.”¹³⁰ While the Queen’s “resemblance to a middle-class wife made her seem ordinary... its meaning and effectiveness depended on the contrast with her extraordinariness.”¹³¹ Although her clothes and pose corresponded to thousands of other British mothers, the finely-detailed albumen prints captured the unique and recognizable visage of the Queen of England.

During the early years of her reign (1837-1901), postcards, souvenir prints, panoramas, paintings, theater tableaux, and dioramas depicting the new Queen reflected the “excitement, anticipation, and expectations of the public,” termed “Reginamania” in the popular press.¹³² Curator of photography at the National Galleries of Scotland Anne M. Lyden writes that this profusion of visual material “strengthened the bond between the people and their queen”¹³³ but that each medium presented a monarch who looked slightly different from the next. Only the arrival of photography in the 1840s provided assurance of visual verity. The Prince of Wales had his daguerreotype done in 1842, and a few years later Queen Victoria and her eldest daughter, also Victoria, sat for one. During the 1840s and 1850s, the Queen employed various

¹³⁰ Homans points out that when photographed with Prince Albert, “in the majority of these images” the Queen “conveys less sovereignty than proper wifely humility, subordination, even abjection toward her husband.” Further, “in the pictorial medium of the middle classes,” by which she means photography, “Victoria and Albert assume increasingly the guise of the middle classes, their clothes and most important their rigid gender hierarchy; and that declassing and gender subordination paradoxically confirm Victoria’s highest ambitions, to lead by her example a middle-class nation.” Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 55.

¹³¹ Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1876* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

¹³² Lyden, “‘As We Are’: Exploring the Royal We in Photographs of Queen Victoria,” 134.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 134.

photographers to take pictures of her family,¹³⁴ but none of these were approved for public sale until Mayall's 1860 *Royal Album*.

During the first two decades of their marriage, Prince Albert and Queen Victoria "had been intellectual contributors to the dialogue on photography as well as passionate patrons and arbiters of taste."¹³⁵ After Albert's untimely death in 1861, the Queen's personal interest in the medium waned. However, her photographic portraits became increasingly important since she largely withdrew from public appearances, and she steadily and conscientiously maintained control over their use and sale. An image could not be reproduced without royal approval, and, in the case of some photographs taken strictly for private use – such as two taken of Prince Albert immediately after his death in 1861 – the glass plate negatives were destroyed to disallow unauthorized copies. Inversely, upon the celebration of her Diamond Jubilee in 1897, the Queen lifted the copyright on a portrait that had been taken by W. & D. Downey in 1893 in order to allow its widespread reproduction, an action that Lyden reads as "another example of the queen's complicity in the commercial promotion of her image."¹³⁶

In the *Royal Album*, the carte-de-visite portraits, humble in size and stereotypical in pose, present a collection of what appears to be a rather ordinary Victorian family, thereby appearing to construct a visual bridge of familiarity between subject and viewer. However, this familiarity stops short of any more excessive emotion by nature of the medium itself and by the ways in which the subjects have been photographed. Perhaps with the exception of the photograph of

¹³⁴ One of the most prominent photographers of the Royal Family was Roger Fenton, known for his images of the Crimean War (1853-1856) and for founding the Royal Photographic Society with the patronage of Prince Albert.

¹³⁵ Lyden, "A Young Monarch, a New Art, and the Introduction of the Photographic Exhibition," 134. They often reviewed their new additions to their collection (which consisted of over twenty thousand items at the time of the Queen's death in 1901) while dining alone twice a week, and the Queen wrote in her journal about having enjoyed and anticipated these evenings.

¹³⁶ Lyden, "'As We Are': Exploring the Royal We in Photographs of Queen Victoria," 142.

Beatrice seated on her mother's lap and Arthur and Leopold seated together, the portraits are almost uncomfortably stiff, due to the formal nature of the poses and the time required to obtain a proper exposure. Although shortened to mere seconds, Mayall still utilized head clamps and props upon which to lean.¹³⁷ While the size and scale of the portraits necessitate close viewing of the physical object itself, ideally with a magnifying device of some sort, the formal nature of the poses and the distance of the camera deny affinity with the sitters.

Commercial photographs, if expertly exposed and developed, presented the minutiae of faces and bodies and fed an assumption that the sitters could be fully "known," and the familiarity engendered through this kind of observation required a close physical proximity to the album and photographic object itself. However, although the photograph could be literally embraced, kept close to one's heart in a breast pocket, or fondled in a pocket, it ultimately disallowed full knowledge of the sitter as well as physical access to their body. Its view was only ever two-dimensional: that is, viewers could only ever know the sitter to the extent of the visual information provided by a flattened representation. The fundamental nature of photographic objects, however, is three-dimensional, and roots them firmly in physical space and geographical place. They inhabit two places: the subject location of the photographer's studio, and the physical location of the photographic object itself. It is this latter place, found in a pocket, a purse, an album, or a rubbish bin, that constituted a fundamental component of the nineteenth century photograph's mystique, representing both its preciousness and its very real physical vulnerability.

Photographs of Queen Victoria and her family operated as elevated symbols of British power at home and global empire abroad, yet at the same time the medium acquiesced to the

¹³⁷ The head stand can be seen behind the feet of the Prince of Wales in a standing portrait and in the many taken seated or leaning against a low pedestal for support.

importance and respectability of middle-class virtues, morals, and behavior. Further, by sanctioning the sale of her family's carte-de-visite representations, the Queen made the public decision to entrust her subjects with the caretaking of these royal icons. Lyden argues that the Queen's self-representation as an upper-middle-class mother softened her image as reigning monarch,¹³⁸ and this argument builds upon analyses of royal depictions by scholars such as art historian Susan P. Casteras, who writes that paintings such as Edward Landseer's *Windsor Castle in Modern Times* (1841-5) and Franz Xavier Winterhalter's *Queen Victoria with Prince Arthur* (1850) reinforce Victorian ideals of feminine domesticity, submissiveness, and wholesome maternity.¹³⁹ Throughout her life, the Queen amassed photographs for her personal albums such as the Portraits of Royal Children series.¹⁴⁰ In doing so, the Queen reflected "her own position as the central figure controlling the various dynasties through marriage alliances."¹⁴¹ The Queen's sanction of *The Royal Album* combined with her well-known hobby of collecting family photographs lent credence and respectability to the ritual of having one's portrait taken and collecting those of others, thereby contributing to the vibrant album culture of the second half of the nineteenth century.

¹³⁸ See Anne M. Lyden, "'As We Are': Exploring the Royal We in Photographs of Queen Victoria" in Anne M. Lyden, ed. *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2014): 129-144.

¹³⁹ See Susan P. Casteras *The Substance or the Shadow: Images of Victorian Womanhood* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1982) and the first chapter of Susan P. Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1987).

¹⁴⁰ Ultimately, these consisted of forty-four albums spanning the 1840s to 1890s. See Sophie Gordon, "Queen Victoria's Private Photographs" in Anne M. Lyden, ed. *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2014): 107-127.

¹⁴¹ Gordon, "Queen Victoria's Private Photographs," 122.

Albums

Album culture was not, however, unique to the nineteenth century. Prior to the development of photography, aristocratic women used albums (from the Latin *albus* for “white”) to demonstrate taste and reinforce social relationships through established systems of exchange of calling cards, signatures, ephemera, and poetry, a practice that extended into the middle classes after the increased availability of commercial photographs. In *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums*, Associate Curator of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago Elizabeth Siegel writes that “the album completed the process begun with the insertion of photographs into family Bibles, and marks a particularly modern shift from an oral or textual tradition to a visible one: what had been a list of names, dates, and events had now become a history of appearances and physiognomies.”¹⁴² Largely due to the development of the collodion process, commercial photographs were accessible, cheap, and visually engaging in a way that directly appealed to Victorian concerns with appearance, status, and character. These visual talismans were often collected into gilt-edged leather- or velvet-bound tomes that evoked the weighty authority of its text-based neighbors. Displayed in the parlor or drawing room, the album achieved a visual prominence that emphasized its importance within the home as well as the preciousness of its contents. In the album, as in the parlor, “social networks were cultivated, status was on view, and home met world.”¹⁴³ The impulse to collect, catalogue, and preserve reflected a Victorian concern, both in Britain and the United States, with “creating an indoor microcosm of the surrounding world”¹⁴⁴ knowable

¹⁴² Elizabeth Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 122.

¹⁴³ Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame*, 127.

¹⁴⁴ While her ideas are broadly applicable to Victorian Britain, Siegel specifically posits the American family album as a response to national crisis since the Civil War, migration to urban areas, and westward expansion

primarily through sight. Siegel reads the American family album as a response to national crisis including the Civil War, migration to urban areas, and westward expansion, all of which threatened the continuity and proximity of biological families. American albums, which often included portraits of notable men and women, created a national portrait collectively on view in parlors across the country. This analogy can be extended to practices of collection and display in Britain: in both nations, album keepers attempted to organize, classify, and ultimately display ideas of identity, taste, class, patriotism, and empire. Indeed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, both America and Britain experienced significant imperial development that extended the geographical boundaries of each nation, and maintaining family albums presented one method for preserving a stable vision of one's familial and social identity amidst social and cultural changes.

When interpreting the activities relevant to photograph albums – including the rituals of having one's photograph taken, exchanging one's portrait with others, and collecting, organizing, and rearranging these objects within an album – it is provocative to extend Susan Stewart's consideration of the dollhouse. Stewart writes that the dollhouse, representative of both wealth and nostalgia, inhabits the spheres between exteriority and interiority and presents a frontal view of an interior that is purposefully constructed of objects that are desired but unachievable.¹⁴⁵ As di Bello writes in *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts*, the photograph album was a creative outlet in which middle class women, with increasing access to wealth and leisure, could reconstruct imaginary desires in a visually narrative form. In

threatened the continuity and proximity of biological families. She argues further that American albums, which often included portraits of notable men and women, created a national portrait collectively on view in parlors across the country. See Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame*, 127.

¹⁴⁵ See Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993 [1984]).

some cases, collectors even went so far as to create multi-media collage, ink, and watercolor creations fascinating in their complexity.¹⁴⁶ These empty “walls” filled with intentionally chosen faces share affinity with Stewart’s notion of the dollhouse, within which miniature objects are purposefully arranged and rearranged to create an environment simultaneously separate from and tied to the collector. Just as the dollhouse allows for freedom of arrangement within a delineated space, the carte-de-visite album, and later the cabinet card album, “enabled a new way of visual ordering, free from the constraining formula of a pre-ordained hegemony.”¹⁴⁷ In some cases, and predominantly in family albums, their interior galleries reflected the ordered and stratified arrangement of *The Royal Album*, while others mirrored the diverse array of faces for sale in photographers’ shop windows. While family albums such as *The Royal Album* visually delineated genealogy and status, celebrity albums featured a much closer affinity to consumer demand. Most portraits were not sold as sets, as was the case of *The Royal Album*, but were collected over time and arranged into albums. They therefore represent ideal venues for considering individual expressions of desire for particular fashions, faces, and bodies. The album was not necessarily an immutable environment, but rather one exposed to regular scrutiny, physical manipulation including violence,¹⁴⁸ and possible demotion and dismissal in favor of the latest fad.

¹⁴⁶ In particular, see Elizabeth Siegel, et al., *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage* (Chicago and New Haven: The Art Instituted of Chicago and Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁷ Roger Hargreaves, “2: Putting Faces to the Names: Social Celebrity and Celebrity Portrait Photography” in Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, eds., *The Beautiful and the Damned: the Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001), 47.

¹⁴⁸ One example of the anxieties attendant upon potential violence against photographs can be found in the fictional story “My First Carte de Visite,” published in *The American Journal of Photography* in 1863. New York stockbroker Mr. Solomon P. Rodgers has his carte portrait made for his wife. He is so pleased with the portrait that he also gives a copy to a former love interest, whose husband angrily rips it up and throws it away. Rodgers’s shocked reaction to this mutilation demonstrates that his portrait stands as an important embodiment of himself. The physicality of the carte reinforced its authority as a kind of body, or at least as an extension of a body, and at the same time rendered it vulnerable to the touch and gaze of others. Referenced in Elizabeth Siegel, *Galleries of*

According to di Bello, some women used the creative outlet of the photograph album to reconstruct their desires, such as “a beautiful house, a slender waist, healthy children, a loving family, fond memories of loved ones,”¹⁴⁹ in a visually narrative form. Di Bello demonstrates that photographs represent more than coveted fashions and objects: they may also represent complex desires relevant to interpersonal relationships. For example, the arrangement of images in Anna Waterlow’s (1824-1880) album (which dates to between 1850 and 1870), now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, both enacts and suppresses her complex maternal feelings. Using Freud’s definition of melancholia – “a reaction to the loss of a loved one that is not necessarily dead but lost as an object of love”¹⁵⁰ – di Bello reads Waterlow’s album as a coming to terms with both the joy of motherhood and the inevitable loss of her children to adulthood and ultimately death. The practice of collecting, modifying, and placing photographs of her children within her album thus serves to partially fill “a gap in the maternal ego; a wound caused not by castration but by melancholia, the loss of the child not, or not only, to the world, but to her sense of self.”¹⁵¹ By manipulating her album, Waterlow exercises a degree of autonomy and control that is impossible in her daily life, and thereby gives expression for her complex, and sometimes ambivalent, feelings. Her album shelters the interiority of her varied maternal feelings while presenting the world with a visual narrative that maintains a myth necessary to the construction of her individual and family identity. Further, it provides autonomy within a protected space to

Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010). An Outsider, “My First Carte de Visite,” *American Journal of Photography* 5:15 (1 February 1863): 337-43 and “My First Carte de Visite, and What Became of Them,” *American Journal of Photography* 5:17 (1 March 1863): 385-92.

¹⁴⁹ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 27.

¹⁵⁰ Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography*, 2007, 105.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

physically explore her feelings through the careful arrangement of photographic order, thoughtful embellishment of album pages, and the slicing, cutting, and reconstitution required of collage.

Siegal and di Bello's scholarship demonstrates that albums are highly mediated, and often ambiguous, spaces representative of complex human emotions and real and imaginary social networks. Even Mayall's *Royal Album*, a pre-packaged selection of photographs approved by Queen Victoria that appear to present a sanitized and appropriately familial version of the Royal Family, is also subject to the desires of the collector. The album may have been sold as a set, but the photographs remain loose within the sleeves of each page: carefully slid in from the top and displayed within the gilt-edged frame of a cut-out window, they are just as easily slid back out.¹⁵² Although relatively durable, they were nonetheless subject to the physical manipulations as well as the rigorous scrutiny of others.

Scrutiny

The photograph album had the potential to reflect accepted social hierarchies and networks ranging from the celebrity to the familial. However, within its heavy leather-bound and brass-hinged confines, portraits risked being pressed against the representations of other (potentially undesirable) bodies according to the whim of the collector. Shop windows and the periodical press directly influenced the purchasing and collecting practices of consumers who shopped in person or by mail order. Prints were requested by title or negative number, both of which are apparent on a working print of the *Venus de Milo* by Frances Frith kept on file to

¹⁵² While the manufactured body of the *Royal Album* at the Harry Ransom Center was clearly made for a single purpose – this series – there are four empty pages following the fourteen published cartes-de-visite, suggesting that other photographs could be added as desired.

locate the original negative. (**Figure 1.4**) Letting one's representation loose into the world therefore rendered it subject to indiscriminate desires, including entrapment within potentially impolite venues such as pockets and albums, as well as to indiscriminate acts, including prolonged analysis of photographic faces.

The belief that a person's character could be deduced from the formal analysis of his or her face, head, and body fostered specific expectations regarding physical "types" and their associated qualities. These assumptions contributed to a particularly rigorous process of observation perfectly suited to highly detailed albumen prints. French novelist Émile Zola (1840-1902) provides an apt example of this kind of looking, inspired predominantly by base motivations, in his 1871 novel *La Curée*. Upper class protagonists Renée and her stepson Maxime spend their excessive leisure time poring over photographs:

Whenever it rained or they were bored, this album was the great subject of conversation. It always ended by falling under one's hand. Renée opened it with a yawn, for the hundredth time perhaps. Then her curiosity would reawaken, and the young man came and leant behind her. And then followed long discussions about the Crayfish's hair,¹⁵³ Madame de Meinhold's double chin, Madame de Lauwerens' eyes, and Blanche Muller's bust; about the marquise's nose, which was a little on one side, and little Sylvia's mouth, which was renowned for the thickness of its lips.

The novel later continues:

[Renée] again forgot herself in the contemplation of the pallid, smiling, or cross-grained faces contained in the album; she lingered longest over the portraits of the fast women, studying with curiosity the exact microscopic details of the photographs, the minute wrinkles, the tiny hairs. One day even she sent for a strong magnifying-glass, fancying she had perceived a hair on the Crayfish's nose. And in fact the glass did reveal a thin golden¹⁵⁴ thread which had strayed from the eyebrows down to the middle of the nose. This hair diverted them, for a long time. For a week long the ladies who called were made to assure themselves in person of the presence of this hair. Thenceforward the magnifying-glass served to pick the women's faces to pieces. Renée made astonishing

¹⁵³ The Crayfish is an unpleasant nickname for a society woman in the family's social circle.

¹⁵⁴ Because color photography was not possible until the twentieth century, Zola's reference of "golden" in this context may refer to the gold toning often used during development that enriched the gradation of tone in albumen prints.

discoveries: she found unknown wrinkles, coarse skins, cavities imperfectly filled up with rice powder, until Maxime finally hid the glass, declaring that it was not right to disgust one's self like that with the human countenance.¹⁵⁵

This passage demonstrates a fictional, though entirely feasible, extent to which photographs underwent strenuous analysis for the sake of entertainment that is not edifying, but rather critical.¹⁵⁶ As a commentator for the *Photographic Times* stated, “We are not satisfied with knowing what [the sitters] have done. We want to know *what they are*,”¹⁵⁷ and prolonged scrutiny could supposedly reveal a degree of this truth. The use of a magnifying glass to analyze photographs was not uncommon; in fact, composite and mosaic cartes-de-visite demanded their use.¹⁵⁸ Their implementation deepened the sometimes cruel game of analysis that became a requisite part of album culture. The violence implied in picking faces to pieces disturbingly evokes fragmentation and bodily harm at the hands of inconsiderate or unkind viewers. According to Siegel, advice columns recommended that a family's best photographs be kept under lock and key in order to avoid the “dirty” fingers of servants. Indeed, the mishandling of, or simply indifference to, prized portraits was considered offensive to the sitter, and

¹⁵⁵ Émile Zola, *La Curée*, trans. A. T. De Mattos (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924 [1871]), 125-126.

¹⁵⁶ Zola's detailed passage, in keeping with his careful regard for descriptive and technical accuracy, presents one possible way in which a viewer could have handled and analyzed commercial photographic portraits. Renée's degree of analysis falls on an extreme end of a spectrum that would have ranged from casual to obsessive viewing practices. While I do not wish to suggest that French and British viewers utilized and scrutinized photographs in exactly the same way, it is likely that individuals with access to such photographs engaged to mixed degrees of similar viewing practices. Recent scholarship on nineteenth century photograph albums reveals that they were often used to entertain, whether to pass the time in collecting and collaging or to generate small talk at social occasions, just as Renée does with hers. See Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), Elizabeth Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), and Elizabeth Siegel, et al., *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage* (Chicago and New Haven: The Art Instituted of Chicago and Yale University Press, 2009).

¹⁵⁷ Italics mine. Quoted from E. Legouvé, “A Photographic Album,” *Photographic Times* 4:40 (April 1874): 54 in Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame*, 66.

¹⁵⁸ It appears Disdéri, the French inventor of the carte-de-visite format, was the first to create these composite images in the early 1860s. See McCauley, *A. A. E. Disdéri*, 94.

demonstrated that appropriate behavior was expected towards both the living subject as well as to the light-drawn icons of his or her body.

The tenets of physiognomy and phrenology profoundly impacted the way Victorians “read” and assessed others by presenting seemingly objective methods for understanding individual identity and character. These ideas contributed to medical and scientific discourse, thereby lending credence to particular constructions of race, gender, and class ideologies throughout the century.¹⁵⁹ According to these pseudosciences, character, class, and breeding could be read through the expressions of the face (pathognomy), the physical features of the head and face (physiognomy), the shape of the skull (phrenology), and the expressive qualities of the body in movement and gait. In *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art*, Mary Cowling points out that the origins of these studies, a mixture of scientific observation and moral expectation, remain obscured in ancient history, although they resurfaced forcefully in the late-eighteenth century writing of Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) and Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828).¹⁶⁰ Popular treatises, such as Lavater’s widely influential *Essays on Physiognomy*, went through multiple editions during the course of the nineteenth century and established a measurable, and supposedly scientifically accurate, means

¹⁵⁹ Jennifer Green-Lewis points out that by the end of the century, notions of “truthfulness” relative to photography and character became increasingly unhinged from static physiognomic expectations: “As fiction by James, Hardy, Wilde, and others was showing, personal identity was no longer necessarily understood in static terms, the sum total of a fixed number of facts. It was susceptible to change, circumstance, perceptual nuance.” See Green-Lewis, “The Invention of Photography in the Victorian World,” 21. While people may have been increasingly aware of the complex components of personality, especially given the development of psychoanalysis, assumptions regarding character as codified by physiognomy and phrenology – many of which hinge upon a perceived physical likeness between facial types and animals – remained present into the late nineteenth century.

¹⁶⁰ She writes that human efforts to classify and understand others by their appearance seems “to be a perennial human need: that of finding some simplified means of organizing our perceptions of our fellows, and in such a way as to help towards some instant understanding of the strangers whom we encounter.” See Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 31.

for understanding others. Further, they were invoked in order to emphasize a linear conception of the evolution of man based on a nineteenth century ideology of race and imperialism that positioned people of color at the bottom of a linear evolutionary trajectory, at the other end of which Anglo-Saxon men supposedly represented the most culturally and intellectually advanced beings.

Physiognomy and phrenology thus most often privileged supposedly “civilized” Caucasian features, and ideal types of heads, noses, ears, etc. were “defined in terms of [their] distance from any resemblance to the animal, and vice versa.”¹⁶¹ Therefore, large craniums and high, wide foreheads signaled developed intelligence, and soaring domed heads pointed to greater spiritual capacity, but prognathism (a projecting lower jaw) and low foreheads – associated with monkeys and apes – pointed to physical, intellectual, and spiritual inferiority. Some features could have either positive or negative attributes: a thick bull neck signaled stolidity, tenacity, and strength of purpose at its best, but ruthlessness and violence at its worst. Noses could supposedly tell quite a lot about a person: the aquiline nose was considered illustrious, for it was as far as possible from the associated laziness of snout-like noses. A large nose signaled a dominant character, while a small nose signaled a submissive and weak one. The “Greek” nose (a straight unbroken line) was considered poetic and mild, and therefore more suitable for women. A too-thin mouth meant an ungenerous nature, while a fleshy mouth (consider the thickness of Sylvia’s lips in the previous Zola quote) pointed to a sensual one.

Victorians took these ideas seriously and adapted evolutionary theory accordingly, arguing that, because of their lack of refinement and development, lower social classes were physiognomically and developmentally inferior. The Irish, especially, suffered at the hands of

¹⁶¹ Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist*, 79.

physiognomic justifications of their supposed similarities with dogs and monkeys, and the lower classes more generally were denigrated for their coarseness, ugliness, and “primitive” behavior. The growing middle class, considered the most tenacious and ambitious segment of society, was most often associated with energy, determination, and practicality. The aristocracy, perhaps not surprisingly, were lauded for their ideal breeding, exhibited in orthognathous skulls (straight-jawed, as opposed to the jutting lower appendage of prognathism) and refined features, which signaled a combination of strength and delicacy. Even ugliness, if found in the genteel, was to be excused, as it signaled an overdevelopment of beauty, while in the lower classes ugliness remained, quite simply, vulgar. Being already in command of their supposed evolutionary prominence, the upper classes placed greater emphasis on nuance and variety in expression.¹⁶²

Artists utilized these coded features in order to better express narrative and meaning. Therefore, peasants could be identified not only by their clothing but also by their broad, blunt (read: honest and simple) features. The relative prominence of foreheads and chins supposedly revealed much about class, intellect, and virtue. This is not to say, however, that a figure from the lower class could not have hints of refinement. In order to express virtue in a low-class individual, artists might appropriately attire that subject as a peasant but retain some aristocratic features – a long, straight, refined nose or a high forehead, for example. Beauty, as defined by the tenets of physiognomy and phrenology, could be found in all classes, but in the lower and middle classes, this beauty was more likely to be of the “diamond in the rough” sort.

Commercial portraits presented ideal tools for practicing such visual decoding. While Zola’s Renée searched for the imperfections of her contemporaries, seeking the seemingly truer

¹⁶² For other sources, see Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Melissa Percival and Graeme Tytler, eds., *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater’s Impact on European Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

material behind rice powder and rouge masks, she also noted the size of lips, asymmetrical noses, and double chins appropriate to physiognomic reading. However, the apparent truth-value of the clarity of these photographs was exactly what disguised their instability as mediated representations. Photographers understood the visual language and ideological tenets of phrenology and physiognomy and implemented them accordingly, often to disguise preexisting “undesirable” features. While the machine aesthetic of the commercial portrait appeared to deny the all-too-human hand of the artist, thereby raising it to the authority of “science,” many photographers understood the degree to which pose, expression, composition, lighting, and development impacted the finished print. The photographer’s artistry was not in delineating a form, but rather in arranging the sitter in such a way as to present a preferred likeness to the camera.

In 1872 American photographer H. J. Rodgers published *Twenty-three Years Under a Sky-Light; Or, Life and Experiences of a Photographer*, a book that melded the sciences of physiognomy and phrenology with the photographer’s artistry and connoisseurship of human character and expression. In agreement with physiognomic ideas, to which he devoted an entire chapter,¹⁶³ he wrote that “the human face is the true index of the soul.”¹⁶⁴ However, the photographer’s job was to make the best possible portrait, which often involved alleviating unfortunate physiognomies: “Notwithstanding the great diversity of shape which the human head assumes, according to the corresponding developments, it can by the art of photography, if

¹⁶³ Entitled “Facial Resemblance Between Man and the Brute Creation,” some examples include equating the lion with intellectual power and vigor and the eagle with those who are sarcastic, but who also “*soar above* all others of their race.” Thin, muscular, wiry men whose eyes naturally slant downwards are “fierce, revengeful, sanguinary, cruelly domineering” like the tiger. Emphasis the author’s. H. J. Rodgers, *Twenty-three Years Under a Sky-Light; Or, Life and Experiences of a Photographer* (Hartford: H. J. Rodgers, 1872), 110.

¹⁶⁴ Rodgers, *Twenty-three Years Under a Sky-Light*, 1872, 84.

artistically treated (that is, by posing and expression), be made to look beautiful, graceful in contour, without in the least degree impairing the naturalness of the likeness.”¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, if left to his own devices (without the meddling of ignorant and often demanding sitters), the photographer could utilize his artistry to discover and capture the most pleasing “natural” likenesses. The photographer was therefore an artist of knowing how angles and composition could serve both as subterfuge and enhancement. The camera may have been an objective machine capturing “true” physical likeness, but it was in part the photographer’s responsibility, with help from the sitter, to decide *which* likeness would be recorded.

In nearly all cases, photographers retained the right to the negatives they produced. Therefore, if a subject seemed interesting or attractive enough to warrant their portrait being displayed in a shop window, a photographer had the right to reproduce and sell that portrait without the approval of the sitter. They could also sell the negative if that presented better financial prospects than keeping it for future reproduction. In 1878, *The Dundee Courier & Argus and Northern Warder* published a “Curious Question” excerpted from the *Echo*:

Can a photographer really sell to any one a copy of the photograph of a private individual who has had his or her portrait taken by him or their own private use? In these days of professional beauties, who seem to spend their leisure in getting ‘taken’ in all manner of absurd attitudes and dresses, and, indeed, sometimes in all but no dress at all, this may seem an idle question. But everybody does not think so, and I hear that a lady who had refused a *carte de visite* to an admirer, who afterwards purchased one from the photographer, is determined to have the decision of a court of law on the question.¹⁶⁶

One’s representation was vulnerable to purchase and manipulation by undesirable consumers, leading this commentator to assume that demure and proper women would carefully guard their reputation and representation. Faster women of fashion (namely, professional

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 119-120.

¹⁶⁶ “MULTIPLE NEWS ITEMS: ‘CURIOUS QUESTION,’” *The Dundee Courier & Argus and Northern Warder* (Dundee), Friday, 6 December 1878, issue 7918.

beauties, of relevance to forthcoming chapters), on the other hand, actively participated in the widespread commercial promotion of their likeness. The next year, a London Correspondent in *The Belfast Examiner* chided the husband of famed professional beauty Mrs. Cornwallis West for wishing to suppress reproductions of his wife: “surely,” the author writes, “he must have known that portraits of his wife could not have been taken and subsequently displayed without permission, and that the publishers claim for them all the privileges (and profits) of ‘exclusive copyright.’”¹⁶⁷ To some, it seems, the “facts” of photographic copyright were clear: the photographer and publisher owned the rights to the negatives. To others, however, the reality of this situation was not fully understood and, once realized, resulted in anxiety regarding the circulation of their image.¹⁶⁸

The protagonist of Margaret Oliphant’s 1866 novel *Miss Marjoribanks* presents an interesting fictional case study that reflects concerns regarding the negotiation and anxiety of photographic representation, status, and class. An upper middle class woman aspiring to prominence in her hometown, Lucilla Marjoribanks speaks of having had her portrait done by a local photographer named Maria Brown. “[Maria] has taken six [portraits],” she says, “and I am sure they are every one more hideous than the other; and they will go all over England, you know, for the Browns have hosts of people belonging to them; and everybody will say, ‘So *that* is Miss Marjoribanks.’” Lucilla continues, “I don’t think I am vain to speak of, but that sort of thing goes to one’s heart.”¹⁶⁹ Lucilla’s portraits do not adequately capture what she considers the

¹⁶⁷ Further, the correspondent saw photographs of Mrs. Cornwallis West near Cheapside with the word “copyright” emblazoned across the bottom. “London Correspondence,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, Monday 20 October 1879, issue 20087.

¹⁶⁸ For a consideration of the Cornwallis West libel suit and its pertinence to copyright law, see Patrizia Di Bello, “Elizabeth Thompson and ‘Patsy’ Cornwallis West as Carte-de-visite Celebrities,” *History of Photography*, 35:3 (2011): 240-249.

¹⁶⁹ Margaret Oliphant, *Miss Marjoribanks*, (New York: Penguin Books – Virago Press, 1989 [1866]), 380.

likeness most indicative of her station and aspirations. Lucilla realizes that, because the Browns “have hosts of people belonging to them,” and because Maria Brown legally controls the portrait negatives, she has no control over the dissemination of an image she finds disappointing. Lucilla finds herself caught in the reality of portrayal, acts of which, according to Pointon “are bound up with anxieties about betrayal – about inauthentic representations.”¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

Nineteenth century commercial photographs, while often cheaply and badly made and now faded to light and time, nonetheless present fascinating objects of historical inquiry because of their presumption to authority as relatively truthful documents of individuals that simultaneously existed as expendable commodities. Siegel writes that photographs “fed a positivistic desire to see and verify – and thus to *know* – the person pictured there,”¹⁷¹ and Victorian viewers practiced decoding the photographic visages of others, sometimes to the extent of prolonged scrutiny, because of the presumed visual veracity of the commercial photograph. This is not to say, however, that the machine aesthetic “duped” viewers into believing a single photographic portrait could reveal all of an individual’s character. Rather, part of the entertainment provided by analysis of the photographic portrait was found in measuring the relative truthfulness of the image to what was known about the sitter. Further, while having one’s portrait taken rendered it the property of the photographer and of anyone interested in parting with a few shillings for its print, the act also entailed engagement in thriving social networks. Di Bello posits that for some the fantasy of imagining the presence of one’s portrait

¹⁷⁰ Pointon, *Portrayal*, 8.

¹⁷¹ Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame*, 120.

amongst the social and cultural elite of a stranger's album heightened the experience of being photographed. In fact, for many the display and sale of one's portrait was an honor and social compliment: to have one's portrait in circulation meant that they were culturally relevant enough to be collectible. Di Bello concludes that "the pleasures of being photographed resided not in the correspondence of the portrait with one's own sense of self, or with some kind of truth about the inner qualities of the portrayed, but in participating in a real or imaginary public sphere, through the social games engendered by the photographic album."¹⁷²

The commercial photographic portrait could have it both ways: it could be an object of authority and function as a physical and visual extensions of the sitter's body, taste, and character as revealed by careful scrutiny and practiced decoding of physiognomies, fashions, and props. Or, it could be a much more playful and entertaining piece of cheap visual culture traded, collaged, collected into an album, or thrown away. Ultimately these albumen prints prevented any kind of true psychological familiarity with the photographed subjects, and yet dangled the possibility of analysis and knowledge in the playful pocket-sized form of a sturdy carte-de-visite. These factors contributed to the success of professional photography amidst a commodity culture of disposable manufactured objects and grew out of a historical moment in which appearance mattered greatly for establishing reputation and identity within established categories of race, class, and gender.

The coming chapters will consider photographic portraits of specific subjects tied up in the strange tension lived by commercial portraits as cheaply authoritative representations. The next chapter of this project will consider the active participation of London's professional beauties in the visual culture commodity marketplace of the late 1870s to consider the ways in

¹⁷² Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography*, 2007, 111.

which, when viewing photographs of professional beauties, viewers' imaginations activated powerful fantasies of celebrity bodies and lives that in turn motivated consumer culture. The chapter following will consider the historical and ideological biases of portraiture in the construction of race and discuss how the static presentation of the print shop seller's window could collapse within the minds and hands of viewers, thereby risking the destabilization of a particular vision of empire based on racial and class hierarchy.

Chapter Two:

The Public Intimacy of Professional Beauties

This chapter considers the intersections between professional beauties' physical bodies as performed works of art and of their representations, largely photographic, which, according to Joseph Roach, "[did] the work of creating the effigy in the physical absence of the beloved."¹⁷³ Through formal elements including dress, pose, framing, and gaze, these icons created the illusion of public intimacy that motivated the commercial market for portraits. Many found this influence threatening: in their portraits, these women did not always look away blushing, but often returned the public's gaze with confidence. Such gazes not only linked them problematically with "public women," a euphemism for prostitute, but also manipulated the gendered power dynamics of London's ocular spectacle. The perceived authenticity of their beauty mattered greatly to assessments of their worth, and the commercial photograph's illusion of documentary authority served as one foundation from which celebrity effigies sprung. Subject to the scrutiny, desires, and whims of the viewer and collector, these representations were simultaneously cheap and dispensable visual culture as well as potent visual icons that vaulted (largely imagined) celebrity personalities into the sphere of transcendent fame. In lieu of the presence of the professional beauty's physical body, viewers constructed her imagined celebrity body and personality via widely-circulating textual and visual representations based upon their own desires and fantasies. This productive tension between representation and "real" was built into the nineteenth century photographic medium, which existed as both subject (visually

¹⁷³ Roach, *It*, 40.

authoritative yet ultimately mediated) and object (physically present and thus physically vulnerable).

Lauded as modern Venuses and Galateas, professional beauties were taken as proof of British racial preeminence. Seen to embody the highest feminine achievement (beauty) within a patriarchal structure, they performed in a traditional sense as muses, models, and living works of art given currency via the paint brushes of artists, the cameras of photographers, and the attention of patrons. At the same time, however, critics decried their often *déshabillé* photographic portraits and willingness to engage in the commercial trade of their representations. The figure of the professional beauty was, to some, no better than a glorified courtesan and an indication of British culture's degeneration during an "Aesthetic age." The perceived gap between the professional beauty's elevated and debased virtue created a productive space in which the public could conduct "a fierce war of opinion as to their rival merits."¹⁷⁴ Roach provides an apt formulation of this dynamic when he writes of celebrities as "double-bodied persons" with living, aging physical bodies and "cinematic" ones which neither decay or die:

As their sacred images circulate in the vortex of the profane imagination, these double-bodied persons foreground a peculiar combination of contradictory attributes expressed through outward signs of the union of their imperishable and mortal bodies. These include the simultaneous appearance of strength and vulnerability in the same performance, even in the same gesture. Let those marks of strength be called *charismata*; the signs of vulnerability, *stigmata*. They work cooperatively, like muscles in opposable pairs, and their mesmerizing interplay has a long history as well as popular currency as the source of public intimacy.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ This quote by Jennie Churchill (later Mrs. George Cornwallis West, having married the son of Patsy Cornwallis West) specifically refers to the debates of opinions relative to Langtry and Wheeler. See Mrs. George Cornwallis West, *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, (Bath, UK: Cedric Chivers, Ltd., 1973 [1908]), 105.

¹⁷⁵ Roach, *It*, 36. "Effigy," as defined in the introduction, refers to the "mental pictures or ideas... generally available by association when summoned from the enchanted memories of those imagining themselves in communication with the special, spectral other." *Ibid.*, 17.

Roach's dichotomy between strength and vulnerability, *charismata* and *stigmata*, presents a productive framework for considering the public intimacy that motivated the fame of professional beauties. Consumers, cognizant of gossip papers and the latest portraits tacked up in print sellers' windows, filled this space with their own interpretations, confident that they somehow *knew* the celebrity figure better by being privy to her true intentions, authentic behavior, and mask-less self. These opinions were the result of mass media materials from which individual "personal" (though completely fantastical) relationships with celebrities were created.

Spaces of spectacle

The professional beauty was a product of an industrialized urban environment that privileged visibility and spectatorship. But, "far from being a simple matter of opening one's eyes," as Nancy Rose Marshall writes in *City of Gold and Mud: Painting Victorian London*, "sight for Victorians was a difficult process that required education and discipline."¹⁷⁶ Modern vision was not an innate skill but rather one that had to be studied and learned. This lent increased importance to paintings, as well as to other forms of visual culture such as illustrations and photographs, which functioned as tools to educate people about their world, and increased the attraction of physiognomy and phrenology as the means of analysis through which London's diverse crowds could be better understood. In this context, gendered public behavior was strictly delineated by etiquette manuals. Conservative advice stated that if a woman wished to avoid "London's web of glances," they ought to dress unassumingly, and even unattractively, and

¹⁷⁶ Nancy Rose Marshall, *City of Gold and Mud: Painting Victorian London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 28.

“walk at a steady pace and look straight ahead.”¹⁷⁷ Lynda Nead has demonstrated, however, that such advice was not necessarily followed. In the 1860s girls from respectable families could and did walk unaccompanied, thereby participating in the “ocular economy” of London’s streets, which constituted places of flirtation and sexualized encounters where “details of dress, gesture and glance [were] ambiguous and [could] convey social status or flirtatious availability.”¹⁷⁸

Rather than self-efface by merging into the cityscape, many women openly interacted with the city’s spectacle. James Tissot (1836-1902) captured such purposeful interaction in his 1874 *London Visitors* (**Figure 2.1**), in which the female subject stares directly at the viewer. Marshall states that “she seems to appropriate the male gaze of presence and desire, one capable of penetrating and absorbing everything in its scope.”¹⁷⁹ This gaze, she writes, also referenced the purposeful body language of prostitutes communicating their sexual availability. Some period commentators believed these glances to be irresistible snares capable of weakening any man’s resolve. Therefore, “a woman’s gaze, encountered by a man strolling through urban spaces, was charged with allure and questionable respectability.”¹⁸⁰

Professional beauties “[permitted] any number of their photographic portraits to be sold in infinite varieties of poses”¹⁸¹ and thus gazed by the hundreds from shop windows and vendor

¹⁷⁷ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 66.

¹⁷⁸ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 65-6.

¹⁷⁹ One reviewer from the *Atheneum* described her face as an “unpleasing sneer” and her actions “inexplicable.” Marshall, *City of Gold and Mud*, 31.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 31. Marshall references Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, “who warned her readers in 1878, ‘one glance of a prostitute’s eye, passing in the street, one token of allurements’ was enough to weaken any man’s resolve.” See *Ibid.*, 31. Taken from Elizabeth Blackwell, *Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Children* (London: Hirst-Smyth & Son, 1878), 30.

¹⁸¹ J. Redding Ware, *Passing English of the Victorian Era: A Dictionary of Heterodox English, Slang, and Phrase* (London: George Rutledge & Sons, 1909), 201.

carts around London. Their photographic portraits, such as a cabinet card featuring Cornwallis West (**Figure 2.6**), sometimes referenced the questionable gaze of Tissot's female subject in *London Visitors*. Further, these representations rendered themselves up as discreet commodity objects to undesirable consumers. One commentator concerned with class transgression wrote, regarding professional beauties Cornwallis West and Langtry, that:

For years past these two ladies, and other 'beauties,' have caused or allowed their portraits to be exhibited throughout the country cheek by jowl with the portraits of semi-nude actresses and other personages who are, morally speaking, comely nude. Every 'Arry who had a shilling to spend had the privilege of placing a *carte* of Mrs. Langtry or of Mrs. West underneath his pillow. By denuding themselves of the old-fashioned sanctities they have also stripped themselves of the right to much sympathy when those sanctities are brutally invaded... they have lost the right to complain of indiscriminate criticism...¹⁸²

According to this critic, professional beauties participated in the commodity marketplace through the willing complicity of the sale of their photographic portraits. If they chose to be exhibited next to actresses and harlots and thus subject to lewd lower-class gazes, they could not complain if they were treated as such. If they wanted to claim a space in the masculine public sphere by self-advertising, identified by another critic as "the heart's desire of the professional beauty,"¹⁸³ they would be subject to the conventions of that sphere. Chivalry would no longer protect them.

Their successful self-advertisement upset a nineteenth century consumer ideology that posited industries, and their associated techniques of marketing and display, as economically aggressive and therefore masculine, and the "seduced" consumer as a feminized victim. According to Veblen's theory of emulation, women literally displayed the wealth of their husbands by pursuing "conspicuous consumption" as a form of leisure. By consuming tasteful

¹⁸² *The York Herald*, Monday, 13 October 1879, issue 7071, p 4.

¹⁸³ "Professional Beauties." Excerpt from the *Saturday Review* published in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 3 September 1879, issue 7658.

commodities, they demonstrated their husband's socio-economic status and their cultivation of taste. However, over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of women contributed to the British economy as producers. Criticism leveled at the professional beauty often revealed anxiety about women utilizing self-marketing in aggressive and savvy ways, indicating that the popularity of professional beauties exposed disruptions in the accepted ideology of gendered consumer behavior.¹⁸⁴

Professional beauties operated in the realm of spectacle defined by Sarah Burns as the place “where manufactured images assumed a dynamic existence as commodities, to be desired, replicated, exchanged, consumed, exhausted, and replaced.”¹⁸⁵ Writing specifically about James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), Burns explores how he utilized techniques of self-presentation and notoriety to fit within the parameters of “an ever more powerful consumer ethos” in which “the most dynamic form of advertisement lay in the construction of an intriguing public personality, a distinctive style, with the power to attract and hold attention on exhibition walls, in the social world, and on the pages of newspapers and magazines.”¹⁸⁶ This (male) personality and its accompanying public image, embedded in of late-nineteenth century consumption and advertising, became a dynamic agent “for signaling and negotiating identity,

¹⁸⁴ See Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). For a recent consideration of how women – particularly middle-class and “surplus” women – contributed to the British economy, please see Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport, eds. *Economic Women: Essays on Desire and Dispossession in Nineteenth-century British Culture*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

¹⁸⁵ This meant, for men, cultivating the right kind of public identity. Further, she argues that reading the narrative of public performance on the part of the artist came to replace the loss of narrative in painting. Regarding Whistler, she states that “at a time when a vigorous aesthetic mainstream privileged self-expression over legibility in painting, the artistic performance of personality became an important substitute for the loss of readable narrative and conventionally symbolic meaning.” Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 221-2.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 231-2.

status, power, and desirability.”¹⁸⁷ Di Bello has pointed out that, in contrast to men who were expected to self-promote in order to cultivate “manly confidence,” women’s moral character relied upon modesty and self-effacement,¹⁸⁸ two qualities with which the professional beauty was rarely associated. The mixed reception of these celebrity figures signals that they were dynamic agents in the modern environment who united style and celebrity and exercised power via representations and public performances, but who in so doing risked transgressing the gendered dynamics of ocular power and public self-fashioning.

Society journals created popular venues for the regular publication of their names, attire, and behavior from the late 1870s and into the 1880s. The author of a column entitled “Society Journals and their Victims” in *The Newcastle Courant* wrote in the fall of 1879:

There is no denying that for a considerable time those recent additions to the London press, Society journals, have in recording or in professing to record the personal appearance and private acts of prominent ladies tended to broaden people’s views as to what is strictly proper in many things.¹⁸⁹

Paragraphists, those writing for increasingly popular Society papers, were responsible for coining the term “professional beauty” and keeping women deemed such in the public eye. The author continued that no one would care about these pretty women if the public were not continuously told various “details as to how their riding habits suited them in the Row, what dresses they wore at Ascot, and whether they smiled on this and that occasion.”¹⁹⁰ Society journals molded public taste and directed readers’ attention to women they deemed noteworthy.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 233.

¹⁸⁸ Di Bello, “Elizabeth Thompson and ‘Patsy’ Cornwallis West as Carte-de-visite Celebrities,” *History of Photography*, 35:3 (2011): 240-49.

¹⁸⁹ “Society Journals and their Victims,” *The Newcastle Courant, etc.*, 17 Oct 1879, issue 10685. Ware wrote that the phrase professional beauty “arose in one of the Society papers, and was at once accepted by the best people, and even by the best of the Press.” Ware, *Passing English of the Victorian Era*, 201.

¹⁹⁰ “Society Journals and their Victims,” *The Newcastle Courant, etc.*, 17 Oct 1879, issue 10685.

These textual descriptions complemented the photographic portraits offered for display and purchase in shop windows.

In its earliest usage, “professional beauty” identified a particular kind of female celebrity created by a combination of photographers, powerful social connections, and the press.¹⁹¹ In 1879, *The Whitehall Review* provided a more thorough consideration of these criteria, writing:

There are said to be three essentials: the first and most important is to sit on the box-seat of ——’s coach; secondly, you must be seen *tête-à-tête* with Royalty for half an hour uninterrupted; and thirdly, you must get your photograph exposed for sale at Macmichael’s in North Audley Street.¹⁹²

The author is most likely referring to sharing the box-seat of Edward, the Prince of Wales (1841-1910), while riding in Rotten Row, a place where hoards of viewers congregated to take note of who was seen with whom. (Rumors implied that the woman present on his box-seat was probably also his mistress.¹⁹³) The second component may also allude to the fact that Langtry, the preeminent professional beauty, was presented at court to Queen Victoria in May 1878, a situation arranged by the Prince of Wales even though Langtry’s social standing hardly qualified her for such an honor.¹⁹⁴ The author may more broadly refer to a woman in association with the Marlborough Set, a fashionable social circle led by the Prince of Wales and named after his

¹⁹¹ These three criteria became standard and were recycled in fiction. In Annie Thomas’s piece of fiction “Best for Her,” published in *Lady’s Pictorial* (no. 1, Saturday, 5 March 1881), Dolly, the protagonist, is described as having the potential to become a professional beauty, but her limited social circle keeps her from accessing the necessary photographers, princes, and press.

¹⁹² “Reigning Beauties. III. Mrs. Wheeler” in *The Whitehall Review* 2 August 1879, 273.

¹⁹³ This knowledge would have been supported by the exhibition of photographs of the Prince of Wales next to his supposed mistresses. See Laura Beatty, *Lillie Langtry: Manners, Masks and Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999) and “Libels of Mrs. Langtry and Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, Monday 13 October 1879, issue 8184.

¹⁹⁴ Typically this honor was reserved for the wives and daughters of the aristocracy. Each woman presented needed to have a female sponsor who had already been presented at Court. See Evans, *The Party that Lasted 100 Days*, 131-2. Theo Aronson writes that although Langtry’s family was not aristocratic by any means, her father’s position in the clergy rendered them socially acceptable people on par with landed gentry. See Theo Aronson, *The King in Love* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1988), 31-2.

London residence.¹⁹⁵ A professional beauty would have been in demand at any important Society event and therefore would have had ample opportunities to engage with the Prince, his wife Alexandra, or a number of the other royal children.¹⁹⁶ Finally, a professional beauty's fame depended upon the regular sale of her photographic portraits. Macmichael's was a particularly well-established print seller's shop in Mayfair enjoying a prime corner location at 42 South Audley Street where passers-by would have made a point to stop and observe who was on display,¹⁹⁷ including a "permanent exhibition" of "fair candidates."¹⁹⁸ Regardless of their opinion of the professional beauty's merit (or lack thereof), none could deny the prevalence of her face: "Wherever we go in our great metropolis," wrote the *Saturday Review*, "we seem unable to escape the well-known faces of the beauties."¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Edward, the Prince of Wales, was in large part responsible for diversifying elite London Society. He and his wife Alexandra were considered among the most stylish nobility of Europe and were known to welcome interesting and notable people into their circle regardless of race, religion, or gender. The Prince of Wales enjoyed the finer pleasures of life and maintained a strict annual "regimen" of socializing, hunting, yachting, racing, and traveling. In 1885 T. H. S. Escott wrote that the Prince "wishes [Society] to enjoy itself, to disport itself, to dance, sing, and play to its heart's content. But he desires that it should do so in the right manner, at the right times, and in the right places." Further, Escott wrote that the Prince was known for welcoming into his circle even members that Parisian salons would not accept, and that "England is the chosen home of freedom, but not of independence; and society in London, in all it does, or abstains from doing, is, as I have already shown, absolutely dependent on the initiative of royalty." A Foreign Resident [T. H. S. Escott], *Society in London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), 17 and 28. See also Theo Aronson, *The King in Love* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1988).

¹⁹⁶ In particular, Princess Louise, an artist, and Prince Leopold frequented artistic circles in which professional beauties often socialized.

¹⁹⁷ The former Macmichael's storefront, which enjoys two large vitrines on the corner of Adam's Row and South Audley Street, is now Cafe Richoux. Macmichael's, a well-established venue for viewing and purchasing photographs, did not have their own photography studio, but rather sold prints from other photographers. In the 1860s, Jane Carlyle (1801-1866) wrote to her husband that "The greatest testimony to your fame seems to me to be the fact that my photograph is stuck up in Macmichael's window. Did you ever hear anything so preposterous in your life?... It proves the interest, or curiosity, you excite; for being neither a 'distinguished authoress,' nor a 'celebrated murderess,' nor an actress, nor a 'Skittles'... it can only be as Mrs. Carlyle that they offer me for sale." "Skittles" was the nickname of the well-known courtesan Catherine Walters (1839-1920). Quoted in Gernsheims, *History of Photography*, 1955, 227. They draw it from Trudy Bliss, *Jane Welch Carlyle: A New Selection of Her Letters* (London, 1949).

¹⁹⁸ "Reigning Beauties. I. Mrs. Langtry" in *The Whitehall Review* 19 July 1879, 224.

¹⁹⁹ Further, "in the public picture-galleries we find them in characters of nymphs, vestals, or sylphs." See "Professional Beauties." Excerpt from the *Saturday Review* published in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 3 September 1879, issue 7658.

Shop window

The liminal space of the shop window, “a highly permeable boundary, designed to orchestrate a free exchange between shop and street,”²⁰⁰ buttressed the sense of their omnipresence. In an engraving (**Figure 2.2**) on the back of a cabinet card by the photographer M. Boak, regular and consistent rows of images almost entirely fill the formerly transparent space of the window, rendering it a wall of faces returning the gaze of a couple who have paused in their urban perambulations. Although densely crowded, lines of sight pierce through the seemingly “bricked in” facade of physiognomies, and this allusion to depth is reinforced by a woman and child entering the shop’s door on the left. A series of jagged edges that sharply curtail the regular rhythm of the brick facade constitute the engraved borders of this design. At the upper right and lower left edges, the edges curl into tight scrolls, as if the entire image had once constituted a full sheet, rolled tightly, and ultimately deteriorated against inexorable Time. One can almost feel the crisply frail edges of an aged brittle parchment as it has been unrolled and displayed, here, as an advertisement for Boak’s Bridlington Studio. At the upper and lower boundaries, however, this image bleeds onto the actual cardstock and remains held in place by the noble “BOAK” emblazoned along the upper edge and a smaller “BOAK,” apparently a storefront sign, that, in its sharply receding linear perspective, appears to pin the image to the card like a thumbtack. Along the lower right edge, a spindly plant with starburst extremities reaches upward through holes in the scroll and grows from a darkened hole beneath the feet of the window shoppers. Visually, the jagged-edged image reads as a tattered second skin of the durable card from which it flakes. The plant seems to grow from the darkened interior layers of the card itself, as if the photographic object is not simply consumed and consumable, but also

²⁰⁰ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 179.

somehow regenerative, a maker of meaning: a signifier within a larger social and cultural network.

This engraving cleverly visualizes the idea of a liminal space created by permeable intersecting layers: physically by the compressed layers of the photographic object, and visually by the seemingly solid and tightly-packed space of the shop window. Within the parameters of a single vitrine the British nation was on display, from its most celebrated to its most notorious. Although presented with the potential to comfortably reinforce expected socio-economic, gender, and racial hierarchies, such as those established more than a century earlier in Reverend James Granger's 1769 *A Biographical History of England*,²⁰¹ the ever-changing display within shop windows also revealed their malleability. A fluid space intentionally manipulated by commercial motives, the shop window reflected the British public's daily obsessions, tasteful or otherwise, and underlined ongoing relationships between bodies and texts, metropole and colony, celebrity and notoriety. Therefore, as one author wrote,

The simple might expect to find the cartes-de-visite of the husbands by the side of their wives. Not a bit of it. If we look at the photograph of one of the beauties in a London shop window, we shall probably find the representation of Cardinal Manning on one side of it and that of an eminent murderer on the other.²⁰²

Although in the 1880s the phrase "professional beauty" became generally applied to beautiful young women in Society, in its earliest years it was restricted to married women. A husband's name provided security and a shield from scandal, although critics did not overlook

²⁰¹ Granger lists the following hierarchy: Royalty first, then officers of the state and household, peers, and dignitaries of the church. Next follow distinguished (male) commoners, men of the robe, men of the sword, respected (male) thinkers and authors, male artists and men of other inferior professions and, finally, at the fringes, ranked ladies and "Persons of both Sexes, chiefly of the lowest Order of the People, remarkable from only one circumstance in their Lives; namely such as lived to a great Age, deformed persons, Convicts, &c." Taken from Hargreaves, "Putting Faces to the Names," 23.

²⁰² "Professional Beauties." Excerpt from the *Saturday Review* published in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 3 September 1879, issue 7658.

this hypocritical situation. The *Saturday Review* wrote that “marriage seems to be a necessary preliminary to recognition as a beauty” first by a husband and then by “fashionable men of the faster sort.”²⁰³ Another critic stated sarcastically that, while “always a married woman,” the professional beauty is “a jewel of such magnificence as to dispense almost entirely with the setting of a husband,”²⁰⁴ in favor of the attentions of other men. Indeed, for women of the upper classes, being married often meant increased freedom for otherwise unacceptable dalliances.²⁰⁵ Frances, the Countess of Warwick, a former associate of the Marlborough Set, wrote in her memoirs: “What a man or woman might feel or do in private was their own affair, but our rule was No Scandal!”²⁰⁶ T. H. S. Escott also pointed to the hypocrisy of the upper classes, in which anyone could be forgiven and admitted into the inner sanctum, but only after pandering to and seeking dispensation from the proper authority (the Prince of Wales).²⁰⁷

At the time, an unmarried young woman’s reputation, including her sexual purity, was of utmost importance. Because their reputations could determine their marriage prospects, young upper class women were closely monitored when introduced to Society and expected to obtain a husband after a few London Seasons.²⁰⁸ In an 1880 illustration entitled “Where the Shoe Pinches” (**Figure 2.3**), George du Maurier (1834-1896) pokes fun at a “frisky matron” dressed in

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ “Professional Beauties.” *London Society: an Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation*, 36:215 (November 1879), 453.

²⁰⁵ Such married women were sometimes referred to as “frisky matrons.” Evans, *The Party that Lasted 100 Days*, 13. See the seventh chapter on evening parties for a better sense of the liberties married women might have in order to steal away for quiet, private moments with other guests.

²⁰⁶ Frances, Countess of Warwick, *Afterthoughts* (London: Cassel & Co., Ltd., 1931), 42.

²⁰⁷ Escott, *Society in London*, 53.

²⁰⁸ The “Season” refers to Society’s rigorous schedule of social events that started for some as early as February, when Parliament began their annual session, but the focus of which spread from April to August. See Hilary and Mary Evans, *The Party that Lasted 100 Days* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s Publishers Ltd., 1976).

a low-cut gown in preparation for the evening's social events. Her daughter, who is the very marriageable age of twenty, begs to participate in such events, but her mother disallows it, claiming that the "hollowness" of society would impinge upon her daughter's "girlish freshness." The mother's underlying reason, however, is that she is "unprepared to act the part of Chaperone and Wallflower," per the illustration's caption, and therefore unwilling to compete with her daughter for male attention.

Taint of trade

As di Bello points out, "It was not always clear to what extent a portrait sold well because the person was famous, or a person was famous because the portrait sold well."²⁰⁹ This context produced instances in which "beauty" was the only criteria to merit the attention of photographers and the press. One commentator wrote that:

The world expects to hear of the public performances of actresses and vocalists, and can feel interested in their sayings and manner of life; yet they have no right to know, and do not expect to know, through the newspapers all that can be told of beautiful women, married or single, in private life.²¹⁰

This author finds *public* discussion of the lives of *private* women unseemly and possibly threatening since it collapses a preexisting line between professional performer and any other woman whose beauty might merit more than a second glance. The lack of clarity regarding who was an appropriate subject for paragraphists' speculations reflected confusion regarding the phrase "professional beauty" itself. Purportedly, Queen Victoria disapproved of women receiving royalties for their portraits: she "strongly [objected] to the term 'professional beauty,'

²⁰⁹ Di Bello, "Carte-de-visite Celebrities," 243.

²¹⁰ "Society Journals and their Victims," *The Newcastle Courant, etc.*, 17 October 1789, issue 10685.

and, naturally enough, [asked] what is meant by it.”²¹¹ Some excused the phrase as useful: *The Dundee Courier & Argus* wrote that it “is misleading and has an odious sound, but it is convenient, and has passed into general use.”²¹² The “odious” sound of the phrase was tied, as I will later elaborate, with a problematic taint of trade. Further, as art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn has pointed out, it suggested anxieties relative to class and social climbing. “Professional beauty,” she writes, designated “a woman who [deployed] her personal qualifications and skills, after the middle-class model of professional self-advancement, to usurp an elite status ordinarily attainable only by right of birth.”²¹³ However, a number of women lumped together with the “professionals” had been born into the aristocratic class, and were thus already in possession of such elite status. General confusion about the phrase, which continues to the present, points to the increased fluidity and expanded roles of women in public spaces as consumers, observers, and performers.

A variety of phrases – including professional beauty, woman of fashion, and fashionable beauty – were used to refer to women in the public eye who were not necessarily stage actresses but who nonetheless performed to a public audience. They were often described negatively as women whose sole occupation was to garner attention in order to satisfy their personal vanity. For example, a reviewer in the *Illustrated London News* described the narcissism of “women of fashion.” These were:

women for whom we can say nothing else, women who move in what are called the upper circles, women who spend a great deal of money or of credit, women who give and go to a great many parties, women who put in an appearance wheresoever the booths of Vanity Fair are pitched, women who ride and drive in the Park and on the road, women who change their dresses some half-dozen times a day, women who consider it a religious

²¹¹ “Metropolitan Gossip,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, Saturday, 6 Sept 1879, issue 20050.

²¹² “Mrs. Langtry.” *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, Thursday, 21 August 1879, issue 8139.

²¹³ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Interpreting Sargent* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1999), 25-6.

duty to be presented at Court, women who probably put money into the pockets of Madame Rachel and her sisterhood; women, in fact, who make up the greater portion of what is commonly known as society, but who do little or nothing else and have little or no other claim to anybody's notice.²¹⁴

These women, the author points out, essentially do nothing but shop and *appear*: they present themselves strategically for the benefit of indiscriminate public audiences. On the other hand, a “fashionable woman” signaled someone slightly different. In May 1881, the *Lady's Pictorial* wrote about a Miss Cresswell:

[she] is a fashionable beauty whose charms have not been advertised by the paragraphists of the Society journals, so called, and the photographers. She is a fashionable, rather than a professional beauty. Miss Cresswell was not ‘invented’ by the Society journals, but, although she has not been photographed and puffed into unenviable notoriety, and is allowed to have a new bonnet or the headache without a public announcement being made of the fact, she is one of the most beautiful young ladies among the many beauties of the day.²¹⁵

Miss Cresswell cannot be considered a professional beauty since her celebrity has not been invented by paragraphists and photographers. Thus, her sartorial choices are not *advertised*, a word that in connection with “professional beauty” was equated with problematic self-marketing for the purpose of public attention and strategic liaisons with powerful men. The difference between “fashionable woman,” “woman of fashion,” and “professional beauty” was not always clear since many of their characteristics overlapped, and by the late 1870s the use of the latter

²¹⁴ Anonymous, *Illustrated London News*, 20 April 1878, no. 2025: 398. The “Park” referred to is Hyde Park. Madame Rachel (Sarah Rachel Russell, 1814-1880) sold cosmetics to London's wealthier women during the 1860s. Over a series of trials between 1868 and 1878, these products were found to be largely fraudulent. See Helen Rappaport, *Beautiful for Ever: Madame Rachel of Bond Street – Cosmetician, Con-Artist, and Blackmailer* (London: Vintage Books, 2012) and Aileen Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty: Painted Women & Cosmetic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

²¹⁵ The author continues that Miss Cresswell only came out the previous year, 1880, one that was “a trying season, which went hard with many of the favourites.” This could have been due to the presence of (married) Professional Beauties taking up an undue amount of male attention. *Lady's Pictorial*, 14 May 1881, No. 11, 243. As di Bello has pointed out, “fashionable” could also mean “fleeting:” not timeless, but rather “subject to random change.” Di Bello, “Carte-de-visite Celebrities,” 247.

two were in many cases implicitly tied to connotations of the streetwalker, or “public woman,”²¹⁶ who rendered herself up to the public gaze without discrimination. As stated by the *Lady’s Pictorial*: “The duties of a Professional Beauty... are to be all things to all men, and women also.”²¹⁷

On July 12, 1879 *The Whitehall Review* made a striking statement about Sarah Bernhardt’s participation in a London bazaar for a French charity.²¹⁸ Bernhardt was working madly to raise money by signing photographs for buyers. “What a cruel Turkish bath the business was to her,” wrote the *Review*:

She would dive for a photograph of herself, hastily scribble her signature, hand it to the buyer always with some pleasant little word, send him about his business, and repeat the performance with some fresh and willing victim. She positively *laboured*, and the work done by her must have entailed double the fatigue of that endured by the other *femmes vendeuses*.²¹⁹

Charity bazaars were one instance in which professional beauties were seen to actually *do* work, but this work, even if for a good cause, associated them with the same taint of trade that morally colored the sale of their portraits. By referring to the women managing the stalls as *femmes vendeuses* (saleswomen), the author linked them to commodity exchange in a variety of problematic ways. Assumptions were often made, for example, regarding the availability of women’s bodies who worked as shopgirls, actresses, and dancers. It was not a far stretch to conceive of the professional beauty as a similarly available, and even predatory, figure. Many,

²¹⁶ While Lynda Nead in *Victorian Babylon* has demonstrated that women’s social interactions within the streets of London were diverse and often composed of opportunities for flirtation and sexualized encounters, Rapport writes that a woman in public without a chaperone could be potentially mistaken for a “public woman.” See Rapport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 7.

²¹⁷ *Lady’s Pictorial*, no. 20, 16 July 1881, 475. This is in regards to the service of professional beauties at a charity bazaar, where their charm and beauty are strategically deployed to increase sales.

²¹⁸ Although not strictly a professional beauty, but rather a professional actress, Bernhardt (1844-1923) was linked with the Prince of Wales and friends with Langtry.

²¹⁹ Italics in the original. *The Whitehall Review*, 12 July 1879, 202.

including Langtry, Cornwallis West, and Wheeler, were linked with the Prince of Wales and thought to prey upon men's desires.

Outside of the charity bazaar, it was assumed that their self-advertisement was devoted to promoting the sale of their photographic portraits, and thereby their public profile. Indeed, one critic went so far, in an attack on Cornwallis West, to write:

When actresses get themselves taken it is excusable; when harlots... are sold from the windows of our fashionable shops, it is understood that they are as shameless as they are good-looking; but when a woman of position, such as Mrs. West, classes herself with the latter, she has only herself to blame if the casual purchaser considers her to be in 'the same street.'²²⁰

In no uncertain terms, the author equated professional beauty with public woman, an accusation that was doubled in severity due to the fact that Cornwallis West represented the aristocratic class. A joke made in *Funny Folks* riffed on the idea that ultimately all women were for sale, depending on the depth of one's wallet:

THE LATEST FANCY-FAIR BAIT. - (Introductions to beauties and persons of distinction, at so much per head) - Enterprising Swell - 'This way to introduction boudoir! Terms most moderate. Introduction to professional beauty, two shillings; fashionable authoress, half a crown; countesses, marchionesses, and baronesses, a guinea a piece; belle of the season (only just out), five pounds; duchess (including one of her grace's cards for your card-basket), ten guineas only!'²²¹

Professional beauties undoubtedly benefited financially from strategic liaisons. As one writer commented:

²²⁰ "Libels of Mrs. Langtry and Mrs. Cornwallis West." *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, Monday, 13 October 1879, issue 8184.

²²¹ *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Friday, 6 June 1879. A shilling was worth twelve pennies. A half crown was worth two shillings and six pence, rendering a full crown worth five shillings. A full pound was composed of twenty shillings and also called a sovereign. Kelley Graham writes that the guinea was "a somewhat fictitious coin not minted after 1813. The idea of a guinea, however, continued to be used by shops selling luxury goods, or by important doctors and other professionals. The guinea was worth twenty-one shillings – or a pound plus a shilling – and makers of luxury goods announced their prices in guineas rather than pounds. A rich customer who paid the guinea price had the indulgent experience of paying the extra shilling to show that paying did not matter at all." See Kelley Graham, *Gone to the Shops: Shopping in Victorian England* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 12-13.

Besides the delightful tribute to personal vanity, the trade of a professional beauty must be an uncommonly paying one, judging from all we hear. A kind of *corbeille* of magnificent underclothing, valued at £1000, is reported to have been one of the offerings of a noble earl; and a costly parasol handle, set in jewels, the gift of another member of the aristocracy. As to bracelets, earrings, and brooches which pour in anonymously, they are countless.²²²

The Prince of Wales went so far as to build a house Langtry, which they shared while she was his mistress.²²³ Milliners and couturiers capitalized on a professional beauty's fame by lending their newest fashions.²²⁴ It was not clear, however, if professional beauties gained royalties from the sale of their portraits. Reportedly, the Queen had

heard of ladies who boast of the sums of money realised by the sale of their portraits, and of more than one 'professional beauty' covering the expense of extravagant clothes by the sale of herself in various costumes and attitudes; that one beauty in particular has only to invent a new style in which to be taken when a little more money than usual is required.²²⁵

A scandalous *Town Talk* article published in October 1879 described Cornwallis West as driving round "to the various shops to collect her commission on the cartes-de-visite and the cabinets that have been added [of her] during the previous day."²²⁶ However, a more lenient author wrote that "no one supposed that Mrs. Cornwallis West and Mrs. Langtry participate in such gains"²²⁷ made from their photographic portraits. While some women may have been paid to sit for

²²² "Personal and Society Gossip (From 'Mayfair.')" *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent*, Saturday, 14 September 1878, issue 7483.

²²³ Called Red House, the building is located in Bournemouth. See Aronson, *The King in Love*, 92-3 and Laura Beatty, *Lillie Langtry: Manners, Masks and Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999).

²²⁴ See Catherine Hindson, "'Mrs. Langtry Seems to Be on the Way to a Fortune': the Jersey Lily and Models of Late Nineteenth-Century Fame," in *In the Limelight and under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity*, ed. Su Holmes and Diane Negra (New York: Continuum, 2011): 17-36.

²²⁵ "Metropolitan Gossip," *The Belfast News-Letter*, Saturday, 6 September 1879, issue 20050.

²²⁶ "Libels on Mrs. Langtry and Mrs. Cornwallis West." *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, Monday, 13 October 1879, issue 8184.

²²⁷ "Society Journals and their Victims," *The Newcastle Courant, etc.*, 17 October 1879, issue 10685.

specific photographers, it seems most plausible that photographers and print sellers alone kept the profits from individual sale unless otherwise agreed.²²⁸ If a subject's portrait seemed interesting or attractive enough to warrant display in a shop window, a photographer had the right to reproduce and sell that portrait without the approval of the sitter or to sell or lease the negative to other print sellers.²²⁹

Critics complained that these women debased the purpose of beauty by using it for personal gain, and even into the twenty-first century one use of "professional" retains this connotation in reference to someone who "'makes a trade' of anything that is properly pursued from higher motives."²³⁰ The *London Society* author of a particularly scathing and long-winded

²²⁸ According to copyright law of the time, the "author" of the photograph - most often the photographer - had sole ownership of the negatives produced. The British Fine Arts Copyright Act of 1862 conferred copyright protection upon photographs produced from the negatives for the life of the author plus seven years. Enforcement of the Act in respect to photography proved difficult in some cases due to a vague definition of "originality," which was problematized when dealing with reproductions of reproductions (such as photographs of engravings, see in particular *Gambart v. Ball* [1862]), and "author," a word that was not necessarily associated with the machine-based process of producing a photograph. However, the Act did largely protect the owners of photographic negatives as "authors" except in some cases where it was demonstrated, such as in *Nottage v. Kennard* (1883) that the person who arranged the sitter was closer akin to "author" than the proprietor of the studio, who did not always arrange and/or take the photograph. See "Gambart v. Ball," *London Times*, 13 December 1862; Ernest Gambart, "The Law of Copyright: To the Editor of the Times" *London Times*, December 24, 1862; "Nottage and Others v. Jackson," *London Times*, 9 May 1883; "Court of Appeal. (*Before the MASTER of the ROLLS and LORDS JUSTICES COTTON and BOWEN*) Nottage v. Jackson," *London Times*, 3 August 1883. See also di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography*, 111, as well as her essay "Elizabeth Thompson and 'Patsy' Cornwallis West as Carte-de-visite Celebrities," *History of Photography*, 35:3 (2011): 240-49, in which she considers the status of copyright law in 1879. The topic was brought to public attention by the libel trial brought by Mr. Cornwallis West against Adolphus Rosenberg, the author of the earlier cited criticism placing Cornwallis West "in the same street" as actresses and harlots. According to the law, the "original" work covered by copyright was the negative itself, rather than any prints produced from it. If a woman were famous enough, it is possible that she could have received royalties.

²²⁹ It seems most likely that photographers retained the original negatives, especially for popular celebrity subjects. Many of the cabinet cards and cartes-de-visite I have studied at the Harry Ransom Center and University of Washington Special Collections feature the photographer's logo as well as inked or blind stamps applied with the print seller's mark. Marion & Company of London, for example, is blind stamped upon a number of cabinet cards originally produced by photographer Lafayette of Dublin. It therefore seems that some photographers of celebrities manufactured their own prints, and marked them accordingly, which they then sold to other retailers, who added their own stamp. There was also, of course, a vibrant market for "spurious" (illegal) copies.

²³⁰ See the Oxford English Dictionary, second edition, 2001, 573. The same edition defines "professional beauty" as "a phrase humorously applied to a lady with the implication that she makes it her business to be a beauty, or to be known as such." The updated online version of the OED defines professional beauty as "a woman who is famed for or makes a living out of her beauty." Accessed 19 February 2015. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152053?redirectedFrom=professional#eid>

critique, reproduced in excerpts throughout the country, made the “professional” nature of her work explicit by comparing it with other established nineteenth century professions:

What his tongue and knowledge of the law are to the barrister, what anatomy is to the surgeon and medicine to the physician, what art is to the painter and the sculptor, what mechanics are to the engineer, her beauty is to the professional belle. It is her stock-in-trade, and often her sole credential for social support.²³¹

While the former required extensive training and knowledge acquisition, the beauty’s “stock-in-trade” was a divinely-given gift abused by female vanity. Another author compared her unfavorably with the phony medicine of a quack doctor, who, like the professional beauty, took up inordinate amounts of space in shop windows and newspaper columns to ply a dishonest trade: “She even rivals the patent medicine monger... She is not to be beaten by the quack, and occupies a large space in every shop window of a certain type, portrayed in as many aspects as the unfailing physic.” By her many poses and postures she “hopes to gain even more celebrity than the anti bilious pills in the chemist’s shop window next door.”²³² Indeed, critics considered the professional beauty’s self-marketing a purposeful corruption of a natural gift. Rendered in service to her own narcissism rather than to some loftier goal, she all too purposefully used her beauty to indulge the market possibilities of the modern urban environment and its attendant celebrity culture.

²³¹ “Professional Beauties.” *London Society: an Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation*, 36:215 (November 1879), 452.

²³² “Professional Beauties.” Published from the *Saturday Review* in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 3 September 1879, issue 7658. By “certain type” of shop, the author is most likely referring to those who exhibit photographs of a more scandalous nature and thus are perceived to have laxer morals. Hilary and Mary Evans write that the women “who gave their permission would have their photographs displayed in the windows, along with portraits of the professional beauties and other ‘fashionables’ of the current Season.” Supposedly, therefore, an appropriately modest woman would not give permission to exhibit in shops deemed uncouth, and supposedly photographers would respect the wishes of female sitters regarding their desire (or lack thereof) to be exhibited. Although photographers retained the right to their negatives, and could thus choose to exhibit whomever they chose, some may have chosen not to alienate or scandalize their clientele and thus respect their wishes regarding self-display. This also demonstrates that sitters had, to an extent, input regarding the exhibition and sale of their portraits. See Evans, *The Party that Lasted 100 Days*, 152.

Public intimacy of photographic portraits

One's representation was vulnerable to purchase and manipulation by undesirable consumers, a situation that could not be avoided due to copyright.²³³ Professional beauties, however, threw caution to the wind, and were photographed "in infinite varieties of poses"²³⁴ in order to fulfill the demand for novelty made by the modern consumer market. In her memoir, Langtry recalled these attempts in detail:

Like every other fashionable rage, [the photograph craze] had its comic side, and, after the shopkeepers had exhibited my pictures in their windows alongside royalties and distinguished statesmen, all the pretty women in society rushed pell-mell to be photographed, that they, too, might be placed on view. They were portrayed in every imaginable pose. Anything the ingenuity of the camera-man could devise to produce an original or startling effect was utilised with more or less happy results. Some smothered themselves in furs to brave photographic snowstorms; some sat in swings; some lolled dreamily in hammocks; others carried huge bunches of flowers (indigenous to the dusty studio and looking painfully artificial), and one was actually reproduced gazing at a dead fish!²³⁵

The Gernsheim Collection at the Harry Ransom Center provides cabinet card examples of each of these descriptions (except, alas, for the dead fish), which demonstrates the degree to which these women and celebrity photographers attempted to enliven the studio environment to arrest the glances of those passing by shop windows. Once "hooked," a viewer was drawn towards the subject by her come-hither gazes and the appearance of public intimacy created by pose and composition.

²³³ Apparently the answer to this conundrum was to have no photographs taken at all, or to seek legal council before having one's picture taken. "To keep control of oneself or of one's work as the originals of their reproductions, legal representation had to come before visual representation." Di Bello, "Carte-de-visite Celebrities," 249.

²³⁴ Ware's dictionary states that it was in currency from 1879-82, but, although I have yet to locate the original use of the phrase, it enjoyed wide-spread currency as early as 1878 and throughout the 1880s. Ware, *Passing English of the Victorian Era*, 201.

²³⁵ Lillie Langtry, *The Days That I Knew* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1925), 44.

A primary method for bridging the distance between viewer and celebrity figure was to place the sitter's body in the foreground of the cabinet card, thereby bringing her much closer to the picture plane than the distanced and full-figured royal bodies in Mayall's *The Royal Album*. For example, in a hand-painted cabinet card the Countess Dudley holds flowers "indigenous to the dusty studio" in a hand-colored portrait.²³⁶ **(Figure 2.4)** Seated and facing the viewer with lilies in her hands and lap, she wears a striped high-necked long-sleeved bodice and ample skirt painted a rich mauve with white lace at the cuffs and collar. Her hair is parted down the middle and pulled back low on her neck with a few small curls at her forehead and pendant earrings in her pierced ears. Cropped at the knees, she is placed close to the picture plane in front of an unobtrusive nondescript background. Seated as if slightly below the viewer, she presents us with an offering of flowers, symbols of beauty from a Beauty. The seriousness of her expression signals the magnitude of receiving such an offering from a woman established as Britain's most preeminent aristocratic Beauty.²³⁷

In an unpainted cabinet card, **(Figure 2.5)** the backdrop of a dark textile patterned with foliage and birds presses Lady Lonsdale's body forward. A horizontal neoclassical band passing behind her head frames and arrests the vertical rise of her body. Cropped at the hips, her frontal pose presents a detailed view of her highly embellished and tightly corseted bodice, the square collar of which rises up behind her long neck and oval face in which her large, heavy-lidded eyes gaze directly at the viewer. In contrast to the Countess Dudley's serious expression, the edges of Lady Lonsdale's mouth curve slightly upward, presenting a graciously composed visage. The

²³⁶ On hand-coloring techniques, see Heinz K. and Bridget A. Henisch, *The Painted Photograph 1839-1914* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). On the creation of aniline dyes, used in many of the photographs of relevance here, see Simon Garfield, *Mauve: How One Man Invented a Color that Changed the World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001).

²³⁷ As mentioned in the footnotes to the introduction, the Countess of Dudley had enjoyed a reputation as a leading beauty since the 1860s.

decorative foliage of the backdrop and the flowers at her chest allude to femininity and domesticity, serving to soften the potentially aggressive qualities of her confident gaze and forcefully present body.

A loose cabinet card of the aristocratic Cornwallis West by W. & D. Downey (**Figure 2.6**) depicts her reclined amongst furs amidst a “photographic snowstorm.”²³⁸ The fur fringe of her attire nestles her more firmly within the embrace of her throne of pelts. The light tone of her hat and bodice pops her figure forward from the darkened background, delineating her body and the dark curls of her hair. With head tilted forward, Cornwallis West looks directly at the viewer with face in three-quarter profile. The slightly down-turned corners of her small mouth melt into her smooth-skinned face crowned by gracefully sloping eyebrows and bisected by a straight nose. She holds her mouth slightly open, as if preparing to speak, a detail noticeable only when the photograph is brought near to the viewer’s face for close scrutiny. When the negative from this sitting was used to produce a carte-de-visite (**Figure 2.7**), rather than reduce the cabinet card image to fit a smaller format, it was reproduced at the same size and cropped, cutting out the majority of the backdrop in order to focus more intently on her face, bust, and come-hither gaze.

A second cabinet card of Cornwallis West creates a sense of public intimacy without the attention of her darkly focused gaze. (**Figure 2.8**) Drastically cropped, this image focuses on her face, shoulders, and arm against a nondescript background. Seated in a chair with her back to the viewer, she twists her body to the right in order to prop her arm along its top edge. The perfectly-fitted glove on her right hand stretches tautly around her knuckles and pools in dainty wrinkles at the curve of her wrist. Although slightly faded, this photograph reproduces the darker tone of her glove in much more detail than her exposed skin, rendering that hand and its

²³⁸ Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 44.

living grasp more sensual than even her tightly bodiced dress or exposed ear. The soft petals of her bouquet touch her face, creating an imaginatively tactile extension of the lace at her wrist and neck and curls along her forehead. The bend of her arm creates a circle through which the viewer's eye may travel from face to limb, perhaps pausing to enjoy the delineation of her well-endowed bosom. Although she gazes to the right, the difference of a split second could bring her attention to the viewer, who has caught her in a moment of reverie and approached, perhaps unnoticed, to within the span of her arm: tantalizing close, but never close enough to touch.

In a hand-colored cabinet card, Cornwallis West seems on the brink of falling into the arms of the viewer. **(Figure 2.9)** She wears a richly painted high-necked purple dress with form-fitting bodice, white lace at sleeves and throat, flowers upon her left breast, and four large yellow medallions placed from hip to hip that complement an accent of yellow at her neck. She poses with her knees on a woven hammock slung from the upper corners of the image and rests the entire left side of her body along the hammock's vertical sweep. Holding her arms out from her body and upright at the elbows, she grasps two green vines and pulls them apart to reveal her face. A string encircles her left wrist and disappears into the foliage, hinting at the extra supports necessary to hold this pose.²³⁹ Placed at a diagonal across the composition, Cornwallis West's body hangs strangely suspended and precariously balanced. Pressing her bust forward with arms extended, her body tilts forward, yet her composed expression reveals no sense of urgency. Indeed, why should she worry? The viewer stands before her suspended body and knows exactly how to catch her should she fall: by grasping the meticulously small waist delineated by the dark purple aniline dye of her dress.

²³⁹ An uncolored cabinet card from the same sitting can be found in the National Portrait Gallery in London (NPG x128475). Seated on the hammock, Cornwallis West holds a parasol over her shoulder and shows an extensive amount of her left ankle from under short skirts. The print is dated 1878 and was produced by W. & D. Downey.

Roach writes that the possessor of *It* and all of its contradictory qualities (including simultaneously “strength *and* vulnerability, innocence *and* experience, and singularity *and* typicality”²⁴⁰) must keep “a precarious balance between such mutually exclusive alternatives, suspended at the tipping point like a tightrope dancer on one foot,”²⁴¹ or like a professional beauty balanced on one knee in a hammock. The tension of Cornwallis West’s tilting body has been safely caught in the sensitized salts of the photographic negative, and anchored firmly into place by deeply hued aniline dyes, yet the viewer can read a narrative of falling. Indeed, the “precarious balance” maintained by celebrity figures makes for particularly “breathless spectatorship,”²⁴² and this motivated the production and sale of such novel photographic portraits.

In October 1879, Mr. Cornwallis West brought a libel suit against Adolphus Rosenberg, the proprietor of *Town Talk*, for a critique he had written of the *Beauty* earlier that month. The article, entitled “Mrs. Cornwallis West at Home,” brought Mr. Cornwallis West to task since he “indulged his “wife’s stupid vanity” by allowing her photograph “to be exposed for sale at a price ranging from one penny to two shillings and sixpence.”²⁴³ As if this were not bad enough, Rosenberg emphasized that these were “purchased principally by cads,”²⁴⁴ men who treated women – and perhaps their representations – dishonorably. Rosenberg implied a form of class-transgressing prostitution, as cited earlier: “when a woman of position, such as Mrs. West,

²⁴⁰ Roach, *It*, 8.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴³ “Libels of Mrs. Langtry and Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, Monday, 13 October 1879, issue 8184.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

classes herself with [actresses and harlots], she has only herself to blame if the casual purchaser considers her to be in ‘the same street.’”²⁴⁵ The portrait of Cornwallis West suspended in a hammock seemed to present tacit complicity: the confident, composed face and body of a highly recognizable aristocratic woman chooses to fall forward off of the metaphorical pedestal composed of her elite class, beauty, and gender, and into the hands of undesirable collectors.

When considered within the dichotomies that Roach writes activates double-bodied celebrity persons, Rosenberg’s public accusation of narcissism, vanity, and greed represents a *stigmata* that contrasts with accounts of her *charismata* of personal beauty and sparkling personality. In the months before Rosenberg’s *Town Talk* essay, *The Whitehall Review* – a conservative weekly journal dedicated to society, finance, and politics that also incorporated Society gossip and notes on art exhibitions – presented a vision of the *charismata* of her beauty, charm, and wit. The second in a series of three “Reigning Beauties” that included Langtry and Wheeler, Cornwallis West’s biographical sketch was published on 26 July, 1879, although readers had to wait until 23 August for her lithographic portrait.²⁴⁶ The *Review* contributor compares her with the Venus de Milo, writing that she possesses “the classical outline of the high-born and high-bred Milesian.”²⁴⁷ Further, the color of her eyes “is almost dazzling, and they glow with a glorious expressiveness.”²⁴⁸ In her bust-length portrait, (**Figure 2.10**) artist Adrian Stokes (1854-1935) accentuates the outward gaze of these large, dark eyes. Posed in

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ When Langtry’s portrait was published on 19 July, an accompanying note advertised that “an original crayon drawing of Mrs. Cornwallis West (with brief memoir)” would be available 26 July. However, on that date, a portrait of Lady Huntingdon greeted viewers, with a brief mention that “As Mrs. Cornwallis West’s Portrait was unsatisfactory, the publication of the picture is postponed.” Her “brief memoir” appeared on 26 July, and her portrait was finally published on 23 August. See *The Whitehall Review*, 19 July, 26 July, and 23 August, 1879: 235, 244, and n.p.

²⁴⁷ “Reigning Beauties. II. Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Whitehall Review*, 26 July 1879, 248.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 248.

three-quarter profile facing to the right, the “regular features”²⁴⁹ of Cornwallis West’s composed face are framed by dark curls, a striped toque featuring a draped ostrich feather pinned high above her forehead, and a neck scarf tied at the back and draped behind her right shoulder. Highlighted in white, the scarf and stripes of the toque add chromatic range to the portrait and serve to emphasize the depths of her dark eyes. Her shoulders and bust disappear into long rapid strokes overlaid by vertical lines evoking the pattern of her high-necked bodice. The bands of her dress vertically stabilize her portrait but also direct attention upward to the sweep and fold of her scarf, the tight curls of her hair, and the starburst of radiated lines of her hat rendered in feather and white bands.

This visual liveliness, combined with the sitter’s direct gaze at the viewer, corresponds with the author’s description of her sparkling personality. She has, the author writes, “an almost mesmeric influence,” for “her repartee is as unrivaled as her surpassing loveliness.”²⁵⁰ She is known for her ready wit, extreme good-nature, and love of fun and amusement.²⁵¹ She displays the powerful combination of regular features, fine eyes, and an “ever-varying mobility of expression, perpetually changing with the mood, now grave, now gay, according to the fleeting fancy of the hour.”²⁵² Langtry remembered her similarly as “petite, with a vivid complexion, golden hair worn short... and flashing hazel eyes; and equally attractive whether walking, on

²⁴⁹ The full quote stated that unless critics “lay down an inexorable canon that regular features are inconsistent with perfection, [Mrs. Cornwallis West] will escape the snap and snarl of professional detraction, since she possesses the classical outline of the high-born and high-bred Milesian.” “Reigning Beauties. II. Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Whitehall Review*, 26 July 1879, 248.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁵¹ Indeed, the author comments that she has a reputation as a bit of a prankster who enjoys practical joking, particularly when there is ice on the table. This references an incident in which the Prince of Wales had ice placed down his back as a joke. The story has been attributed both to Langtry and Cornwallis West. In Langtry’s memoirs, she denies having been the culprit while, strangely, the author of the introduction to her memoirs states that she in fact said she had done it.

²⁵² “Reigning Beauties. II. Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Whitehall Review*, 26 July 1879, 248.

horseback, or in a ball gown. She was high-spirited, vivacious, and extremely witty, sometimes audaciously so, and the possessor of a fine singing voice.²⁵³ Jennie Churchill recalled her vivacious animation: “It was difficult to find a fault in her bright, sparkling face, as full of animation as her brown eyes were of Irish wit and fun. She had a lovely complexion, curly brown hair, and a perfect figure.”²⁵⁴

These accounts emphasize her beauty and vivaciousness but also allude to tension between proper feminine wit, genteel teasing, audacious humor, and practical joking. Stokes’ portrait was clearly sketched after a photograph by W. & D. Downey, a cabinet card print of which is available in the National Portrait Gallery. **(Figure 2.11)** A study of this and the previous photographs discussed here reveals that, when in repose, Cornwallis West’s small mouth had a tendency to fall slightly at the edges, resulting in a much more serious expression not altogether in keeping with her playful reputation. Thus, Stokes reproduces the hat, scarf, and striped dress, but softens her serious gaze by enlarging her eyes and modifying her mouth from a rigid line into softly plump and slightly upturned lips. According to Stokes, Cornwallis West appears both a classical, timeless beauty as well as the fashionably modern woman described by *The Whitehall Review*.

Another “Reigning Beauty” was Margaret Wheeler. Her lithographic portrait, also based on a drawing by Stokes, and biographical sketch appeared in *The Whitehall Review* on 2 August, 1879. **(Figure 2.12)** The author reminisces that it was along the Terrace of the Royal Yacht Club at Cowes the year before last (1877) that Mrs. Wheeler was first seen:

there appeared on the terrace a figure clad in a trim serge dress, neither too short nor too tall – the happy medium – slight, but beautifully moulded. A face which to look on was

²⁵³ Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 45.

²⁵⁴ Cornwallis West, *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, 107.

to love, it seemed so thoroughly candid, truthful, and unaffected; a mass of dark brown hair, under a delightful little straw hat; a pair of lovely dark brown eyes; a brilliant complexion... such was the apparition which completely awoke us from our lazy day dream.²⁵⁵

Stokes's bust-length portrait of Wheeler reveals little of her "beautifully moulded" figure but does communicate her wistful heavy-lidded loveliness, long straight nose, and small but finely formed mouth. Wheeler turns her face and far-off gaze to the left, slightly tilting her head towards her shoulder in order to emphasize the long line of her neck emerging from a ruffled collar that completes the oval frame of the curls crowning her brow. The dress depicted in this portrait, which features a pleated ruffle running over her right shoulder, looks very much like that in a carte-de-visite from the Victoria and Albert Museum, (**Figure 2.13**) which suggests that Stokes may have been working from a photograph from this sitting. Placed in profile view with her back facing the camera, the viewer is placed in the same relationship with her body as with a previous cabinet card portrait of Cornwallis West, (**Figure 2.8**) as if having come upon her while in reverie.

In an unpainted cabinet card, (**Figure 2.14**) Wheeler and a generous portion of her "beautifully moulded" figure peek between drapes, the sunflower pattern of which compliments the floral fabric running up the sleeve of her dress.²⁵⁶ A comparison of Stokes's portrait with this photograph reveals that the artist reduced the weight of her jawline and rendered her lips slightly smaller and more plump. He preserved the pert point of her straight nose and even further exaggerated the size of her eyes. His drawing captures a beauty described by Langtry as one "of

²⁵⁵ "Reigning Beauties. III. Mrs. Wheeler." *The Whitehall Review*, 2 August 1879, 273.

²⁵⁶ The Harry Ransom Center holds a second print of this portrait that is brightly painted. The Victoria and Albert Museum has a carte-de-visite printed from the same sitting that was cropped to focus on her face, as was the previously discussed carte-de-visite and cabinet pairing of Cornwallis West.

line and expression rather than colour”²⁵⁷ and by Churchill as “gentle, appealing... very fascinating.”²⁵⁸ The organic lines of her soulful beauty in Stokes’s portrait hints at the style of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s (1828-1882) paintings of the Aesthetic beauty Jane Burden Morris (1839-1914). In a pencil and red chalk drawing of Wheeler, Henry Holiday (1839-1927) also emphasized the Aesthetic beauty of her hooded eyes, small lips, oblong face with pointed chin, with hair parted down the center gathered loosely at the base of her neck.²⁵⁹

By the 1880s critics derided the limpid, weak, and depleted bodies of Aesthetic beauties, but *The Whitehall Review*’s description assured readers that Wheeler was anything but. The author wrote that her fine figure, a sign of her excellent health, was seen to best advantage when on board her husband’s yacht the *Foxhound* and elaborated that:

people who know her best say that no living woman has so high a courage. She loves yachting in a great measure on account of its danger, and keenly relishes an adventure. But, when the peril is over and the excitement has subsided, she does not care to talk about the details of the incident.²⁶⁰

Lest such physical vigor be interpreted as vulgar, the *Review* described her as “quite placidly tempered.”²⁶¹ Further per the author, she enjoyed dancing and, while “it [had] been unjustly said that women who are fond of dancing are usually flirts,” she was “a notable exception to the

²⁵⁷ Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 45.

²⁵⁸ She was, Churchill remembered, “quite different, with dark hair and deep grey-blue eyes, which held you by their gentle, appealing expression. She was very fascinating.” Cornwallis West, *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, 105.

²⁵⁹ The National Portrait Gallery in London has on file a reproduction of this drawing in pencil and red chalk of Mrs. Wheeler by Henry Holiday (1839-1927) sold at Christie’s on 12 June 1992.

²⁶⁰ “THE ‘WHITEHALL’ PORTRAITS CXXXVIII. – MRS. WHEELER.” *The Whitehall Review*, 9 August 1879, 292.

²⁶¹ “Reigning Beauties. III. Mrs. Wheeler.” *The Whitehall Review*, 2 August 1879, 292.

rule.”²⁶² Indeed, rather than fall victim to the claims of vanity and flattery, Wheeler had retained her unaffected manner and the steadfast faithfulness of her friends.²⁶³

In 1881 the *Lady's Pictorial* equally lauded Mrs. Wheeler and drew an implied connection between her healthy outdoor activity and motherhood:

Wherever the slim, graceful little figure, cheerful voice, and beautifully clear olive complexion of the lady whom Mr. Luke Wheeler is proud to call his wife appear, there, you may be sure, will be found all that is brightest and best in fashionable society. Whether in town or country, she is the life and soul of her circle, and only those who know how famous and experienced a yachtswoman this charming lady is can appreciate what she is when at sea. She is the happy mother of some very pretty children.²⁶⁴

Wheeler was a relatively new face during the 1878 Season, and one commentator wrote that “she seems likely... to attain high photographic fame.”²⁶⁵ However, few known images of her exist in public collections: it is nearly as if she closed the sunflower-patterned drapes of a popular photographic portrait (**Figure 2.14**) and, in so doing, disappeared from the historical record.

Premier professional beauty Lillie Langtry presents an entirely different situation, for her life is well-documented with photographs, memoirs, and biographies. Before her lengthy career as a stage actress, Langtry’s fame revolved around her fairytale as a naïve country girl turned mistress to the Prince of Wales. Posited as a simple and innocent dean’s daughter from rural

²⁶² Ibid., 273. The author states that Mrs. Wheeler has even snubbed royalty, yet, somehow, Mrs. Wheeler’s aloofness, which stands in contrast to Langtry’s geniality and willingness to dance with all partners, snubbing no one, does not disqualify her from being an admirable woman, but rather attests to her steadfastness. Certainly these points contradict each other, but it seems – and perhaps the author wishes to imply this point – that beauty excuses all.

²⁶³ The author writes that she has remained “unscathed, uninjured by what has proved so baleful an offering to others,” although the author does not specify the nature of these baleful offerings. “Reigning Beauties. III. Mrs. Wheeler.” *The Whitehall Review*, 2 August 1879, 273.

²⁶⁴ “English Ladies No. 21 — Mrs. Wheeler.” *Lady's Pictorial*, Saturday, 6 August 1881, No. 23, 540. Langtry does not mention Wheeler’s personality in her memoirs, but does write that “Mrs. Luke Wheeler, another of the ‘professionals,’ was tall and slender, with a very small head and face, and regular features. Her beauty was of line and expression rather than colour, and, while disappointing to some people when first seen, its charm grew on acquaintance.” See Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 45.

²⁶⁵ “London Gossip (From Truth.)” *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc.*, Saturday, 17 August, 1878, issue 4800.

Jersey, she was raised aloft as the most classically beautiful woman of the day. In an early cabinet card, **(Figure 2.15)** Langtry is tight-laced into a belted low-necked dress with elbow-length sleeves. Standing behind a bannister, she faces the viewer with her head turned to the right and chin tucked to elongate the line of her neck. A tall drape frames the left side of the print, while a bouquet of flowers and opera glasses rest on the banister, thereby evoking an opera stall, a venue for seeing and being seen. In this cabinet card, Langtry has put down her opera glasses and tilts her face and gaze away in order to clearly delineate her cleft chin, nose, light pools of eyes, and sculptural neck and shoulders. The opera glasses imply the expectation that she will be viewed and scrutinized, but, with her hand resting mere inches from their cool cylinders, this composition alludes to the possibility that she might look back.

The lithographic portrait of Langtry published by *The Whitehall Review* on 19 July, 1879 presents her face at an angle identical to that in the cabinet card.²⁶⁶ **(Figure 2.16)** The expressive energy of the artist's lines illuminates Langtry's hair, simply pulled back into a low knot at the nape of her neck and crowned by gently curling fringe over her forehead. Her shoulders disappear into energetic horizontal strokes that evoke the simplicity of the black mourning dress with simple neck ruffle she wore during her first London Season. Her right shoulder dips downward at a soft angle from that of her face, which is turned rather exaggeratedly towards her left shoulder with chin down, thereby emphasizing the long line of her neck emerging from the soft folds of her ruffled collar into the gentle curl of her chignon. Langtry's large eyes under low brows stare dreamily out of the right frame. The delicate outline of her slightly bridged nose

²⁶⁶ The portraits of Cornwallis West and Wheeler feature the signature of portraitist Adrian Stokes. The portrait of Langtry, however, is not signed, though the style is very similar to the others. In the issue of 3 July, the *Whitehall Review* advertised that an "original sketch" of Langtry would be available by the seventeenth and published in the issue of the nineteenth, though unfortunately it does not specify who the artist will be. See *Whitehall Review*, 3 July 1879, 185.

leads to a soft point, under which reside slightly flared nostrils, a carefully shaded philtrum, and full sculpted lips. The artist's modeling of her indented chin and the sfumato at the corner of her mouth soften the firmness of her features. Small eccentricities – an unruly eyebrow, the bridge of the nose, wisps of hair – remind viewers of the corporeal realities of her body.

In keeping with the other lithographic portraits, this artist has enlarged her eyes, slightly reduced the vertical length of her face, and refined her jawline. These modifications signal the artist's translation of Langtry's powerful and even heavy features into a vision of delicate girlhood. The portrait thus complements the accompanying biography's description of the sitter as a youthful, honest personality. The author of this passage writes:

You are spell-bound by her ineffable sweetness before you have exchanged hardly a dozen words with her... [she has] a delicious manner, simple and sympathetic... and she talks at once so prettily and so musically that you are insensibly impressed with the idea of her absolute sincerity. The bright ringing treble, the light springy step, the happy halcyon view of life characteristic of girlhood, are still hers.²⁶⁷

This image of girlish simplicity corresponded with the story of her rise, which followed a country-girl-turned-socialite trajectory: born into a respectable family on the rural Isle of Jersey, Langtry enjoyed a tomboy upbringing amidst a passel of brothers. After marrying Edward Langtry in 1874, she convinced her husband, supposedly a wealthy Irish landowner with a beautiful yacht, to move to the sparkling metropolis of London in 1876. Unfortunately, Edward disliked the city and, it turned out, had very little money. They had few friends, but in April 1877 they fortuitously met Lord Ranelagh, who had vacationed on Jersey and had been struck by Langtry's beauty as a young girl.²⁶⁸ He promptly invited the couple to an evening reception at the home of Lady Sebright, which the Langtrys attended in May 1877. During this event, Langtry's

²⁶⁷ "Reigning Beauties. I. Mrs. Langtry" in *The Whitehall Review* 19 July 1879, 224.

²⁶⁸ Lord Ranelagh had met Langtry because of his acquaintance with her father William Corbet Le Breton, the Dean of Jersey.

classical beauty, striking blue eyes, unfashionably quaint black mourning dress, and simple hair style made her the cynosure of all eyes, including those of artists John Everett Millais (1829-1896) and Frank Miles (1852-1891). Because of these acquaintances, her social network soon included Whistler, Edward Poynter (1836-1919), and Wilde, who hyperbolically lauded her stunning beauty in his poem *The New Helen*.²⁶⁹ Soon after, she sat for Millais's *Effie Deans* (1877) and Poynter's *Nausicaa* (1877). Her remarkable beauty garnered attention in the papers,²⁷⁰ and on 24 May, 1877 she was formally introduced to the Prince of Wales, soon thereafter becoming his mistress. In May 1878, Millais, Poynter, and Henry Weigall (1829-1925) exhibited portraits of her at the Royal Academy, the most popular of which (Millais's *The Jersey Lily*), attracted such large crowds that it had to be roped off for safety. The same month, she was formally presented at Court to Queen Victoria, who remained at the event (rather than leaving early, as she often did) in order to see this exceptional new beauty. Langtry hats, shoes, and jewelry flooded the market. Viewers scrambled to see her in person, and all doors to elite Society events were thrown open to her.

As Lara Perry writes, "The role of the 'beauty' carried connotations both of exemplary feminine behavior and of the temptations of excess: it was a socially desirable quality to possess, but to exploit or exercise it in certain ways was dangerous. In contemporary life, as in history painting, female beauty was an ambiguous gift."²⁷¹ Langtry's beauty did not exempt her from criticism, particularly because some of her portraits appeared too risqué. For example, a cabinet

²⁶⁹ Heather Marcovitch has pointed out that scholars have differing opinions about the extent to which Wilde "created" Langtry. Marcovitch posits Langtry as a work of art that Wilde attempted to shape. Heather Marcovitch, *The Art of the Pose: Oscar Wilde's Performance Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

²⁷⁰ Laura Beatty writes that *Vanity Fair* published a blurb about this new beautiful Jersey Aphrodite as early as 19 May 1877. See Beatty, *Lillie Langtry*, 81.

²⁷¹ Perry, *History's Beauties*, 92.

card (**Figure 2.17**) displays her pale skin and fine figure in a low-cut and tight-laced evening bodice. With her face turned to the left, the viewer is presented with her “classical Greek profile... and wonderful columnlike (sic) throat”²⁷² descending into softly rounded shoulders and arms. Comments made by an observer in 1879 reveal concerns regarding the extent of skin on display:

What can we say against professional beauty displaying its charms in the shop windows for the delectation of ‘Arry, after the latest photograph of a princess? She has fine shoulders, and wishes the public to know it. At all events, the portrait of her back in a *decollate* (sic) dress of the most *prononcee* (sic) style is displayed in all the stationers’ windows. The shoulders are magnificent. But few men would wish to see any lady for whom they cared advertising her beauty quite so nakedly.²⁷³

Although this kind of décolletage was in keeping with aristocratic evening wear and referred to as “naked,”²⁷⁴ these photographs tottered dangerously on the edge of propriety, especially given their location in shop windows next to “harlots,” actresses, and minimally-attired Zulu women. Here, Langtry moves dangerously toward the pole of femme fatale and away from that of beautiful ingénue. Both stereotypes, however, proved to be powerful motivators for the celebrity industry and consumer marketplace.

Modern fairytales

Langtry presents a productive case study for examining late-nineteenth century intersections between celebrity, fashion, and consumer desire united in the glamorous trappings

²⁷² Cornwallis West, *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, 105.

²⁷³ “OUR LONDON CORRESPONDENCE,” *Liverpool Mercury*, Monday, 10 March 1879, issue 9720.

²⁷⁴ See Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 110.

of a social-climbing fairy tale.²⁷⁵ Her celebrity status benefitted from the mystique that enveloped the Prince of Wales's fashionable Marlborough Set. As Frances, the Countess of Warwick recalled:

Of course the Marlborough House Set had glamour; indeed, glamour was its particular asset. It created the atmosphere which intrigued the public. I can feel something of the same sense of enchantment, in recalling it, that children experience when they watched the transformation scene at the pantomime. For them, the girls in their spangles were beautiful fairies, and the scene a glimpse of fairyland. There lies, deep down in the heart of most of us, a desire for something that we cannot attain, and because they are out of reach they become imbued with a delusive fascination.²⁷⁶

Langtry found herself wrapped up in the public's "delusive fascination" with the Marlborough Set. Her narrative presented the possibility that attaining the heights of the social elite was possible given the right combination of beauty, charm, and luck. In her memoir, she recalled the strange experience of finding herself living a fairytale she had imagined as a youth: "I sometimes wondered what it must be like to be such a great and fashionable beauty," in this case as Lady Dudley, whose photograph was for sale in a Jersey shop window. She continues, "when I realised that people were even acquiring the habit of standing on chairs in crowded drawing-rooms for a glimpse of *me*, is it surprising that I thought it uncanny?"²⁷⁷ Her memoir, written in 1925, repeats the trajectory of simple country girl to cosmopolitan celebrity found in period accounts such as that of *The Whitehall Review*. Having grown up a tomboy supposedly

²⁷⁵ My use and understanding of the term "glamour" stem from Stephen Gundle's book of the same title. An amorphous word with "talismanic qualities," he writes that "glamour is best seen as an alluring image that is closely related to consumption. It is an enticing and seductive vision that is designed to draw the eye of an audience." Glamour does not apply strictly to people and may also include "things, places, events, or environments [that] capture the imagination by association with a range of qualities, including... beauty, sexuality, theatricality, wealth, dynamism, notoriety, movement, and leisure." See Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁷⁶ Countess of Warwick, *Afterthoughts*, 40.

²⁷⁷ Emphasis the author's. Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 42. Langtry's narrative, as retold during her lifetime and after, fed a powerful fantasy associated with other famous women of humble birth, such as the Gunning sisters (Elizabeth, 1733-1790, and Maria, 1733-1760) and Emma, Lady Hamilton (1765-1815), that posited beauty, charm, and luck as the criteria to a social mobility dependent upon celebrity and strategic liaisons rather than genealogy.

unaware of her own beauty, Langtry positions herself as a clueless attendee at Lady Sebright's fashionable evening event, where she wore "a very simple black square-cut gown" with no jewels or ornaments and her hair "twisted carelessly on the nape of [her] neck in a knot."²⁷⁸ Such seemingly indifferent sartorial choices quickly became the hallmarks of her early success. Her classical features and peach-blossom bloom contrasted with the somber simplicity of her provincial black dress. Her hairstyle, a contrast to the elaborate false-hair coiffures of the 1870s, referenced that of classical statuary and was widely imitated. Portraits and Society papers, which remarked widely on the clothing worn by professional beauties, served as fashion plates for fashion-forward women, and such material provided rich fodder for constructing the powerful fantasies required for the celebrity industry and modern consumerism.

In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Colin Campbell presents a framework for understanding fashion industries, characterized by the seemingly endless, and often irrational, swings from desire to obsolescence. Affluence, he argues, directs attention away from needs, which have been met, and towards pleasure. However, the most powerful pleasure results from the *imagined* fulfillment of the desire before it has been achieved, acquired, or consummated. Campbell's theory of modern autonomous imaginative hedonism thus privileges emotions, desire, fantasy, and imagination as the primary motivators of modern consumption. An experience or object ceases to be pleasurable if it is owned or experienced to excess. In this construct, distance matters: the closer a daydream is to its reality potential, the more longing it will create, while an extravagant fantasy too far removed from reality will not induce the same degree of yearning. The actual consumption of objects or experiences is only a small component of modern hedonism, which is enriched by enjoyable discomfort and permanent longing via

²⁷⁸ Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 36.

imaginative desire. Consumers weave their desires around advertised objects, which serve as aids to further daydreaming. The gap between dreams and reality creates a permanent desiring mode and inexhaustibility of wants, therefore accounting for the incessant novelty demanded of fashion. The ubiquitous representations of professional beauties fueled imaginative desires for diverse audiences by serving as loci for fantasies ranging from sexual consummation to fashion emulation. Further, they appeared to represent visual and textual “evidence” of the possibilities of and processes for accessing elite social and cultural networks.

The fairy tales built up around the appearance of professional beauties (in terms of how they came to be set apart from others in a new social category) and the pivotal role of commercial photography to the maintenance of these fantasies, per Roach’s celebrity effigy, created consumer desire for a social experience that became wrapped up in the material fashions of the moment. Langtry’s toque, which she wears in this carte-de-visite (**Figure 2.18**), is a good case in point. She writes that “One morning I twisted a piece of black velvet into a toque, stuck a quill through it, and went to Sandown Park. A few days later this turban appeared in every milliner’s window labeled ‘The Langtry Hat.’”²⁷⁹ The popularity of such a simple item is explained by Campbell’s theory of modern autonomous imaginative hedonism in which an article of clothing is often much less about that object itself and much more about the associations it triggers. He writes that “in the daydream the details of [a] dress may only be vaguely imagined, for the focus is upon the general impression that wearing it has on others.”²⁸⁰ The pleasure derived in this scenario focuses on the daydream of imagining how others will react to the wearer of a new dress rather than on the specifics of the dress itself. The desire for

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 40.

²⁸⁰ Campbell, “*The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism: reflections*,” 39.

Langtry's toque partially reflects a need to emulate (how will this look on me?), but is more profoundly concerned with imagining oneself in the place of, or in conversation with, Langtry's effigy (how will people see me when I am wearing this?). Such an object becomes endowed with the possibility of changing the way one is perceived by others.

Photographs promoted Langtry's narrative by keeping her face and fashion in the public eye. More importantly, photographic objects enabled collectors to control, curate, and display these talismans of fairy-tale-become-reality in ways that made them more socially meaningful and personally pleasurable. Campbell states that "the individual is much more an artist of the imagination, someone who takes images from memory or the existing environment, and rearranges or otherwise improves them in his mind in such a way that they become distinctly pleasing."²⁸¹ This statement shares clear affinities with Stewart's ideas relative to the dollhouse and di Bello's conception of the photograph album as a venue for collecting and expressing desire as discussed in the previous chapter. Consumers purchased the albumen faces of professional beauties to enjoy the kind of sustained gazing and critical commentary described by Zola in *La Curée*, but also to harness the professional beauty's fantasy to their own purposes. By transporting these icons out of shop windows and into the home, consumers could individualize a much larger cultural fantasy into a personal one using combinations of difference, similarity, critique, and praise to appropriate or distance any part of the fantasy that most compelled them. Professional beauties did not shrink from this reality, but rather capitalized upon the opportunity to attract attention, promote sales, maintain a public image, and influence the momentum of consumer desire.

²⁸¹ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 69.

This kind of fashion advertisement was critical to the success of professional beauties since it kept their names and faces in print. However, as visual and physical extensions of their bodies, their photographic icons problematically transgressed gender and class propriety by risking placement in the street or under the pillow of any cad or ‘Arry. Such indiscriminate self-promoting behavior appeared to condone similar license in the female viewers and collectors who actively consumed and emulated such photographic portraits. In *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End*, Erika Rappaport writes that “when Victorian women shopped, they imbued the urban center with meaning. Their consumption produced new attitudes about the city, while consumers contributed to the creation of new urban institutions.”²⁸² Thus, female consumers represented a powerful contingent that contributed to the professional beauty’s fame, to the chagrin of those who worried over the increasing prominence of superficial and thoughtless Girl of the Period types.

Emulation of professional beauties by other women was widely mocked in the press, and these attempts at humor reveal concerns with feminine behavior and social influence. In September 1879 the *Saturday Review* posited the professional beauty as a frivolous exhibitionist who seemed to say “Look at me in this position, and if you do not then admire me, look at me in that. Don’t I look bewitching under an umbrella, and cannot I melt your stony heart by standing with my head on one side and my thumb in my mouth?”²⁸³ Du Maurier humorously captured the influence of such posing in his 1879 illustration “Disastrous Result of Beautymania.” (**Figure 2.19**) The caption explains: “The last new beauty, having an innocent cast of countenance, has been painted, sculptured, and photographed with her head on one side, sucking her thumb.”

²⁸² Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, 6.

²⁸³ “Professional Beauties.” Published from the *Saturday Review* in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 3 September 1879, issue 7658.

Forming a horizontal line of black tails and trousers across the center of the illustration, gentlemen file into a drawing room and peer over their female counterparts, most of whom sit in groups in the left and right foreground. For the most part, these women look nearly identical. Dressed in décolleté bodices and ruffled pleated skirts, their symmetrical faces tilt to one side or the other, and each holds a closed hand near their faces with a thumb extended to touch their mouths. Among the idealized beauty of these young women, two figures point to the fact that imitating a Beauty did not necessarily make one beautiful: an older rotund matron on the far right mimics the pose, as does a long-faced dark-haired woman standing above her on the right side of the image. Self-absorbed in far-off gazes, the women seem oblivious to the men joining them. Their desire to mimic the newest beauty has turned them into posed, static, uninteresting statues like those on the back wall that, not coincidentally, also copy the style. The gesture itself is quite suggestive, hence the reason why the publicized beauty needed an “innocent cast of countenance” to get away with it. More than a century earlier, Sir Joshua Reynolds painted the actress Frances Barton, better known as Mrs. Abington, in the role of ingénue Miss Prue from the 1694 comedy “Love for Love.” **(Figure 2.20)** Leaning over the back of a chair, she holds her left hand in front of her chin. The pad of her thumb touching her pink lips, Abington adopts “a suggestive, or at least unrefined, pose – unthinkable for a lady,”²⁸⁴ and one that maintained its coy possibilities into the 1870s.

Du Maurier’s illustration implies that fashionable women did not reflect upon who they emulated, how that emulation potentially compromised their reputations, and how it reduced them to nothing more than types. A similar lack of care takes place in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s 1881 novel *A Fair Barbarian*. Lucia, a young British woman raised prudishly in a

²⁸⁴ Angus Trumble, “Mrs. Abington as Miss Prue in ‘Love for Love’ by William Congreve,” written 2007-01, <http://collections.britishart.yale.edu/vufind/Record/1669236>.

back-water English town, works up the courage to give advice to her naively ostentatious American counterpart Octavia: “If I were in your place,” she says, “I think—that...I would not wear—my hair—*quite* so low down—over my forehead.” When Octavia asks why not, since it is so becoming, Lucia explains that “in those absurd pictures of actresses, bangs always seem to be the principal feature. I saw some in the shop-windows when I went to Hartford with grandmamma. And they were such dreadful women,—some of them,—and had so very few clothes on, that I can’t help thinking I shouldn’t like to look like them...”²⁸⁵ The next day, after Octavia has shortened her bangs, a male admirer thinks approvingly to himself that her pretty hair “had a rather less ‘professional’ appearance.”²⁸⁶

After the widely publicized libel trial between the gossip paper *Town Talk* and the Cornwallis Wests and Langtrys in the fall of 1879, some critics hoped that the resulting scandal would put an end to professional beauties and their frivolous imitators. The London correspondent for *The York Herald* wrote that photographers were not solely to blame for the propagation of the professional beauty, considered by many a superficial social folly:

In the first place, most of the leading photographers in the metropolis have never taken a single portrait of any of the ladies known as professional beauties. In the second, it is natural that if a photographer finds it answer his purpose to request to be favoured with a sitting from a lady, the request will be preferred. No; the fault – and even those most directly concerned now recognise the fact – *is that of the ladies* who are willing to have their charms displayed in shop windows, *and of their friends who encourage them in their folly.*²⁸⁷

Du Maurier’s illustration of the “Disastrous Result of Beautymania” is a humorous reflection of this dynamic: the professional beauty’s representation created desire among her female admirers

²⁸⁵ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Fair Barbarian* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1881), 211-13.

²⁸⁶ Burnett, *A Fair Barbarian*, 221.

²⁸⁷ Emphasis mine. “From Our London Correspondent,” *The York Herald*, Monday Oct 20, 1879, issue 7077, 5.

to emulate her style in clothing, pose, and behavior. Part of the fear regarding the professional beauty's social clout resulted from the perception that she seduced both men and women with her fashionable charms. Du Maurier utilized this assumption to mock the social circles of which he was also a part. Others, however, found very little humor in the professional beauty's widespread influence.

The *London Society* commentator, cited throughout the past two chapters as an influential critical voice, wrote in November 1879 that the Aesthetic age had made a “burlesque of Nature”²⁸⁸ and raised professional beauties “from the toy of the hour...into a great social force.”²⁸⁹ The primary reason they obtained such power, the author wrote, was because the nation had become a “plutocracy, and ostentation and exhibition [had] a market value to which hitherto they [had] been strangers.”²⁹⁰ Concern with exhibition, exposure, and advertising permeates the essay. The author clearly infers that proper, modest women would not covet the public scrutiny created by boudoir gossip, society columns, and curious eyes, while professional beauties worked to generate such attention: “the more exposed her shrine and the more discussed her charms, the greater will be the throngs of those who come to worship her or to stare at her.”²⁹¹ Around her altar, both men and women paid homage: the professional beauty needed only smile upon them “to turn them into her most abject of slaves.”²⁹² While the author attempted to dismiss the professional beauty as a passing fad and her admirers as nothing more than spineless imitators, a potent thread of anxiety runs throughout the article. Once she had

²⁸⁸ “Professional Beauties.” *London Society*, 36:215 (November 1879), 449.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 450.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 452.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 453.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 452.

attained notoriety (because of the complicity of preeminent artists and men of royal blood), she was able to dispense with the need of a husband, who was subsumed by her notoriety to become “addressed as the husband of Mrs. A. or of Lady B.”²⁹³ Further, she could indulge in the cruel game of snubbing men, which she did “not because she dislikes [them], but because she loves to exhibit her power with all the caprice and want of consideration of the petty tyrant.”²⁹⁴ While the author’s intention seems to be to “expose” the professional beauty as a fraud and her fame as nothing more than “silly idolatry,”²⁹⁵ s/he seems unaware of the adage that “all press is good press.” Indeed, the author’s long-winded vitriol simply builds upon the *stigmata/charismata* structure of modern celebrity: in seeking to “expose” the professional beauty, the author reinforces the exposure s/he laments these women already desired. No wonder, then, that the author’s tone, meant to be slightly flippant, translates instead as slightly panicked. Even critics could not escape the celebrity media, for, as is the case today, every line of criticism fueled the dynamic of the celebrity industry.

Conclusion

Subject to the critique and desires of collectors and consumers, professional beauties were sublimated into a type while also active agents in the creation of their public personalities. They therefore performed a celebrity role that was “at once self-expression and self-erasure.”²⁹⁶ In Campbell’s formulation of modern consumerism, commercial cabinet cards and cartes-de-visite created a veneer of intimacy by driving imagined fantasies relative to celebrity figures.

²⁹³ Ibid., 453.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 453.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 454.

²⁹⁶ Roach, *It*, 9.

Highly-detailed nineteenth century commercial photographs fed preexisting expectations regarding physiognomy, phrenology, pose, and attire. Further, strategic composition, props, and poses in photographic portraits of professional beauties created the sense of public intimacy that motivated consumers and admirers.

Professional beauties performed in a traditionally feminine role as a muses, models, and aesthetic objects rendered up to the public gaze. While this situation fits within the patriarchal context of late-nineteenth century British culture and art production, women such as Langtry, Cornwallis West, and Wheeler disrupted the stability of their lofty pedestals as Beauties by proactively engaging the commodity marketplace. Acting as the “cinematic” component of the celebrity’s physical body, the medium of the commercial photograph grounded the tension between strength (*charismata*) and vulnerability (*stigmata*) in intimate-yet-disposable objects. Their fame engendered a kind of frenzied, superficial, and supposedly frivolous madness, and critics worried about a more calculated, manipulative, and pervasive threat to Victorian gender ideology. Professional beauties did not remain confined to the “comparatively obscure fame... [of] the drawing-rooms of good society,” but rather sought other worlds to conquer.²⁹⁷ The power wielded by professional beauties was engendered by techniques of self-marketing that were closely bound up with late-nineteenth century celebrity culture but also clearly gendered as masculine in their aggressive and influential manipulation of consumer culture and insistence on a public persona, even if that persona was largely voiceless. When the public responded so forcefully to commercial studio portraits of professional beauties, and when the popularity of these portraits complimented growing space in society papers and an extraordinary amount of

²⁹⁷ “Professional Beauties.” Published from the *Saturday Review* in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 3 September 1879, issue 7658.

public “mobbing,” fans and critics alike were challenged to rationalize the mania for women who, after all, maintained a fairly traditional role as beautiful faces and bodies.

Chapter Three:

Professional Beauties and Empire

This chapter will turn to the presence of professional beauties on the streets of London, in Rotten Row, at elite social gatherings and events of the summer Season, and at popular galleries such as the Royal Academy and Grosvenor Gallery. Their consistent “mobbing” by curious crowds reflected public desire to witness their physical presence: to bring the celebrity effigy to life, to touch and scrutinize the “real thing,” and to compare and contrast the personality recorded in gossip papers and photographs with the “authentic” one. Some commentators noted the degree to which some professional beauties were able to perform the aesthetic of classical sculpture – the cool of stone and the calm of marble – in order to combat an invasive public gaze. As Victorian studies scholar Gail Marshall has pointed out, “the metaphor of woman as statuary carries much of the rhetorical burden of conservative arguments,”²⁹⁸ one that privileged Beauty as the most important accomplishment in a woman’s life. While being described in terms of the classical evoked secular religious sentiment, a component of modern celebrity with roots in religious practice,²⁹⁹ it was also an attempt to keep women with public profiles objectified and voiceless.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage*, 25.

²⁹⁹ See Joseph Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007) and Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion, 2001).

³⁰⁰ Marshall writes that “Victorian Pygmalions” may have used the passive, voiceless, static rhetoric of classical sculpture to respond to “contemporary anxieties about women and their ability to ‘metamorphose’ into unprecedented professional and intellectual forms,” particularly given the presence of “platform women” such as Annie Besant and Millicent Garrett Fawcett. See Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage*, 24 and 95.

However, channeling the qualities of sculpture also presented a means through which celebrity women could negotiate public scrutiny. Controlling their psychosomatic responses to the physical and visual intrusion of mobbing signaled, to some commentators, their strength of will in face of an increasingly invasive celebrity culture. To others, however, such sculptural performances symbolized a “hardening” of surface and of character, an idea given expression in Annie Edwardes’ 1879 serialized novel *Vivian the Beauty*. Her critique that professional beauties had gone too far in perfecting their morbidly self-aware performances as *objets d’art* implied that, in so doing, they had compromised their femininity, virtue, and humanity, reducing their lauded shapes to merely empty shells.

This chapter focuses on 1879, the year the widely publicized Anglo-Zulu War presented a military challenge to British colonization. In this context, linking beautiful British women to classical sculpture connected them with ancient Greece and placed them within the then-current narrative of the Aryan race. This supposedly presented evidence of British right to rule, but the liminal space of the shop window risked collapsing the comfortable hierarchies established by racial and evolutionary theories. In such spaces, photographs of professional beauties were sometimes on display with those of Zulu performers and warriors. As Nead points out, the placement of such bodies in proximity – for her, within the frame of an oil painting, and, here, within that of a shop window – both “[maintains] a sense of essential difference” but also “[expresses] a desirability that threatens to undo the entire construct of racial difference.”³⁰¹ The imaginations of viewers too easily made impolite associations between the bodies within, thereby linking the rumored sexual behavior of professional beauties with that of “primitive”

³⁰¹ Nead, “The Secret of England’s Greatness,” 180.

black women and reinforcing the idea that, rather than emblems of racial excellence, professional beauties signaled the degeneration of British culture.

The shop window and imperial conflict

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Victorian London enjoyed spectacles associated with international fairs and ethnographic displays, many of which featured African performers living in on-site “native villages.” These apparently “undeveloped” and “static” cultures “reflected back to the audience the modernity and progressive nature of their own European cultures and societies.”³⁰² Zulu performers had been in London since at least the 1850s,³⁰³ and in the late 1870s the most visible spectacles featuring Zulu performers were organized by G. A. Farini, whose promotional materials (including posters and photographs) were visible throughout the city.

During the first six months of 1879, the Anglo-Zulu War “brought the Zulu people to the attention of the British public like no other African people before or since.”³⁰⁴ New submarine cables enabled more rapid communication, and newspapers vied for the most dramatic, if not always the most accurate, reports. Headlines emphasized the brutality of Zulu troops as well as their heroism, establishing “the proud Zulu warrior” as “one of the most enduring icons of

³⁰² Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (University of California Press, 2009), 148. Interest in such shows grew during the years leading up to the “Scramble for Africa,” which refers to the period between 1881 and 1914 when various European countries increasingly controlled the majority of the continent.

³⁰³ Tallie writes that these were “ostensibly” Zulu performers, and Durbach’s chapter “When the Cannibal King Began to Talk” considers the recruitment of non-African men, often Irish, to perform in these roles. See Tallie, “On Zulu King Cetshwayo kaMpande’s Visit to London, August 1882,” 1, and “Chapter Five: ‘When the Cannibal King Began to Talk’: Performing Race, Class, and Ethnicity” in Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (University of California Press, 2009): 147-170.

³⁰⁴ Neil Parsons, “No Longer Rare Birds in London: Zulu, Ndebele, Gaza, and Swazi Envoys to England, 1882-1894” in Gretchen Gerzina, ed. *Black Victorians, Black Victoriana* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003): 114.

nineteenth-century culture.”³⁰⁵ During the first battle in January, British troops were unexpectedly defeated at Isandhlwana. A second unexpected tragedy occurred on 1 June, 1879, when the Prince Imperial (Napoléon Eugène Louis Jean Joseph Bonaparte, 1856-1879, the only son of deposed French Emperor Napoleon III, 1808-1873), was killed in combat. Some periodicals memorialized him as a martyr to the cause. *The Whitehall Review* published an “In Memoriam” number “containing the Portraits of the Empress and the Prince, with special Articles and Poems,” demand for which “was enormous.”³⁰⁶ Such (white) heroism contrasted with tales of the “‘barbarous’ nature and the militant chaos of the Zulu kingdom”³⁰⁷ under the reign of King Cetshwayo kaMpande (c. 1826-1884).

While photographs of Zulu performers had been available since mid-century, demand increased as press accounts reported the conflict in South Africa. In November 1879, St. Enoch’s Church in Belfast advertised a selection of photographic subjects for sale ranging “from Royalty to Zulus, and from popular actresses and professional beauties to distinguished statesmen and divines.”³⁰⁸ An imperial hierarchy embedded within this list, established by Royalty on one end and Zulus on the other, attempted to stabilize its gendered categories (“popular” female subjects versus “distinguished” male ones). However, the nature of the photograph rendered it subject to human hands that united, compiled, and compressed such

³⁰⁵ Parsons, “No Longer Rare Birds in London,” 114.

³⁰⁶ *Whitehall Review*, 3 July 1879, 172.

³⁰⁷ Tallie, “On Zulu King Cetshwayo kaMpande’s Visit to London, August 1882,” 1. Among others, Tallie also considers representations of King Cetshwayo during his 1882 visit to London. See also Julie Codell, “Imperial Differences and Culture Clashes in Victorian Periodicals’ Visuals: The Case of Punch.” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 39, no. 4 (2006): 410-28; Neil Parsons, “No Longer Rare Birds in London: Zulu, Ndebele, Gaza, and Swazi Envoys to England, 1882-1894” in Gretchen Gerzina, ed. *Black Victorians, Black Victoriana* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003): 110-141; and Catherine Anderson, “Embodiments of Empire: Figuring Race in Late Victorian Painting” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2008).

³⁰⁸ “ST. ENOCH’S CHURCH BAZAAR.” *The Belfast News-Letter*, Friday, 7 November 1879, issue 20103.

representations of differently-raced bodies. Lynda Nead has written that “The superiority of the British civilization over all others and its right to rule a mighty empire was built on emphatic notions of difference and hierarchy and the proper relations between races and nations; all this could begin to unravel, however, through the frisson of a brushing of fingers,”³⁰⁹ including those of photograph collectors. Via their photographic portrait, white women’s bodies mixed with those of colonized black bodies under the gaze of, within the hands of, and “in the same street as” any cad or ‘Arry.

In context of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and increased British military occupation in Africa, the visual intermingling of black and white bodies in the shop window represented “forms of contact between the heart of empire and the colonial diaspora”³¹⁰ that were not static. The shop window presented a space in which the relationships between differently raced sitters were complicated by the “dangerous promiscuity”³¹¹ of viewers’ imaginations. Rosenberg’s critique of Cornwallis West, published in *Town Talk* and referenced in the previous chapter, alluded to this danger when he accused Mr. Cornwallis West of compromising his own status and that of the British nation by permitting “his wife to display her charms side by side with the portraiture of half-naked actresses and entirely naked Zulu women.”³¹² While many viewers still interpreted the spatial associations of specific portraits through the lens of traditional social hierarchies, which would have lent itself to a reading of the pairing of British Beauty and Naked

³⁰⁹ Nead, “The Secret of England's Greatness,” 165. Nead is particularly concerned with the relationship between black and white bodies in Thomas Jones Barker’s oil painting *The Secret of England’s Greatness* (1863) and that by William Mulready entitled *The Toyseller* (1857-63).

³¹⁰ Nead, “The Secret of England's Greatness,” 163.

³¹¹ Di Bello, “Carte-de-visite Celebrities,” 244.

³¹² “Libels of Mrs. Langtry and Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, Monday, 13 October 1879, issue 8184.

Zulu as *contrast* and therefore a justification of racial ideologies of the time, others were inclined to read this pair as *affiliation*, leading many to wonder if pink flesh would feel the same as black flesh appeared to.

Critics accused professional beauties of encouraging such affiliations, as illustrated humorously by a joke entitled “Rival Professional Beauties” published in *Funny Folks*:

Professional Beauty (with photographs of Zulu.) - ‘Isn’t it too bad? After we have lavished our loveliness (sic) on an ungrateful public in every pose in which skin-tight costumes could show it off, they are actually allowing these wretched black creatures to appear in - *no costume at all!*’³¹³

Zulu women were often presented as ethnographic “specimens” attired in traditional clothing that often consisted of no more than accessories or tribal skirts.³¹⁴ An indecency trial regarding photographs of Zulu women (produced by the London Stereoscopic Company and widely available throughout the city) highlighted concerns that such images “[invited] fantasies of photographs of English men and women ‘with their pink flesh’ in a similar state of undress.”³¹⁵ This anxiety drew connections between the sexual behavior of professional beauties and that of “primitive” Zulu women, just as the “degenerate” sexual behavior of white prostitutes was visually and metaphorically linked to the “abnormalities” of black female sexuality.³¹⁶ Publicly

³¹³ Excerpt from *Funny Folks* published in *The Royal Cornwall Gazette Falmouth Packet, Cornish Weekly News, & General Advertiser*, Friday, 18 April 1879, issue 3951, p 6.

³¹⁴ Examples of late-nineteenth century photographs of Zulu performers are available in diverse venues online including in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. For the purposes of this dissertation I have chosen not to reproduce this highly problematic imagery.

³¹⁵ Di Bello, "Carte-de-visite Celebrities," 244.

³¹⁶ Sander Gilman has articulated how, in order to demonstrate that the black female was antithetical to the white female, “scientifically” observed differences in sex organs of some black women became “evidence” of their sexual atavism. In particular, the buttocks and genitalia of Sarah Bartmann “[served] as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century.” (235) Such physical “anomalies,” thought to provide scientific evidence of primitive sexual behavior, became associated with disease and uncleanness and led to the association of the Hottentot female and the white female prostituted. See Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. H. L. Gates Jr. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985): 223-61. Phillipa Levine points out that colonial sexualities were “pathologised in part through an excessive attention to the physical aspects

displayed photographs indulged the possibilities of the viewer's imagination to associate the black skin of Zulu women, presented as exotic anthropological specimens, with that of professional beauties. However, the visual difference in skin tone reproduced by phototechnology also reinforced a fundamental point that made the *Funny Folks* joke effective: regardless of how many clothes white women might take off, they would never be black. And black women, no matter how many clothes they put on, would never be white.³¹⁷ While this association could be used to critique the behavior of fashionable women, ultimately, per Nead, the representation of skin insisted "most emphatically on racial difference and hierarchy."³¹⁸

Richard Dyer writes that, as a technology "developed with white people in mind,"³¹⁹ photography has historically "[produced] a look that assumes, privileges, and constructs an image of white people."³²⁰ Key to this ideological construction within the Western canon are centuries of meaning applied to the concept of "light." Whiteness is positioned as the presence of light and therefore the opposite of black, the absence of light. The light that shines through whiteness has traditionally been interpreted as spiritual and intellectual knowledge. In this construct, writes Dyer, "class as well as such criteria of proper whiteness as sanity and non-criminality are expressed in terms of degrees of translucence, with murkiness associated with

of colonial peoples, most especially their genitals, and partly through the association of lechery with primitiveness." See Philippa Levine, "Sexuality and Empire," in Catherine Hall and Rose, Sonya O. *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 127.

³¹⁷ Anne McClintock points out that advertisements such as those by Pear's Soap made use of racial difference to great effect, equating white with cleanliness and black with dirtiness. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

³¹⁸ She writes: "perhaps it is the representation of skin that insists most emphatically on racial difference and hierarchy." See Nead, "The Secret of England's Greatness," 166.

³¹⁹ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 89.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

poor, working-class and immigrant white subjects.”³²¹ However, the visibility of whiteness is also associated with invisibility: it is at once color and non-color, corporeal and non-corporeal, presence and absence. As Dyer writes, “it is reasonable to suggest that fair-skinned people are more liable to make the weird conceptual leap that allows one to see blank white space as a realistic representation of a face,”³²² or arms or shoulders, as seen in this cabinet card of Langtry. **(Figure 2.17)** Dressed in a tight-fitting décolleté bodice, she is “naked” in the sense that she wears aristocratic evening attire, though such garb leaves little to the imagination. Cropped so that she is brought closer to the viewer, the photograph focuses attention on her upper body and face. The translucency of Langtry’s body risks absence, rendering the tight embrace of her corseted bodice and darkened background integral to the legibility of her presence.

White skin was sometimes reinvigorated with hand-applied color, as in a boldly painted cabinet card of Lady Lonsdale (Constance Gladys Herbert, 1859-1917, **Figure 3.1**). Positioned at three-quarters facing to the left, Lonsdale’s body is cropped at the knee, and a taxidermic parrot peers down upon her from the upper left corner of the frame. The hoop on which it sits compliments the sweep of ferns along the right edge and bottom of the image. Lonsdale is fashionably attired in a fitted dress made of patterned fabric with square neck and sleeves ending in white lace at the elbow. Aniline dyes were most likely used to color her clothing, and these include a saturated red-violet for her bodice, part of her skirts, ostrich feather fan, and head piece, a dark black along the front of her skirts and along her square neckline, and a brilliant white to accentuate the lace at her elbows and chest. Under a raking light the painted areas of her clothing shine and crackle, probably from the use of gum arabic as a binder to adhere the

³²¹ Ibid., 113.

³²² Ibid., 111.

pigment to the print. Her skin and hair, probably painted with watercolor, are matte. Her reddened lips compliment the bloom along her cheeks, ear, chin, and chest. A line of burnished yellow reveals a careless stroke across her upper left temple. Her left arm extends down her side, and here long streaks of red show the most evident marks of manipulation. The fading of the print has probably rendered these lines of color more obvious than originally intended, but they may also simply be the careless result – like the yellow stroke along her forehead – of a commercial studio assistant rushing to complete a large quota of such works. If displayed in a shop window, this kind of applied color would have attracted the eyes of passing viewers, reeled in to contemplate Lady Lonsdale and her parrot companion. While such vibrant tones help “fix” the eyes of potential consumers, they also solidify and enliven this photographic body.

Of particular note are the tones of red used on her face, chest, and arms, which reinvigorate the skin and fill the void of albumen paper expanse while maintaining the translucency of her white body. In "*Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture*," Angela Rosenthal's scholarship posits that "the blush makes whiteness legible."³²³ Her analysis of Thomas Lawrence's portrait in oil of Catherine Rebecca Gray, *Lady Manners* (1794, **Figure 3.2**) considers the ways in which the depiction of *Lady Manners*'s dematerialized white body, composed of a "cloud of wavering white muslin fabric" that merges with her white skin, is given "corporeal certainty" by the high tones of her blushing face.³²⁴ This blush "simultaneously and vehemently [redraws] corporeal boundaries"

³²³ As summarized by Nead in "The Secret of England's Greatness," 176 in reference to Angela Rosenthal's "*Visceral Culture: Blushing and the Legibility of Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture*." *Art History* 27, no. 4 (2004): 563-92.

³²⁴ Her left elbow, which juts out towards the viewer and casts a dark shadow along the hip of her skirt, is perhaps the only other substantially corporeal thing about her. See Rosenthal, "*Visceral Culture*," 576-8.

and “heightens the transparency of the body.”³²⁵ The feminine ideal of the 1770s privileged the fair face as an indicator of inner virtue, resulting in “a form of internalized and dematerialized femininity... always on the verge of its own unbecoming.”³²⁶ This was visually indicated in painting by transparently pale skin that represented a “mediating zone, promising, if only yielding in the viewer’s sensate imagination, a deeper layer of selfhood,” in fact “a transparent threshold to the soul.”³²⁷

In Lady Lonsdale’s photographic portrait, added color enlivens the expanse of her skin, now rendered a mediating zone of translucent blush. This tint presents a living white body being looked into existence since the blush emerges, after all, “as a response to the probing ‘colonizing’ gaze of the white heterosexual man.”³²⁸ The saturated aniline mauve of her dress encases and stabilizes the form and presence of her body. The textural varnish of dye and gum arabic serves as a visual armor that confines and defines her, particularly in the careful detail and darkened shadows of her bodice. Such hand coloring rendered these images more precious as unique objects and also mitigated the visual absences evoked by photographic white skin.

Rosenthal reads the insistence of transparent whiteness grounded by the blush as a reaction to heightened anti-slavery agitation.³²⁹ White women represented ideal racial purity: the

³²⁵ Ibid., 578.

³²⁶ Rosenthal considers the “transparent, pastel-like and almost ‘breathing’” skin Margaret Lindsay in her portrait by Allan Ramsay (c. 1758-9, National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland). See Rosenthal, “*Visceral Culture*,” 572.

³²⁷ Ibid., 574.

³²⁸ Ibid., 582.

³²⁹ Rosenthal writes that the depiction of whiteness evident in late eighteenth century British portraiture must be read as more than a mark of aesthetic taste. She states: “To see this celebration of whiteness in representation as simply an aesthetic choice, demonstrating artistic style or new fashion, is to overlook how style, taste, fashion are all subject to, and intricately linked with, larger concerns about cultural identity.” Rosenthal, “*Visceral Culture*,” 578.

visual construction of their whiteness thus “[defined] corporeal boundaries of the skin in relation to the geographical and political boundaries of Englishness.”³³⁰ In a shop window, such a blush helped further define the boundaries between black and white and metropole and colony. However, this blush also served to emphasize the tactile, sensual, living pink of such skin, thereby encouraging the kinds of imaginative leaps between black and white skin that some critics found so threatening.

Sculptural: strengthened or hardened?

While the blush could signal both purity of race and problematic sensuality in the photograph of a professional beauty, the use of a sculptural rhetoric could also be variously interpreted as a metaphor of strength regarding the racial excellence of beautiful women or as symbolic of moral decay through a petrification of feminine feeling and virtue. References to Greek sculptures such as the Venus de Milo became short-hand for identifying beautiful women with “classically” symmetrical and harmonious features.³³¹ The acquisition and display of classical antiquities signaled cultural superiority and imperial power. In the early nineteenth century, the Elgin Marbles went on display at the British Museum in London, and in Paris the Venus de Milo undertook her tenure at the Louvre in 1821 as the successor to the Medici Venus.³³² A cast of the Venus de Milo was exhibited in the Greek Court of the Crystal Palace in

³³⁰ Rosenthal, “*Visceral Culture*,” 581.

³³¹ Oscar Wilde’s description of Langtry’s classically beautiful features elaborates this comparison: “the grave low forehead, the exquisitely arched brow; the noble chiselling (sic) of the mouth... the supreme and splendid curve of the cheek; the augustly pillared throat which bears it all” which was “based on absolutely mathematical laws.” “Mrs. Langtry as Hester Grazebrook,” *New York World*, 7 November 1882.

³³² The Medici Venus, known since 1559, was displayed in Italy until Napoleon carted it back to Paris in 1803, where it was display until his fall in 1815. As detailed by Francesca Bonazzoli and Michele Robecchi, the Venus de Milo was discovered in 1821 by Greek peasant Yoros Kentrotas on the island of Milos. Through various strategizing, the sculpture was acquired by the Marquis de Rivière and given to Louis XVIII, who put it on display at the Louvre in 1821, thereby filling the vacuum of classical female nudity left by the departure of the Medici

1862 in London, the accompanying catalogue for which described the figure, as quoted by Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, as “unrivalled” and displaying “perhaps the most perfect combination of grandeur and beauty in the female form.”³³³ Art students regularly studied from a cast of the Venus at the British Museum, which was also reproduced as statuettes and in photographs photographs. **(Figure 1.4)**

The Venus de Milo became a convenient label for women deemed the most superior specimens of English beauty, such as when *The Whitehall Review* called Cornwallis West’s features “Milesian.”³³⁴ In her 1993 dissertation on classicism in English painting, Robyn Asleson writes that “although some of these comments amount to no more than flattering hyperbole, many were evidently seriously intended.”³³⁵ Indeed, Catherine Anderson explains in her 2008 dissertation on race and empire in Victorian painting that there was more at stake in such language than bragging rights. The often hyperbolic and widespread use of a classicized rhetoric reflected the idea, a product of racial and evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century, that Victorian Britons were the products of an “Aryan” race from which it was thought great empires, including Greece and Rome, had grown.³³⁶ Pieter (Petrus) Camper’s (1722-1789)

Venus. The French “received the *Venus de Milo* with all honors and immediately extolled her as superior to the one that had been lost.” See Francesca Bonazzoli and Michele Robecchi, *Mona Lisa to Marge: How the World’s Greatest Artworks Entered Popular Culture* (New York: Prestel, 2014), 31.

³³³ As quoted in Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 330.

³³⁴ “Reigning Beauties. II. Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Whitehall Review*, 26 July 1879, 248.

³³⁵ Robyn Asleson, “Classic into Modern: The Inspiration of Antiquity in English Painting, 1864-1918” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1993), 253.

³³⁶ Anderson explains that a combination of physiognomic and anthropometric measurements and comparative linguistics were used to support this idea. “Victorians believed the Aryans to be an early race of people from central Asia or the Middle East, who spread into India and throughout Europe and gave rise to great civilizations of the antique world, most notably Greece and Rome.” In the late eighteenth century, comparative linguists studied the Vedic texts, and one scholar, Sir William Jones, posited that a “common source” language united Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and other modern languages. This hypothetical common language was called Aryan (“noble”), after the Arya people mentioned in the Vedic texts. This linguistic evidence was then used (illogically but powerfully) to posit a

theory of facial angles, articulated in the late eighteenth century, proved influential to this idea. In systematically measuring animal and human skulls to determine the degree of prognathism (jutting forward of the lower jaw) in each,³³⁷ Camper determined that the ideal facial angle was one hundred degrees (that of Greek statuary), while the facial angle of apes was from forty-two to fifty degrees. Because the European face measured around eighty degrees, it was considered closest to the ideal.³³⁸

Camper influenced Robert Knox (1791-1862), whose 1850 *Races of Men: A Fragment* “argued that racial attributes – physical, intellectual, and moral – were immutable over time and determined the destinies of entire civilizations.”³³⁹ Knox upheld the physical ideals of ancient Greek sculpture, particularly the Apollo and the Venus de Milo, and in so doing further “[elided] the division between the living and the sculptural ideal.”³⁴⁰ Victorian women, in particular, were considered “the racial inheritors of the ancient Greeks, a notion promulgated by artists,

common racial ancestry. Anderson points out that even in the nineteenth century the idea of an Aryan race was contested, but “it formed a powerful idea that fed into imperialist sentiments about ‘ruling races’.” Catherine Anderson, “Embodiments of Empire: Figuring Race in Late Victorian Painting” (PhD diss., Brown University, 2008), 171-3.

³³⁷ According to Anderson, “this became known as the facial angle, which can also be visualized as the intersection of two straight lines drawn onto the profile view of a face. The first, horizontal line runs from the opening of the ear to the nostrils, and the second follows the edge of the lips up to the forehead. The further the jaw projects, the lower the facial angle becomes.” Anderson, “Embodiments of Empire,” 160.

³³⁸ Camper chose the Apollo Belvedere as the ideal skull shape and was probably influenced by the writings of Winckelmann. See Anderson, “Embodiments of Empire,” 162. Rosenthal and Jenny Sharpe identify the late eighteenth century in Britain as a moment in which a discourse of race and representation emerged. Sharpe writes that “The beginnings of a *discourse* of race – that is, a regularity in dispersed statements that hierarchically arranges the families of man – can be traced to the New World slave rebellions and the British antislavery movement of the late eighteenth century.” See Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 5. Rosenthal writes that “It seems to me not at all coincidental that the redrawing of corporeal lines,” in reference to the visual construction of race, “occurred at a moment of heightened anti-slavery agitation.” See “*Visceral Culture*,” 579.

³³⁹ Anderson, “Embodiments of Empire,” 164.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 167. See also Knox’s *A Manual of Artistic Anatomy, for the Use of Sculptors, Painters, and Amateurs* (London: Henry Renshaw, 1852).

anatomists, and racial theorists alike.”³⁴¹ Langtry was used to illustrate this “fact” at lectures given by Charles Thomas Newton (1816-1894), Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum.³⁴² This connection helped reinforce the opinion of President of the Royal Academy Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) of the superiority of Englishwomen, a sentiment he expressed in 1883: “In the Art of the Periclean age... we find a new ideal of balanced form wholly Aryan, and of which the only parallel I know is sometimes found in the women of another Aryan race – your own.”³⁴³

Classically beautiful women therefore represented British racial excellence, which supposedly provided evidence of an imperial right to rule. Invoking such the language of classical sculpture, per Marshall, served to elevate beautiful women, and by extension their nation, while keeping them voiceless as symbolic objects subdued within a patriarchal culture. Invoking stone or marble, even obliquely through a reference to the Venus de Milo, also supported a vision of British women as timeless, enduring, and strong: as noble Brittanias capable of withstanding colonial conflict. However, such sculptural rhetoric referenced not only a kind of strengthening of British female bodies, but also a hardening of their emotional virtues. A statuesque ideal, although linked with increased physical vigor and robust health, too easily slipped over into the realm of moral and cultural degeneration, particularly in reference to fashionable Society women and professional beauties.

³⁴¹ Anderson, “Embodiments of Empire,” 158.

³⁴² Newton served in this capacity from 1867 to 1886. His numerous excavations, including the discovery of Halicarnassus, and his well-attended lectures renewed public interest in Greek archaeology. Jennie Churchill recalled that during one of his lectures “Mrs. Langtry, as a living exponent of the classical type which the professor was describing, sat in a prominent place facing the audience.” See Cornwallis West, *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, 105.

³⁴³ Asleson, “Classic into Modern,” 252, quoted from Frederic Leighton, *Addressed Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy* (London: 1897), 89.

Embodying the sculptural

In a discussion of Miss Williams, a new Society beauty, the *Lady's Pictorial* wrote in May 1881 that:

Among the many fair beings... no one, perhaps, was more generally or more justly admired than Miss Williams, who was stared at by, at least, two or three people as if she were some beautiful piece of sculpture, and were as insensible to minute and critical inspection as Galatea before Pygmalion's prayer was answered, and the cold marble was made instinct with life.³⁴⁴

The mythological reference underlines Miss Williams' status as a single woman in need of a Pygmalion to bring her fully to life. Further, the invocation of classical sculpture points to Miss Williams' beauty and identifies her imperviousness to public scrutiny. Embodying this sculptural mode signals her ability to negotiate the conditions of late-nineteenth century London's "rituals of spectacle and socialization."³⁴⁵ If ideal beauty were to exist among men, it had to maintain the strength of the medium from which it had metaphorically sprung, yet not so much that a woman could not be recognized as appropriately feminine.

In his play *Pygmalion and Galatea: An Original Mythological Comedy, in Three Acts*, William Schwenck (W. S.) Gilbert (1836-1911) utilized an idealized female figure to underscore the foibles and hypocrisies British society draped in the guise of ancient Greece.³⁴⁶ Galatea, both perfectly beautiful and perfectly innocent, does not understand why her honest speech and pure feelings are greeted with censure. Ultimately unable to understand the absurdities of mortal human relationships, she chooses to step back onto her pedestal and return to stone. If she had

³⁴⁴ *Lady's Pictorial*, 7 May 1881, No. 10: 218.

³⁴⁵ Perry, *History's Beauties*, 91.

³⁴⁶ The play first opened on December 9, 1871 at the Haymarket Theatre and enjoyed popularity into the twentieth century. According to Essaka Joshua, the play revealed "that duplicity and the 'lie courteous' are necessary for the smooth running of society." See Joshua's *Pygmalion and Galatea: The History of a Narrative in English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 105.

remained human and gone out into the streets of London, she might have wished for some of her marble strength when confronted with gazes that bordered on rude, invasive, and even inhuman.

As *The Whitehall Review* wrote about Langtry in 1878:

Is a pretty face so rare in London Society that its possessor must be stared out of countenance by women as well as men whenever she takes her walks abroad? This thought occurred to me on Sunday afternoon in the Park as I noticed the ogre-like glances bestowed upon the subject of Mr. Millais' last success in portraiture. It is easy enough to offer up the incense of adulation at the shrine of your idol without according her the benefit of that "stony stare" which is so emphatically and disgustingly British.³⁴⁷

A classically beautiful celebrity such as Langtry had to demonstrate self-composure amidst this kind of offensive public scrutiny. Here, she has been appropriately "brought to life" as "Mr. Millais' last success," reinforcing Nochlin's use of the Pygmalion myth to describe the nineteenth century male artist as "merely the humble servant of a higher cause, that of Beauty itself,"³⁴⁸ who brings "stone beauty" to life "by the warming glow of masculine desire."³⁴⁹ By positioning her in this acceptable role – as beauty elevated to art – the author has doubly reinforced the lack of culture of the hoi polloi, who observe her greedily as a spectacle and commodity.

Rotten Row in Hyde Park was a particularly suitable location for star-sightings. As Jennie Churchill recalled, "So great was the enthusiasm created by the beauty of the 'Jersey Lily,' ... that in the height of the season I [saw] people standing on chairs in the Row to get a peep at her."³⁵⁰ Artist W. Graham Robertson recalled in his memoirs regarding a sighting of Langtry in the spring of 1878:

³⁴⁷ "Through the Looking-Glass," *The Whitehall Review*, 1 June 1878, 64.

³⁴⁸ Nochlin, 'Women, Art, and Power', 18-19.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁵⁰ Cornwallis West, *The Reminiscences of Lady Randolph Churchill*, 105.

I was wandering in the Row one Sunday morning when I became aware of a commotion among the solemn promenaders; a crowd collected, women scrambled on to chairs to get a better view, from all directions people converged towards some hidden centre of interest. As the hustle surged past me I suppose I must have stood open-mouthed and obviously interrogative, for a total stranger gripped my arm in passing and panted: ‘Mrs. Langtry – run!’³⁵¹

In her memoir, Langtry distanced herself from her celebrity in writing that the prevalence of her photographic portraits “gave fresh stimulus to a condition which I had unconsciously created.”³⁵² This made her instantly recognizable, so that, in her words, “wherever I went – to theatres, pictures, galleries, shops – I was actually mobbed.”³⁵³ She remembered her early fame as that of a clueless ingénue rendered an object of scrutiny by a curious public, a dynamic to which she was sensitive and helpless. She recalled, for example, how viewers audibly commented on her appearance in Society drawing-rooms and the ways in which any sense of private space collapsed when strolling about London:

people ran after me in droves, staring me out of countenance, and even lifting my sunshade to satisfy fully their curiosity. To venture out for a little shopping was positively hazardous, for the instant I entered an establishment to make a purchase, the news that I was within spread with the proverbial rapidity of wildfire, and the crowd about the door grew so dense that departure by legitimate exit was rendered impossible, the obliging proprietors being forced, with many apologies, to escort me around to the back door.³⁵⁴

Clearly, such attention was discomfiting and sometimes dangerous.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ Walford Graham Robertson, *Time Was* (London: Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., 1931), 69.

³⁵² Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 40. Sos Eltis reads Langtry’s autobiography, which avoids references to any scandal, as a performance pitched for a specific audience: “This whitewashing of her image offers such a confounding of readers’ expectations as to seem deliberately tongue-in-cheek, rendering her autobiography a conscious and skilful (sic) performance for those in the know. Langtry implicitly defies criticism that might place her outside the smart society she portrays by deliberately blurring the line between the professional actress and ‘respectable’ Society women.” Eltis, “Reputation, Celebrity and the Late Victorian Actress,” 175.

³⁵³ Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 40.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁵⁵ Langtry relates the story of a woman in a black dress who was mistaken for her in Hyde Park, overwhelmed by crowds, and was taken away in an ambulance after fainting from the pressure. *Ibid.*, 41.

While Langtry, perhaps the most stared-at woman in London during the late 1870s, remembered being uncomfortable, and in some cases even frightened by, the level of public attention and frenzy, her position in the public eye provided training for her career as a stage actress, which she undertook in 1881.³⁵⁶ In anticipation of her first professional acting role, the *Lady's Pictorial* wrote: "How absurd to talk about shyness in connection with her; a woman who had all the opera glasses, and all the naked eyes in the West end levelled at her, morning, noon, and night, for two seasons, is not likely to suffer from stage fright."³⁵⁷ Ultimately, such trials desensitized Langtry to the public gaze and helped her transition from a career as professional beauty to that of professional actress. Richard le Gallienne pushed the sculptural metaphor further when reflecting on Langtry that:

Of all the forms of fame that of Beauty is the greatest, in that it is the simplest, for... it is the fame of a miracle... To have been the representative of Beauty in one's own time, its very symbol, is a peculiarly aristocratic form of immortality... It is like being some immortal statue, as though one should be the Venus de Milo in real life.³⁵⁸

Such rhetoric elevated Langtry and other beautiful celebrities to lofty idealized pedestals and couched them within the religious sentiment of modern celebrity culture. The classical beauty of "professionals" such as Langtry was upheld as proof of Britain's racial and imperial excellence, but only so long as it was unmediated by superficial enhancements. *The Whitehall Review's* biographies of the three Reigning Beauties explicitly stated that their beauty was natural, rather than an artificial construct resulting from "our *chevelures a la Russe*, our rouge and henna, pearl

³⁵⁶ Although Langtry had already participated in a number of amateur theatricals, her debut as a professional actress took place on 15 December, 1881 in *She Stoops to Conquer* at the Haymarket Theatre.

³⁵⁷ *Lady's Pictorial*, no. 41, 10 December 1881, 328.

³⁵⁸ Richard Le Gallienne in Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 5.

powder and stencilling.”³⁵⁹ While historian of art and fashion Aileen Ribeiro has articulated the extent to which cosmetics became increasingly common and socially acceptable into the late-nineteenth century,³⁶⁰ the brouhaha surrounding the reception of John Singer Sargent’s (1856-1925) portrait of Parisian socialite Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau (1859-1915, **Figure 3.3**) in 1884 revealed that cosmetics and risqué clothing could elicit virulent censure, even in the supposedly more liberal city of Paris.³⁶¹ Gautreau’s use of lavender powder, henna, and rouge was widely known and clearly on display in Sargent’s portrait,³⁶² and, according to Prettejohn, she flaunted “the artificial contrivances with which [she staked] her claim to elite status.”³⁶³ Langtry’s loveliness, on the other hand, could withstand the effects of an exhausting London Season because it was *not* constructed of rice powder and rouge. According to one commentator, her “complexion has stood the wear and tear of London life and late hours and overheated rooms, and the peach bloom on her cheek does not fade, nor will it run off.”³⁶⁴

As discussed in the last chapter, all three of the “Reigning Beauties” were described by *The Whitehall Review* as physically vigorous and robust. While Wheeler enjoyed dancing and yachting, Langtry and Cornwallis West were the products of healthy pastoral upbringings,

³⁵⁹ “Reigning Beauties. II. Mrs. Cornwallis West.” *The Whitehall Review*, 26 July 1879, 248.

³⁶⁰ Aileen Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty: Painted Women & Cosmetic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

³⁶¹ Ribeiro writes that French authors such as Charles Pierre Baudelaire (1821-1867) and Pierre Jules Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) celebrated cosmetics and artifice. See Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty*, 239-41.

³⁶² Sidlauskas points out that accounts of this portrait’s negative reception have not been over exaggerated. “Many of the reasons,” she writes, “that Gautreau’s portrait offended the salon audience are evident: the brazenness of her self-display; the singularity of her adornments, both sartorial and cosmetic; and the crudeness of her American ambitiousness.” More profoundly, “Gautreau herself possessed, indeed flaunted, a sensuality that was undermined by death and decay.” Susan Sidlauskas, “Painting Skin: John Singer Sargent’s ‘Madame X’” in *American Art*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 2001), 11-12. See also Deborah Davis, *Strapless: John Singer Sargent and the Fall of Madame X* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin Group, 2003).

³⁶³ Prettejohn, *Interpreting Sargent*, 26.

³⁶⁴ “Mrs. Langtry.” *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, Thursday 21 August 1879, issue 8139.

Langtry within a deanery on the provincial Isle of Jersey, and Cornwallis West in an Irish vicarage. These references to Great Britain's "wholesome" environments within the simplicity of an imagined countryside harken to what Nead has called "the heart of the imagined indigenous community, of British civilization that is whiter than white and purer than pure."³⁶⁵ Such an "ordinary life," wrote one author in regards to these Beauties, "is healthful, natural, and wholesome, a life, in short, calculated to preserve maidenhood to maturity without a fleck."³⁶⁶

However, not everyone was convinced that the beauty of the primary "professionals" was natural, nor that such beauty represented virtue. Ribeiro writes that an early- and mid-nineteenth century interest in the classical ideal of female beauty unsurprisingly linked it with "the Platonic concept of virtue as intrinsic to beauty."³⁶⁷ However, from mid-century onward, "In spite of the general veneration for Greek ideals of beauty... it was acknowledged that these were no longer relevant to modernity, except in art."³⁶⁸ This was in part because cosmetics became increasingly acceptable, and these placed an emphasis on constructed and enhanced beauty.³⁶⁹ However, the position of professional beauties including Langtry, Cornwallis West, and Wheeler relied on testaments that their beauty was pure. This rendered their primary critique – that they debased themselves and their country by using their beauty for selfish ends that often transgressed class boundaries – even more problematic.

³⁶⁵ Nead, "The Secret of England's Greatness," 173.

³⁶⁶ "Reigning Beauties: II. Mrs. Cornwallis West." *The Whitehall Review*, July 26, 1879, 248.

³⁶⁷ Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty*, 226.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁶⁹ Per Prettejohn, professional beauties such as Gautreau sought to "[override] the 'natural' social distinctions" thought to be "inherent in flesh and blood" by "artificially managing the colour, shape and demeanour of the body itself." See Prettejohn, *Interpreting Sargent*, 26.

From September to December 1879, contemporaneous with the publication of Rosenberg's *Town Talk* article and the ensuing libel trial, author Annie Edwardes presented a critique of fashionable, frivolous London Society, and particularly of professional beauties in the form of fictional beauty Vivian Vivash.³⁷⁰ Many of Vivian's characteristics are based on living women and contrast with the innocent country girl Jeanne Dempster who, although English, has been raised far from the metropole in the primeval forests of Germany's Schwarzwald at Schloss (Castle) Egmont.³⁷¹ Located in a remote valley "curtly hinted at by guide-books, uninvasioned by the great devastating army of personally-conducted cockney sight-mongers," local inhabitants monitor time by seasons and sunlight, are not harassed by intrusive telegraph wires, and have only started to hear the sounds of a railway in the past few years.³⁷² At the center of the story lies an absent figure: Count Paul von Egmont, who has been gone for a dozen years and who, it is rumored, will soon return. Vivian, supposedly one of his London coterie, has been sent ahead. Having lost a strategic marriage opportunity with a wealthy Manchester merchant, she apparently has her sights set on Count Paul. Upon her arrival, however, she immediately detests the aged castle and its outdated inhabitants, including seventeen-year-old Jeanne and her guardian, an old-fashioned Scottish woman called Mamselle Ange.

³⁷⁰ First published serially as "Vivian the Beauty" in *Temple Bar*, the narrative was quickly released as a novel. In London Richard Bentley and Son published the 1879 novel version, which was released in the United States the following year by D. Appleton and Company. The serialized "Vivian the Beauty" received positive reviews from critics. One literature reviewer for *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* wrote: "Mrs. Edwardes' new story, 'Vivian the Beauty,' opens well, and the description of the professional beauty is admirable." See *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday, 17 August 1879, issue 1917.

³⁷¹ The choice of a forested and semi-mountainous German location suggests that Edwardes may have been influenced by knowledge of the Aryan/Caucasian myth. Dyer writes that mountains are a key component of this model: mountain locations associated with this myth, particularly in Switzerland, Germany, and Scotland "had a number of virtues: the clarity and cleanliness of the air, the vigour demanded by the cold, the enterprise required by the harshness of the terrain and climate, the sublime, soul-elevating beauty of mountain vistas, even the greater nearness to God above and the presence of the whitest thing on earth, snow." See Dyer, *White*, 21.

³⁷² Annie Edwardes, *Vivian the Beauty* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880), 18.

Vivian's character is a combination of William M. Thackeray's shrewd Becky Sharpe (from *Vanity Fair*, published 1847-8), the frivolous adult version of Eliza Lynn Linton's "Girl of the Period," and professional beauties who would have been recognizable to contemporary readers. Extracted from a village in Devonshire, Vivian was created by and for the base desires of Lord Vauxhall³⁷³ and performs in all the ways necessary to succeed in an age when "[having] a profile has become a profession."³⁷⁴ Indeed, descriptions of Vivian's career sound very familiar:

Her smile has turned the wisest heads in Europe. Poets have sung her praises; artists have painted her charms. Not a shop-boy in Oxford Street but wears her photograph in a locket; not a weekly social but records her triumphs or her defeats. We have had Vivian Vivash bonnets, Vivian Vivash broughams. Preachers have made her the text of their admonitions, tobacconists have engraved her on their pipes.³⁷⁵

The name-specific couture references the popularity of Langtry merchandise. Like the Jersey-made black dress Langtry wore during her first season, Vivian donned a "provincial gown" in which, she muses, "I went about in... straight through the best balls of my first season. And all the fine ladies copied me!"³⁷⁶ Further, Vivian's fame relied in part upon the display of her

³⁷³ Lady Pamela Lawless, Vivian's companion and the granddaughter of Lord Vauxhall, says "From first to last, Lord Vauxhall's patronage of Vivian was – an advertisement of Lord Vauxhall's vanity." Edwardes, *Vivian*, 171. Although not stated explicitly, the fact that Vivian's attendance at one of Lord Vauxhall's fashionable dinners was the event that cause her fiancé to break off their engagement suggests that Vivian and Lord Vauxhall may have been lovers. The name "Vauxhall" is an obvious reference to London's former notorious pleasure gardens, which existed from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, closing permanently in 1859. See Jonathan Conlin, *The Pleasure Garden: From Vauxhall to Coney Island* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

³⁷⁴ Spoken by Lady Pamela Lawless to Jeanne. Edwardes, *Vivian*, 81.

³⁷⁵ Lady Pamela Lawless to Jeanne. *Ibid.*, 29-30.

³⁷⁶ She adds that "I know a great deal too much of human nature to go about in one gown now." *Ibid.*, 203 and 246.

photographs, which ensured that her face would be familiar to “every one who has passed a Regent Street photographer’s window.”³⁷⁷

Vivian utilizes her talent for posing to prey upon the men she wishes to conquer. While bored at the castle, she indulges her “slakeless thirst for conquest”³⁷⁸ upon the supposedly poverty-ridden Herr Wolfgang, who is actually Count Paul masquerading as Jeanne’s tutor:

Beauty’s sleek head, at its best three-quarter angle, has been studiously posed for Wolfgang’s benefit. She turns at the mention of her name, and gives him – not a straightforward look; Miss Vivash never opens an attack with the point-blank artillery of those pale eyes of hers – she gives him a downward bend of the white throat, a lowering of the lids, a smile furtive, momentary, but sweet, ‘luscious to the taste,’ as the dictionaries define the word, exceedingly.³⁷⁹

Vivian is aware of her target audience at all times and molds herself into the works of art for which she has already sat. After a dance with Wolfgang, she sinks onto a sofa “in an attitude that artists of a certain school have told her is ‘classic’... she lifts her eyes, a sleepy fire in their pale depths, full upon the master.”³⁸⁰ Her presence at Society events causes even the most respectable of ladies to scramble to see her. “If you are lucky enough to penetrate to the very heart and bull’s-eye of fashion,” one of Vivian’s friends explains to Jeanne, “you may witness a refined aristocracy struggling together – elderly earls treading on each other’s toes, dowager duchesses balancing their sixteen stone on rickety ballroom chairs – in vain efforts to behold Miss Vivash dance.”³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 195. At one point the narrator addresses the reader and states that such poses of “the Vivian glance, the Vivian shoulder,” must be familiar “if you have ever employed idle moments... gazing into the London photographer’s windows.” Ibid., 114.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 72.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 62-3.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 119.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 119. Sixteen stone is two hundred and twenty-five pounds.

Readers of Vivian's story would have easily connected the narrative's content with gossipy reportage from London's "weeklies," especially concerning the "performances" of professional beauties in Society's drawing rooms, on London's bustling West End streets, and in the prestigious spaces of the Royal Academy and Grosvenor Gallery. In their eagerness to witness the spectacle of these women, viewers often crossed the boundaries of propriety. When three portraits of Langtry were revealed at the opening of the 1878 Royal Academy exhibition, "There was great curiosity and comparison anent the three rival portraits of Mrs. Langtry at the Academy, on the first day; but when the lady herself arrived the pictures were deserted, and a train of admirer followed 'the Jersey Lily' from room to room."³⁸² In her chapter on audiences at the Grosvenor Gallery, Paula Gillett describes the "crush" experienced at London Society events in the late 1870s. Above and beyond the works on display, professional beauties drew huge crowds, and hostesses would purposefully promise the presence of these women at their events in order to attract guests.³⁸³ Indeed, Gillett relates that attendees of a fashionable ball, including ladies of rank, scrambled onto chairs in order to see Langtry enter the room.³⁸⁴

To return to the novel, Vivian wears a cuirass bodice, a closely molded style that created a slender silhouette from upper torso to hip, and examples of which can be seen in a number of photographs of professional beauties discussed in the previous chapter. When she first arrived at

³⁸² "Through the Looking-Glass," *The Whitehall Review*, 11 May 1878, 619.

³⁸³ See Paula Gillett, "Audiences at the Grosvenor," in Susan Casteras and Colleen Denney, eds. *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 46. In her memoir, Langtry recalls receiving "a flood of cards inviting to dinner, lunch, dance, etc" immediately after her "discovery" at Lady Sebright's in 1877. See Langtry, *Days That I Knew*, 37.

³⁸⁴ See Gillett, "Audiences at the Grosvenor," 53. The frenzy of such star-struck occasions was remembered into the twentieth century. In his 1912 play *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw describes the madness of an entrance made by protagonist Eliza Doolittle: "They tell me there has been nothing like her in London since people stood on their chairs to look at Mrs. Langtry." Quoted in Joshua, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 101. Taken from George Bernard Shaw, *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw. Collected Plays*, ed. Dan H. Laurence, 7 vols (London, 1970-74), IV (1972), 742.

Schloss Egmont, Vivian had worn a fitted dress that seemed “not so much to belong to her as to be herself.”³⁸⁵ Indeed, the narrator muses not so subtly that

Mortal eye can not discern the means whereby Miss Vivash divests herself of that shimmering, foldless dress of hers, unless it be by some mysterious snake-like process of sloughing. There is, indeed, an indescribable look about her whole person – the small head thrown back upon the thick throat, the gleam of gold, the pale chill eyes – that causes Jeanne... to recall the gliding, deadly inhabitants of the Schloss moat with a shudder.³⁸⁶

Edwardes invokes specific materials to reinforce Vivian’s serpentine appearance and movement, including the “shimmering” and “foldless” dress above as well as another made “of opal silk, tight-fitting as wax, shining, undulating, with every movement of her supple limbs.”³⁸⁷ Such descriptions underline the sensuous possibilities of even the most constructed of garments and reinforce a symbolic relationship between her behavior and that of the Biblical serpent – Satan in disguise – who tempted Eve away from purity and innocence.

Edwardes clearly presents Vivian as a femme fatale, but one whose conniving ways are too superficial – literally, in her attire and use of cosmetics, and metaphorically, in her clear lack of human sympathy – to harm any but the most unobservant and thoughtless victims. For example, Vivian’s fashion choices both make her more desirable because of their sensuality but also serve to literally constrain her, to the consternation of her more practical German neighbors. During a village outing, Vivian’s cuirass bodice is paired with “skirts...so narrow that one calculates, with painful uncertainty, as to Beauty’s chance of surmounting the two-foot-high step of a German railway-carriage.”³⁸⁸ Such hobbling skirts were mocked by du Maurier in

³⁸⁵ Emphasis the author’s. Edwardes, *Vivian*, 45.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

illustrations such as *Awkward Incident in Fashionable Life* from 1876. **(Figure 3.4)** The caption explains: “the beauteous Mrs. Vavasour Belsize and her lovely sisters” cannot ascend the stairs due to the “fashionable tightness” of their skirts. The four women’s bodies have been squeezed into the tight-wasted and narrow-skirted silhouette of the mid-1870s, the curves of which are repeated in their elaborate coiffures. Du Maurier indicates that they are “beauteous” by deftly drawing large hooded eyes and oval faces atop graceful columnar necks, though he has left them largely bereft of expression, underscoring their vapid personalities by depicting them as largely absent-minded fashion plates. The closely stacked horizontal line of heads of the fashionable crowd threatens to push the sisters forward onto the looming staircase upon which a footman politely bows, inviting them upward. While the tight skirts are humorously impractical even for London’s elite social venues, they are doubly so when traveling in remote German forests.

In watching Vivian’s performances of voice modulation, body language, and pose, Jeanne “feels that her rival [for Wolfgang’s affections] is an artist.”³⁸⁹ Jeanne watches Vivian arrange herself as she rests her elbows “on the balustrade of the veranda; then lightly bows down her cheek on her clasped hands. The attitude is charmingly photographic; well considered, well executed. It brings every best point of Vivian’s face into relief.”³⁹⁰ Vivian, Edwardes makes clear, is artificially constructed from her strategic posing to the color of her hair:

A sandy blonde by nature, with the phlegmatic temperament, the dense, bloodless complexion of the type, Vivian’s hair is deepened, artificially, to a lusterless, inky black. She wears it plainly drawn from a brow that with all its snaws, with all its handsome carvings, is soulless. The nose is common... one might be tempted to call it broad. The jawbone is square; the lips are full as the lips of an octoroon. Miss Vivash has strong, white teeth, eyebrows carefully selected to match her hair, a pair of unabashed, steel-colored eyes, an excruciating waist, a throat, and shoulders.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 200.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 193.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 44.

These descriptors present an unfeeling (phlegmatic and soulless), overly sensual (her large lips reference the assumed sexual behavior of black women referenced earlier),³⁹² and entirely constructed woman (even her eyebrows are false). Her lusterless hair, soulless brow, metallic eyes, and tight-laced waist underline her lack of vibrant health and humanity. Nothing about her is natural, and she is no longer able to feel the appropriate feminine emotions of kindness, generosity, and compassion. “Who,” asks her cynical companion Lady Pamela Lawless, “would credit a professional Beauty with a heart? Coquetry, vanity, greed – qualities which in other women may be vices – are *her* virtues.”³⁹³ The narrator later takes this assessment one step further and states that “the greed of conquest has, in truth, reached a point in Vivian Vivash at which it becomes a moral disease.”³⁹⁴

This disease has wasted her ability to feel virtuous human emotion and to reach outside of her own narcissism to the broader world. Her success as a beauty “has taken away every wholesome, simple taste of life from her feverish palate.”³⁹⁵ She can enjoy no activity unless she is raised aloft as its deity, a point demonstrated when, amidst her boredom at Schloss Egmont, Vivian proposes home theatricals. At the idea of these,

A flush suffuses the dead whiteness of her skin; life comes into her pale eyes. At this moment you could imagine what she would do... before a crowd of worshippers mobbed in the park of a Sunday, the cynosure of all eyes in an exhibition-room beneath her own portrait.³⁹⁶

³⁹² “Octoroon” would have been applied to those whose blood was one-eighth black. More commonly used in the nineteenth century, it is now considered offensive. See *Oxford English Dictionary* online, accessed 26 January 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/130358?redirectedFrom=octoroon#eid>.

³⁹³ Edwardes, *Vivian*, 170.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

Indeed, this is the only time that Vivian “flushes,” her body suffused with a living glow. She more often “fires” from anger and jealousy.³⁹⁷ The narrator clearly states, however, that these psychosomatic indications of emotion are not reflections of an enlivened soul; rather, they result from “the leading passion in her,”³⁹⁸ an obsessive narcissism that she attempts to hide under the subterfuge of her statuesque beauty. As Lady Lawless points out: for aspirant Beauties to succeed in London’s hyper-critical elite Society, they “must have no flesh and blood about them.”³⁹⁹

Jeanne, on the other hand, has not built up metaphorical and literal layers of hardened, deadened existence, and, at seventeen, is a diamond-in-the-rough girl waiting to be molded by the right man. With “the true Raphael-red hair, the deep, dark eyes of the Madonna del San Sisto,” her young figure “inclines to lankiness” and “her shoulders stoop at times.”⁴⁰⁰ Her greatest merit is her “transparently truthful face”⁴⁰¹ and the skin that renders it so: “palely clear, varying with every varying feeling of the quickest, most emotional of natures.”⁴⁰² Her soul can thus be read through the mediating threshold of her skin and its legible psychosomatic responses to the “colonizing” gaze and words of her male suitor. More than once, in response to Wolfgang’s attentions, “blushes mantle over the child’s pale skin.”⁴⁰³ Rosenthal writes that the most vulnerable bodies – those who are young, female, and virginal, like Jeanne – most often

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 51 and 54.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 103.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 40-1.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 11.

bear the instability of the construct of whiteness as enabled by the blush.⁴⁰⁴ At one point Wolfgang looks at Vivian dancing and observes “the soulless brow, the pale, voluptuous eyes, the studied abandonment of posture and limb,” and then turns to Jeanne and sees her “transparent, primrose face.”⁴⁰⁵ The transparency of Jeanne’s face appeals to Wolfgang’s sense of chivalry and also presents visible “proof” of Jeanne’s emotional, sexual, and racial purity.

A product of emotional hardening and cosmetics, Vivian’s sculpted, soulless countenance obscures such legibility and hides her true breeding. The narrator muses at length upon Vivian’s “professional” usurpation of a position formerly awarded by merit of blood:

Beauty, at one time, was a good deal a matter of family connection. There were certain houses in which a complexion, a throat, a line of feature, were held to be hereditary. The future ‘toast’ knew over what kingdom she should hold sway before she left the nursery; was trained to rule, rather than conquer...⁴⁰⁶

Regardless of her lack of family connection,

[Vivian] was elected a beauty... by so powerful a clique, had backers in places so high, that mothers the most watchful, wives the most circumspect, were forced to ascribe her on their visiting list. ‘An outsider, a photograph celebrity – the talk of the clubs – the Folly of the moment’ – these, and other harder names, the members of her own sex who loved her not might bestow upon Lord Vauxhall’s Invention.⁴⁰⁷

Readers could have easily interpreted this powerful clique as an allusion to the Marlborough Set led by the Prince of Wales. Vivian, a Galatea given form and shape inspired by the lust of Lord Vauxhall, remains mired in the superficial vanities and manipulative relationships from which she sprang. Edwardes suggests that, regardless of such powerful Victorian Pygmalions, everyone understood that Vivian was a temporary fixture:

⁴⁰⁴ Rosenthal, *Visceral Culture*, 582.

⁴⁰⁵ Such “seemingly trivial” moments, the narrator tells us, decide men’s fates. Edwardes, *Vivian*, 120.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

Vivian is a usurper. Partly by accident, partly by sheer self-assertion, not a little – so forward is the aesthetic taste of over-civilized man – through the fact that she is *not* beautiful, has won her perilous way to greatness whereunto she was not born; and her success, of its very nature, has hardened, vulgarized her.⁴⁰⁸

This “hardening” is crucial to understanding both why Vivian is not truly beautiful as well as why she will ultimately fall (indeed, has already fallen). It signals, primarily, that she has compromised the legible indicators of femininity that Jeanne is still able to present (or, rather, unable to deny). If Vivian had had any natural beauty to begin with (which Edwardes calls into question), it has been sacrificed to the artifice required by the position of professional beauty. In the case of Vivian Vivash, Edwardes presents a figure who, in her pursuit of attention and notoriety, has sacrificed appropriately feminine feeling for a heart of stone.

Her lack of feeling is perhaps most apparent in the way she treats female audiences. While performing her most “photographic” poses and angles for the admiring male gaze, she literally stares down any possible female rivals, among whom Jeanne finds herself included. Upon her arrival at Schloss Egmont, Vivian “produces a pair of double glasses, and gives Jeanne a cruel stare,”⁴⁰⁹ one later described as “stony” and honed by “the remembrance of countless feminine cruelties” to which Vivian herself had been subjected.⁴¹⁰ She thus uses such ocular tools when she wants to be “more than commonly supercilious.”⁴¹¹ They serve to exaggerate the power of her gaze, and Jeanne feels pierced through – language that evokes the pinning of a lepidopterous specimen – by the combination of Vivian’s pale eyes and double glasses.⁴¹² As

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 45. She maintains this stare, reinforced by the double eyeglass, “familiar to every idle apprentice of the London streets, with an air of mock criticism both languid and aggressive.” Ibid., 47.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 59.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 59.

⁴¹² Ibid., 59.

tools utilized on London's streets, Vivian's double eyeglasses filter and frame a gaze trained to see the world from an urban perspective. At one point country girl Jeanne considers what she must look like from such a perspective, metaphorically turning the glasses upon herself, and quivers with shame.⁴¹³ The glasses also symbolize the extent to which Vivian cannot see the vibrant picturesque of Germany's primeval forests, quaint villages, poplar avenues, and winding rivers.⁴¹⁴ The only landscapes Vivian appreciates are those of Hyde Park and other London environs relevant to the Season and its events, and only when they feature her.

Edwardes's novel preserves a conservative ideology of gender in which men are clearly creator Pygmalsions and women brought to life under the power of their masculine gaze. Women who no longer respond to such gazes in a natural way – whose emotions and appearance are entirely constructed – have become hardened and blinded to all but their own selfish impulses. Many of the points made by Linton in the original publication of "Girl of the Period" in 1868 remain relevant to understanding Edwardes' story. One of Linton's primary critiques was that young women thoughtlessly sought to emulate the appearance and behavior of the *demi-monde* without considering how their choices reflected back upon themselves:

It is this envy of the pleasures, and indifference to the sins, of these women of the *demi-monde* which is doing such infinite mischief to the modern girl. They brush too closely by each other, if not in actual deeds, yet in aims and feelings; for the luxury which is bought by vice with the one is that thing of all in life most passionately desired by the other...⁴¹⁵

Such obsession with material concerns rendered these young women unable, or unwilling, to participate productively in the time-honored tradition of marriage and procreation. Instead of

⁴¹³ Ibid., 57-8.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁴¹⁵ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 5.

searching for the best match of breeding and character, a frivolous modern girl's idea of marriage was "the legal barter of herself for so much money, representing so much dash, so much luxury and pleasure" and the protection of a husband's name to shield her indiscretions.⁴¹⁶ Such attention to fashionable pursuits engendered a cult of narcissism whose followers were blind to the fact that their decaying virtues were apparent to anyone who had eyes to see.⁴¹⁷ By the early 1880s critics placed professional beauties upon the shrine of this cult, and labeled them, per Linton "bad [copies] of a worse original."⁴¹⁸ not the copies of classical sculpture that provided evidence of an illustrious racial legacy, but rather of the fallen women masquerading as culturally relevant *objets d'art* during the perceived degeneration of an "Aesthetic age."

Conclusion

If we return to Du Maurier's *Awkward Incident in Fashionable Life*, (**Figure 3.4**) classical female statues loom above the fashionable crowd. Both types of beauties, the ancient and the modern, are depicted as vacant sculptural shells defined by the relative merits of their surfaces. The simplicity of the forms of the Venuses, literally elevated above the earth-bound crowd, throw the ostentation and body manipulation of the society women into contrast.⁴¹⁹ The sculptures are not entirely secure: the Venus de Milo, identifiable by her missing arms, tips

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁴¹⁷ Linton writes that men can see the difference between a true prostitute (my words) and those who imitate their appearance: the Girl of the Period "will not see that though men laugh with her they do not respect her, though they flirt with her they do not marry her; she will not believe that she is not the kind of thing they want, and that she is acting against nature and her own interests when she disregards their advice and offends their taste." Ibid., 9.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁴¹⁹ An earlier illustration by du Maurier published in 1870 more overtly deploys the Venus de Milo as a foil for contemporary fashions. Published in *Punch* in 1870, "The Venus of Milo; Or, Girls of Two Different Periods" highlights the overdecorated "Girls of the Period" so vehemently targeted by Eliza Lynn Linton in contrast to the Venus's unburdened form.

precariously out of her wall niche, alluding to the instability of the signifier of these classical types and their associated material qualities, both of which could be conflictingly deployed.

Encapsulating beautiful British women, and particularly those with prominent public profiles, within a sculptural rhetoric linked them with a specific racial heritage while also restricting them to voiceless positions within a patriarchal structure that privileged beauty as the highest feminine accomplishment. Sculptural references also identified those who were able to control their physiological responses to the excessive public scrutiny and invasion of physical space that accompanied public celebrity. Further, such rhetoric was used, as in the case of Vivian Vivash, to draw attention to anxieties that modern women were devoting too much attention to superficial concerns and, in so doing, sacrificing their “inherent” feminine virtues. Professional beauties such as Langtry, Cornwallis West, and Wheeler provided three examples in which women were upheld as preeminent natural beauties and examples of racial excellence as well as signs of the cultural and moral degeneration of an “Aesthetic age.” They represented the stance taken by Lady Pamela Lawless in *Vivian the Beauty*:

We are an aesthetic generation; must have our Beauties as we have our decorative needlework, iridescent glass, and Queen Anne furniture. As a consequence, the passport system is abolished in decent society, and warm manners and a cold heart will carry a pretty woman anywhere, provided the pretty woman chance to be the owner of a Job-like mate.⁴²⁰

Fashionable urban women fit conveniently into growing concerns regarding cultural and moral degeneration during the rise of Aestheticism in the 1870s and 1880s. By indulging the photographic trade – indeed, by utilizing it to the advantage of their public profiles – they seemed to welcome imaginative, and often impolite, associations between their representations and those of their social and racial inferiors. As a daily portrait of the British empire, the shop

⁴²⁰ She explains that “the existence of a husband... makes the sternest Cornelia feel that her girls are, in a certain sense, safe.” Edwardes, *Vivian*, 81.

window thus presented a threatening visual miscegenation of the photographic representations of Britain's primary Beauties with the dark-skinned bodies of its colonized subjects. While this mixture encouraged assumptions regarding the sexual behavior of professional beauties and black women, the comparison of their photographic portraits also reassured viewers of the racial differences reflected in the depiction of their skin.

In an imperial context, the British female body remained a powerful symbol for justifying European aggression and colonial force. While events pertaining to the Anglo-Zulu War were more quickly reported in Britain than had been previously possible, perceptions of such colonial conflict built on an established racialized rhetoric of brutal (black) savage versus heroic (white) European established in the late eighteenth century. Further, according to Jenny Sharpe, representations of such conflict since the Indian Mutiny (Sepoy Rebellion) of 1857 had established an idea of rebellion "closely imbricated with the violation of English womanhood."⁴²¹ Based on images such as Joseph Noel Paton's popular *In Memoriam* (**Figure 3.5**), exhibited in 1858 and reproduced as prints, "the Mutiny was remembered as a barbaric attack on innocent white women,"⁴²² and this specter of rape and mutilation of white female bodies served to validate retribution at times of colonial instability.⁴²³ Julia Thomas notes that to an extent *In Memoriam* "can be seen... to endorse a stereotype of females who are defenseless and innocent,"⁴²⁴ especially, as art historian Pamela Gerrish Nunn has pointed out, amidst period

⁴²¹ Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*, 2.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴²³ Sharpe writes that "the European fear of interracial rape does not exist so long as there is a belief that colonial structures of power are firmly in place." *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴²⁴ Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 133.

agitation for women's rights.⁴²⁵ However, Thomas writes that some commentators saw the work as an argument *for* the "strong-minded women" fighting for female education and emancipation. She quotes from a contemporary review: "These English women, prepared for death, and worse than death, had need of all the training of their English education and the vigour of their English natures to preserve their sanity under such appalling circumstances."⁴²⁶ Such conflict in distant colonies required the mental, physical, and religious resources developed and honed in civilized England. Anderson points out that in this context some health experts, such as Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), claimed the Greek Nausicaa, associated with physical health and athleticism, as a model for Victorian girls, "not just for their own health but to stem the perceived weakening of the British populace."⁴²⁷ Further, emphasizing the need for strong, resourceful white women in distant colonies reinforced a racial imperative of nurturing girls into healthy, resourceful women. The last section of this dissertation will continue this strand of thought into the American West, popular images of which saturated British during the second half of the nineteenth century. The next chapter will set the foundation for considering the representations of the vigorous and resourceful white Western heroines that preceded the 1887 London performance of Annie Oakley in Buffalo Bill's Wild West, with which I will close this dissertation.

⁴²⁵ Thomas references Pamela Gerrish Nunn's *Problem Pictures: Women and Men in Victorian Painting* (Aldershot, UK: Scolar, 1995).

⁴²⁶ Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians*, 134. Original cited: George Whyte-Melville, "Strong-Minded Women," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 68 (1863): 677-78.

⁴²⁷ Anderson, "Embodiments of Empire," 189.

Chapter Four:

Performing the Tomboy Heroine of the American West

This chapter will turn to the post-Civil War United States to consider the creation and dissemination of a popular figure situated on the American frontier: that of the Western tomboy heroine. Originating from sensational news reports and commercial photographs of real Western women such as Martha Jane Canary (1852-1903), the tomboy heroine found its most powerful incarnation in dime novel fiction. Even in their relative humility as manufactured objects, dime novels impacted the creation and cultivation of stories of heroism, sacrifice, determination, and American expansion. Their formulaic narratives satisfied market demand for dramatic stories but also pointed to anxieties regarding a changing nation.

Dime novels, as well as later half-dime novels, present opportunities for considering the relationship between image and text and between individual imagination and nationally-shared implicit narratives. Analysis of dime novel cover illustrations will consider the figure of the westering woman that disseminated traditional models of femininity, termed “True Womanhood,” into the unsettled frontier, thereby providing a venue for eastern audiences to imagine the “civilizing” effects of such westward expansion. This traditional model contrasted with the popular dime novel character of the “Girl Pard,” here called the Western tomboy heroine. She served a supportive role to the male hero and, in so doing, her transgressive behavior, which included swearing, gambling, and cross-dressing, was excused as necessary to the demands of a fraught expanding border. Her trajectory mirrored that of the Western frontier, both of which underwent a process of civilization and maturation. Thus, her efficacy as a

symbol of progress could only be maintained so long as she returned to tamed domesticity upon marriage.

This dime novel character remained restricted to fiction until Annie Oakley (née Phoebe Ann Moses, 1860-1926) took up her tenure with Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1885. While her sharp-shooting and trick-riding performances in the arena entertained and titillated admiring crowds, upon exiting she stepped into the dutiful role of demur wife and hostess. Understanding the roots of her in- and out-of-arena performance personas provides the foundation for considering her British reception as part of the American Exhibition of 1887, to be discussed in the final chapter.

Throughout the following chapters, I have chosen to use the phrase "Western tomboy heroine" rather than cowgirl. While the latter would be more succinct, it was not commonly used until the 1890s, and its historical use lacks specificity. Since the 1980s, scholars of westering women have reintegrated female experience into the male-dominated historical canon of the American West,⁴²⁸ often highlighting ranching and cattle women as as trailblazing figureheads, resourceful adaptors, and, in some cases, social pariahs.⁴²⁹ Referring to an array of

⁴²⁸ Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Mary Ann Irwin and James F. Brooks, eds., *Women and Gender in the American West* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2004). This list is not exhaustive, though Armitage and Jameson's work is considered seminal.

⁴²⁹ Cowgirl scholars often divide their studies between rodeo competitors and ranch women. In her seminal work *The Cowgirls* of 1977, Joyce Gibson Roach draws from a wide swath of examples of working ranch women, performing cowgirls, and popular print media depictions. Highlighting the word's problematic history, which nonetheless did not keep it from becoming "the term by which an international following came to identify ranch women of the West," she frames historical cowgirls as brave and liberated women who undertook difficult ranch work out of desire and necessity without sacrificing attention to their home or children. The cowgirl, she writes, is perhaps our only authentic folk heroine, and her liberation is largely dependent upon her relationship with horses. See Roach, *Cowgirls*, xi. Teresa Jordan in *Cowgirls: Women of the American West* also organizes her work according to these categories by focusing on oral histories of "women who work outside, on ranches or in the rodeo, on a regular basis." See Teresa Jordan, *Cowgirls: Women of the American West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982). Sarah Wood-Clark's short but focused *Beautiful Daring Western Girls: Women of the Wild West Shows* focuses on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century female performers and their efforts to succeed in a male-dominated arena. See Sarah Wood-Clark, *Beautiful Daring Western Girls: Women of the Wild West Shows* (Cody,

ideas regarding female labor, class, romanticized notions of the West, and twentieth century Hollywood films, it has been woven from threads of blurry origin.⁴³⁰ Before the term “cowgirl” became current, women who worked at the “inherently, linguistically, and traditionally male”⁴³¹ job punching cows and wrangling horses in the as-yet-unsettled American frontier were referred to as “cowboy girls.” This phrase remained current into the twentieth century. Popularly, the shortened version has been attributed to Theodore Roosevelt’s reference in 1900 to Lucille Mulhall (1885-1940). However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* locates the origin of “cowgirl” in

WY: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1991). Milt Riske’s *Those Magnificent Cowgirls: A History of the Rodeo Cowgirl* settles firmly in the rodeo arena, although his first chapter is devoted to the cowgirl’s predecessor: the woman “who learned her skills at the college of hard work on a ranch or farm; the earliest became a cowgirl by necessity or choice in helping with the cow and horse business, and thereby became proficient in skills required in rodeoing.” See Milt Riske, *Those Magnificent Cowgirls: A History of the Rodeo Cowgirl* (Cheyenne, WY: Wyoming Publishing, 1983), 1. The title of Mary Lou LeCompte’s *Cowgirls of the Rodeo* clearly establishes her focus on rodeo athletes. Presenting a history of competitive rodeo and the roles Western sporting women played within that genre, LeCompte’s book historically contextualizes a century of changes in the rodeo circuit and focuses on the challenges and triumphs faced by women. See Mary Lou LeCompte, *Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Pioneer Professional Athletes* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Candace Savage’s *Cowgirls* unites previous scholarship in a richly illustrated chronology of the cowgirl from her origins on the Western frontier to twentieth century television. She states that “the cowgirl – the tough, outdoorsy girl or woman who loved riding horses and working with livestock – was born on the family ranches of western America,” thereby making a generational distinction between pioneer woman (mother) and cowgirl (daughter). See Candace Savage, *Cowgirls* (Vancouver, BC: Grestone Books, 1996), 34. This project is concerned with the fictional characters based on living women who predated the rodeo cowgirls of the 1890s.

⁴³⁰ As historian Joyce Gibson Roach has pointed out, the genesis of the cowgirl concept is entangled within stories of “ranch women involved in cattle and horse enterprises, Wild West shows, rodeos, riding organizations, clubs, competitions, show business, and other venues.” See Gibson Roach, “Introduction: Cowgirls and Cattle Queens,” in Sara R. Massey, ed., *Texas Women on the Cattle Trails* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2006), 10-11.

⁴³¹ Linda Rose Sanderson, “‘A Ringside Seat to Paradise’: Rodeo Cowgirls, The New Woman, and The Construction of a Usable Past” (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 2006), 65.

1884,⁴³² and scholars have repeatedly pointed out that the term was widely used in Wild West and rodeo publicity during the 1890s.⁴³³

Historian Joyce Gibson Roach points out that originally the term did not carry positive connotations, and that “anyone calling a ranch woman a cowgirl was living recklessly.”⁴³⁴ This was partly because, even though the frontier required quick-witted resourcefulness and self-reliance, westering women nonetheless carried with them genteel notions of Victorian femininity. The spread of mail routes and railroads ensured access to ladies’ magazines and books. These emphasized a strict delineation between men’s and women’s work and established societal norms of feminine comportment, not the least of which was the prerequisite of a sidesaddle and the restriction of women’s labor to the domestic sphere.⁴³⁵ The reality of pioneer life, however, often meant that women undertook traditionally male labor such as working with livestock. Some of these women fulfilled their tasks willingly and successfully on a sidesaddle, while others adopted men’s saddles and trousers or split skirts for practical reasons of comfort and performance. Associated labor such as branding and castrating was often dirty and violent, presenting myriad challenges to Victorian sensibilities. Further, not only were split skirts considered unfeminine,

⁴³² The first reference uses a hyphenated version, “cow-girls,” from British tourist Edward Barker’s book *Through Auvergne on Foot* (London: Griffith and Farran, 1884), in which he encountered a group of singing cowgirls during a walk through the French region of Auvergne. A second reference is drawn from *The Boston Journal* that describes “A beautiful cowgirl” who “lives near Murkel, Taylor county, Neb.” and “owns some stock, which she personally looks after.” See *Oxford English Dictionary* online, accessed 1 February 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/43415?redirectedFrom=cowgirl#eid7910321>.

⁴³³ Gibson Roach identified the term in an 1897 Cheyenne Frontier Days program: see Gibson Roach, *The Cowgirls*, 90. Mary Lou LeCompte cites an 1893 *Police Gazette* article calling Gertrude Petran a “genuine and fascinating cowgirl.” See Mary Lou LeCompte, *Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Pioneer Professional Athletes* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 36. Riley writes that Buffalo Bill used “cowgirl” in his publicity as early as 1891. See Riley, “Annie Oakley: The Peerless Lady Wing Shot,” 104.

⁴³⁴ Gibson Roach, *The Cowgirls*, xi.

⁴³⁵ Gibson Roach has pointed out that Anglo females, emulating the riding style of the English royalty and aristocracy, had been riding sidesaddle since at least the fourteenth century. See Gibson Roach, *The Cowgirls*, “Introduction: Cowgirls and Cattle Queens,” 15.

but riding astride was also thought to be sexually provocative and harmful to women's reproductive organs.

The appropriation of this term by Wild West performers and show managers in the 1890s seems to have alienated women working on ranches because it “smelled of commercial enterprises... which sometimes had little to do with ranch life.”⁴³⁶ Indeed, the word continues to be linked directly with performance: as historian Candace Savage has pointed out, “there are those who will tell you that the cowgirl is pure myth, just a rootin'-tootin' creation of American show business.”⁴³⁷ The first widespread use of the word amongst east coast and international audiences is tightly interwoven with late-nineteenth century Wild West shows and a growing rodeo circuit. This performed cowgirl character was already part of the imagined American West thanks to newspaper reports about very real women such as Martha Canary and their subsequent sensationalized stories disseminated as serialized fiction.

Dime novels

Published in various sizes, lengths, editions, and series, dime novels were mass-produced texts in which sensational stories reiterated formulaic plots. Thus, “dime novel” came to refer to “any sensational detective or blood-and-thunder novel in pamphlet form.”⁴³⁸ American popular fiction in the form of serial novelettes sold for fifteen to twenty-five cents in the 1840s and 1850s. When New York firm Beadle & Adams released the first dime novel in 1860, they presented a product competitively priced at ten cents, and later at five cents for their Half-Dime

⁴³⁶ Gibson Roach, *The Cowgirls*, xi.

⁴³⁷ Savage, *Cowgirls*, 3.

⁴³⁸ Albert Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams in Its Dime and Nickel Novels: The Story of a Vanished Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 3.

Library series.⁴³⁹ The lower and middle classes composed a majority of the dime novel's audience. Stories chosen for publication most often targeted young boys, although readership permeated all levels and ages of society.⁴⁴⁰

Analysis of dime novel narrative tropes reveals the anxieties and hopes of a country expanding westward after the crisis of the Civil War, a reassessment of "nature" in face of corporate greed, and increased malleability of gender roles in face of unforeseen frontier challenges. Their formulaic repetition ultimately reflected and shaped a specific vision of American identity, expansion, and civilization.⁴⁴¹ The huge print runs of the most popular stories

⁴³⁹ Albert Johannsen, who has written the seminal work on Beadle & Adams, notes that this firm was not the first to publish cheap paper-covered novels, which had been in circulation for at least thirty years prior to 1860. Although Erastus Beadle (1821-1894) is often given credit, it was actually his brother Irwin (1826-1882) who first issued paper-covered novels at a fixed price of ten cents that were issued in continuous series. See Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams*, 3. The late-eighteenth century penny press in England had already created a precedent for producing "educational" yet sensational literature at costs affordable to the working class. Improvements in printing techniques and mass distribution in the 1830s provided access to increasingly literate British and American audiences.

⁴⁴⁰ There is no existing hard data regarding who purchased and consumed these works. Although publishers did target specific audiences based on gender and age, most scholars admit that popular fiction was probably read across class, age, and gender lines. Johannsen states that the Dime Novel Library series (which ran from 1878 to 1905 and featured first printings with the exception of some serials) was intended for adults, while the Half-Dime Library (published from 1878 to 1905) targeted younger boys. See Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams*, 200, 204, and 253. American studies scholar Martha Burr has argued that it is very likely men and women of all classes read this type of literature or at least were exposed to similar content via the news press, spectacles such as Wild West shows, and stage plays. See Martha Burr, "The American Cowgirl: History and Iconography, 1860-Present" (PhD diss., New York University, 1998), 81. Dime novel scholar Daryl Jones cites author Eugene T. Sawyer who reported having seen "bankers and capitalists gravely paying their nickels for the same tales their own elevator boys read." Jones then quotes a second dime novel author who wrote that popular stories "were to be found in the hands of men of large business interests and public affairs." These businessmen seemed unashamed of their reading material, using it as a form of entertainment and mental relaxation. See Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green, OH: The Popular Press Bowling Green State University, 1978), 14-5. Historian Jane Hunter in her study on Victorian American girlhood and adolescence writes that adventure and romance stories were widely popular amongst both boys and girls. See Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 80.

⁴⁴¹ Dime novel scholars Edmund Pearson, Jones, and Henry Nash Smith, have pointed out the usefulness of studying dime novels as a social phenomenon indicative of cultural anxieties. See Edmund Pearson, *Dime Novels, or, Following an Old Trail in Popular Literature* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1929); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970 [1950]); Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green, OH: The Popular Press Bowling Green State University, 1978); as well as Larry E. Sullivan and Lydia Schurman, eds., *Pioneers, Passionate Ladies, and Private Eyes: Dime Novels, Series Books, and Paperbacks* (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1996). Dime novels have been largely overlooked by scholars because of their ephemeral nature and often mediocre content. Per Edmund Pearson in 1929: the medium represents "a social phenomenon rather than a matter of artistic achievement." Pearson, *Dime*

attest to the degree of their popularity: *Malaeska: The Indian Wife of the White Hunter* by Mrs. Ann S. Stephens sold 65,000 copies within a few months of its release in 1860.⁴⁴² *Seth Jones*, published the same year, sold out of its first printing of 60,000 almost immediately.⁴⁴³ Popular novels such as these went through as many as a dozen editions in a single year and were consistently republished.

Scholars of American culture and literature Henry Nash Smith and Daryl Jones argue that this body of literature reflected and shaped a specific vision of American identity, expansion, and civilization through the presentation and repetition of formulaic and sensational content, thereby shedding light on “the anxieties and aspirations of the age.”⁴⁴⁴ Smith has written that “history cannot happen... without images which simultaneously express collective desires and impose coherence on the infinitely numerous and infinitely varied data of experience.”⁴⁴⁵ Thus, dime novels concerning the frontier can be read as the expression of collective desires, and particularly of nostalgia for a disappearing age, as well as a method for imposing coherence on the messy history of the vast American West. These stories created temporary escape from a world

Novels, 17. In 1978, Jones pointed out that the period between 1860 and 1900 had been particularly overlooked and termed it “the forgotten era” of Western literature. See Jones, *The Dime Novel Western*, 4.

⁴⁴² Stephens, like many dime novel authors, was already a well established author. *Malaeska* was first published in 1839 in *The Ladies' Companion* and was re-published as the first of Beadle & Adams's Dime Novel series in 1860. See Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams*, 31.

⁴⁴³ The marketing strategy for *Seth Jones* helped boost its sales. In September 1860, the simple question “Who is Seth Jones?” appeared in newspapers and then spread to posters, handouts, and graffiti. This was then followed by an image of the character, a hunter type dressed in a coon-skin cap and bearing a rifle, with the words “I am Seth Jones.” The dime novel was released in October. An estimate has been made that it eventually sold 400,000 copies, but unfortunately the official records of Beadle & Adams are no longer extant, and this number cannot be verified. See Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams*, 31-33. Jones writes that the original story was translated into half a dozen languages and ultimately sold more than 600,000 copies, a figure given by Charles M. Harvey in 1907. See Jones, *The Dime Novel Western*, 8.

⁴⁴⁴ Jones, *The Dime Novel Western*, 15.

⁴⁴⁵ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970 [1950]), ix.

perceived to be increasingly unstable and dangerous due to the negative effects of industrialization. Such adverse effects included an increased amount of machine labor (and thus fewer jobs), financial panics, the omnipresence of powerful (and often ruthless) corporations, immigration, an increased number of women and children in the work force, crime, and prostitution. The frontier was described in elevated terms of the Romantic sublime and used in practical, materialistic ways in hopes of achieving the potential civilized utopia that could remedy such social ills.⁴⁴⁶

While male characters dominate dime novel plots and dime novel scholarship,⁴⁴⁷ American studies scholar Martha Burr's 1998 dissertation considers a range of female types. These include the White Indian Queen, a fierce warrior captured by Native Americans as a girl and raised among them, and the Female Outlaw, a tragic and unredeemable figure who lusts for power and domination through whatever means necessary. The Female Detective, a highly skilled professional posing as a simple working girl, utilizes various disguises in order to move about in a man's world. The young, independent Girl Pard serves as a scout, tracker, and guide while her flashier counterpart the Girl Sport spends most of her time at gaming tables. The latter two types enjoy smoking, drinking, and gambling, and the vulgarity of such behavior often disqualifies them from being love interests of the male protagonist. Rather, they support the male hero until finally realizing the benefit of ladylike manners and the comfort of home and family. The Cowgirl/Daughter of the West grows out of the Girl Pard/Sport model and assists the Cowboy hero in his quest to tame and civilize the American frontier.

⁴⁴⁶ Jones, *The Dime Novel Western*, 10-18.

⁴⁴⁷ Smith and Jones focus almost exclusively on male character types. Jones analyzes the Hero, the Plainsman, the Outlaw, and the Cowboy but devotes only a small portion of his insightful scholarship to female characters, reducing them to a dichotomy of heroine versus siren (good versus evil). Smith spends even less time on the subject of the heroine, tracing a basic linear trajectory from genteel lady to aggressive Amazon.

The female types Burr analyzes share some commonalities. Physically strong and agile, they often wear male attire but retain highly feminine features. They hone their expertise with weapons of various sorts, are comfortable in nature, often perform male labor, and usually live on the fringes of society. Orphanhood often provides a suitably tragic past around which a colorful revenge story may be written while also providing freedom to function independently without besmirching a family's reputation.⁴⁴⁸ These women participate in spaces outside of the home, on the range or in towns, and therefore alongside men in action-dominated spheres. Rarely domestic, they may at first look upon marriage critically before coming around to romantic union and the responsibilities of raising a family. Although they display "masculine" emotions that tend toward competitiveness, anger, and revenge, Western heroines are feminine and genteel at the core. Only in the female Outlaw does "a ruthless egotism"⁴⁴⁹ overpower sympathy and compassion.

Burr states that "each type challenges female gender roles in explicit ways,"⁴⁵⁰ but, by being placed in the American West, they are safely distanced from their largely eastern audience. The Western heroine may have acted counter to Victorian standards of behavior, but she acted alone and was not an agitator. She did not challenge masculinity, but rather aligned herself to its cause. Female readers could interpret this figure as a civilizing force on the Western frontier whose happy ending inevitably involves marriage and family; or, they could enjoy the rebellion of a liberated woman living according to her own needs and desires. Burr contends that "the iconic cowgirl challenged ideas of gender and was manipulated by both radical and conservative

⁴⁴⁸ In the case of the White Indian Queen, although not technically an orphan, the process of "becoming 'savage'" effectively severs any ties with white "civilized" culture. Burr, "The American Cowgirl," 111.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

arbiters of culture. Simultaneously she was used to both symbolize and subvert female power.”⁴⁵¹ Dime novels therefore provided a venue for rethinking the behavior, appearance, and vigor of the American female adolescent in an expanding post-Civil War nation. Their exaggerated narratives entertained through depictions of female characters engaging in nontraditional activities and allowed readers to contemplate the possibilities for women’s work and bodies in an uncivilized frontier.

Although dime novels were sensational, they were not necessarily radical. The moral decisions made by female characters determined their ultimate end. Readers could therefore expect that a fallen woman or female outlaw would get her just deserts in premature death, while heroines or helper figures, although transgressing traditional gender roles, would eventually be “rewarded” through love, marriage, and childbirth. Dime novels thrilled and provoked through sensational story lines but ultimately conformed to expectations of moral behavior. Indeed, the guidelines set by Beadle & Adams for contributors were surprisingly conservative:

We prohibit all things offensive to good taste in expression and incident—
We prohibit subjects of characters that carry an immoral taint—
We prohibit the repetition of any occurrence which, though true, is yet better untold—
We prohibit what cannot be read with satisfaction by every right-minded person—old and young alike—
We require your best work—
We require unquestioned originality—
We require pronounced strength of plot and high dramatic interest of story—
We require grace and precision of narrative, and correctness in composition.
Authors must be familiar with characters and places which they introduce and not attempt to write in fields of which they have no intimate knowledge.
Those who fail to reach the standard here indicated cannot write acceptably for our several Libraries, or for any of our publications.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁵² From “Chapter 1: Dime Novels in Albert Johannsen. *The House of Beadle and Adams in Its Dime and Nickel Novels: The Story of a Vanished Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), managed by Northern Illinois University Libraries and accessed 1 February 2015, <http://www.ulib.niu.edu/badndp/chap1.html>.

It was this insistence on good taste and sincerity combined with market pressure for sensationalism that made dime novels promising venues for experimentation around a core of respectability.

Cult of True Womanhood

During the mid-nineteenth century, the female ideal popularized by women's literature was termed "True Womanhood"⁴⁵³ and emphasized piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. While men labored to expand American capitalist enterprise, women remained in the home and devoted their lives to God, their husbands, and their children. Women's bodies, thought to be closed biological systems with limited amounts of energy, required constant rest and isolation. Experts such as Dr. Edward H. Clarke recommended that girls avoid strenuous mental and physical activity in order to focus all developmental energy on their reproductive organs.⁴⁵⁴ The "ovarian" model of biology "aligned femininity with the animal world by constructing the female body as a container, nest, and fountain of sustenance for the young,"⁴⁵⁵ thereby emphasizing the biological imperative to reproduce. A woman's strength was not

⁴⁵³ In her seminal work on the subject, historian Barbara Welter surveyed women's magazines, gift annuals, religious literature, cookbooks, diaries, memories, and autobiographies from 1820 to 1860. See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18: 2, Part 1 (1966): 151-74.

⁴⁵⁴ Art historian Lauren Lessing writes that Dr. Clarke's 1873 book *Sex in Education; or, A Fair Chance for the Girls* was so popular as to warrant seventeen printings in thirteen years. See Lauren Lessing, "Roses in Bloom: American Images of Adolescent Girlhood" in Holly Pyne Connor, ed., *Angels & Tomboys: Girlhood in 19th-century American Art* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications Inc., 2012), 121.

⁴⁵⁵ Sarah Burns, "Winslow Homer and the Natural Woman" in T. J. Jackson Lears, ed., *American Victorians and Virgin Nature* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2002), 26.

physical, but rather emotional and spiritual.⁴⁵⁶ By maintaining a clean and spiritually healthy living environment, she exercised a positive influence over her husband and children. Her submission to God mirrored deference to her husband, whose physical strength balanced her feminine frailty. Further, her devotion supposedly kept his spiritual and moral compass properly aligned. Through maintaining a cheerful and religious home, submitting to her husband, nurturing her family, participating in healthy activities such as cleaning and housework, and cultivating a spirit of gratitude, a woman could find fulfillment in the assurance that her good deeds culminated in moral and social improvements. True piety resulted from cultivating religious and bodily purity: therefore, at least according to the literature, fallen women were ensured a similar unredeemable fate of madness and/or death.

Westering American women represented the first generations of white culture bearers transporting this Anglo-American ideology from the East coast to a new frontier.⁴⁵⁷ In early- to mid-nineteenth century literature, these home-bound angels of the hearth were often positioned as pioneer victims under siege. While men settled the West's rough and tumble territories, women civilized and populated its sod houses and prairie towns, and their fictional counterparts fulfilled this ideal vision within the constructed parameters of a dime novel's 35,000 to 70,000 words.

⁴⁵⁶ Welter writes that "religion belonged to woman by divine right, a gift of God and nature," and religious devotion kept a woman's thoughts from becoming restless, helped her avoid temptation and desire, and purposefully structured her activities around church and home. Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 153.

⁴⁵⁷ Men seem to have done their fair share in bringing an ideal of womanhood with them as well: according to Jacqueline Moore, "accounts of both cowboys and cattlemen abound with evidence that Victorian ideals of innocent womanhood came with them to the frontier and the men modified their behavior accordingly." This ideal applied only, however, to mother figures and proper ladies. Prostitutes did not merit the same kind of romanticization. See Jacqueline M. Moore, *Cow Boys and Cattle Men: Class and Masculinities on the Texas Frontier, 1865-1900* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 144.

In narratives such as *The Prairie Queen: or, Tom Western, the Texas Ranger* (No. 232 of Beadle's Dime Novels written by William J. Hamilton and published in 1871, **Figure 4.1**) or *The Maid of Wyoming* (No. 101 of Beadle's Dime Novels written by James L. Bowen and published in 1866, **Figure 4.2**) the text and cover illustrations represent young white female protagonists as the enduring epicenters of Euro-American civilization surrounded by untamed Nature in the guise of wilderness, beast, and dangerous foreigner. The plot of the *The Prairie Queen* revolves around Tom Western the Texas Ranger and a variety of male villains. Female protagonist Mabel, a passive pawn tossed around between these characters, engenders positive change by the powerful combination of her physical beauty and moral strength. In contrast to the "dark, passionate"⁴⁵⁸ Mexican woman Zillah, Mabel's idealized beauty shines forth as an indication of her internal character, thereby representing the metaphorical glow that Dyer writes is integral to the construction of white femininity.⁴⁵⁹

The cover illustration (**Figure 4.1**) reinforces a common conflation of moral and spiritual aptitude with race, highlighting a perceived discrepancy between Mabel's peaceful, civilized demeanor and that of the passionate Mexican woman. Lying asleep on her back in a cave, the right angles of Mabel's elbows – one plump arm thrown up over her head, the other draped across her waist – frame the idealized profile of her sleeping face, calling attention to her low-cut dress and vulnerable bosom. Zillah's dynamic upright form bisects Mabel's prone body on the right side of the composition, leaving a negative space between their faces inhabited by the eerie shadows of Aztec graffiti. Mabel wears a dress of simple design featuring a form-fitting bodice,

⁴⁵⁸ William J. Hamilton, *The Prairie Queen; or, Tom Western, the Texan Ranger*, Beadle's Dime Novels No. 232, June 20, 1871, 25.

⁴⁵⁹ Dyer writes that "idealized white women are bathed in and permeated by light. It streams through them and falls on to them from above. In short, they glow." See Dyer, *White*, 122.

loose short sleeves, and long skirts that drape over her legs and feet, mirroring the tumble of her hair. The shadows on the back wall and the dark texture of the hide on which she sleeps throws her white skin and dress into sharper contrast. Zillah wears a dress with capped shoulder sleeves that accentuate the width of her shoulders over a small belted waist. Her short skirt, staccatoed by rapid lines of embroidery and beading, allows an ample view of shin, ankle, and dainty foot that points to the novel's title emblazoned across the bottom of the cover. Not only would such an obvious foregrounded flash of leg have attracted Victorian eyes, but the difference in skirt length also underlines a sartorial hierarchy. The skirts of "proper" young ladies were gradually lengthened between the ages of twelve and twenty from just below the knee to, finally, fully to the floor (**Figure 4.3**). Zillah, an untamed woman of foreign origin, wears a skirt much too short for her age and obvious physical maturity. Perhaps she does so for practicality of movement, or perhaps she simply does not know better; regardless, this attire signals her lack of culture and taste.

Zillah's wide-spread feet and flowing black hair signal her quick entry from the right side of the frame, her left arm held rigidly behind her clasping a long blade extending perpendicularly from her tight fist. Holding her right arm against her body and crossed in front of her heart, she looks down over her right elbow which points directly to Mabel's face. Zillah's equally idealized features mirror Mabel's beauty, but, caught in a moment of furrowed emotion, indicate inner turmoil. The vigorous S-line of Zillah's body further reinforces the psychological tension of this moment in which a dangerously sexy and empowered exotic woman threatens to extinguish her civilized white companion. Mabel must trust that the moral and racial superiority represented by her beauty and character will positively influence this wild woman, thereby inspiring her to drop her masculine weapons and take up the healing effects of civilized femininity.

This particular scene never occurs within the narrative. Rather, it is a strategic marketing ploy that is titillating enough to attract consumer attention from the shop window or book stand. Throughout the novel the women are quite good friends. When Zillah wildly rides her mustang, her character takes on an exotic, sensual, and fierce demeanor associated with wild Nature and the exotic (primitive) Other. However, when in Mabel's presence, Zillah becomes tamed into a self-composed woman. After a series of unexpected and rather random adventures, the plot line concludes with Mabel marrying the white hero Tom Western and Zillah returning to Mexico and settling down to become a responsible wife and mother. Mabel's civilizing influence as a participant in the Cult of True Womanhood has assured both women a traditional happy ending.

An earlier novel, *The Maid of Wyoming*, (**Figure 4.2**) positions a young white woman within a brutal landscape and against a corrupt father. Although Charlotte Bradbury grows up on her father's open range ranch in Wyoming, she has been raised as a proper True Woman: she dresses, acts, and speaks with tact and good taste and manages household responsibilities due to the premature death of her mother. She is torn between loyalty to her father John Bradbury and love for ambitious settler Abner Ainsworth, especially because these men are embroiled in a land war. Eventually the greedy and grasping Mr. Bradbury is shot, allowing Abner and Charlotte to marry and look towards the future. The tragedy of the story is not that Charlotte deserted her father, but rather that her father lost his moral direction even though he had the benefit of Charlotte's constant devoted presence and moral guidance. Charlotte thus makes the resourceful decision to consider her biological imperative to marry and reproduce. Her upbringing as a well-bred woman provides clarity of foresight, firmness of purpose, and confidence in her role as wife and mother.

The cover of *The Maid of Wyoming* depicts an early moment in the narrative when settler Abner first sees Charlotte on a horse running out of control. The splayed legs, tossed head, and streaming tail of her horse create a starburst of activity in which she properly holds her sidesaddle position, leaning slightly forward and into her body even while her cape and hat whisk behind her. The tree in the background bisects the horizontal axis of tautly pulled reins, flowing cape and hair, and whipping tail, thereby creating a stable grid that anchors the dynamic composition firmly in the center of the page. Charlotte's dress, the darkest portion of the central composition, creates a visual locus around which swirl the sharp threatening rocks in the left foreground and feathery branches in the right background, thereby framing the powerful explosion of her horse's body and her firm seat upon its back.

The main plot of this novel is taken up with warfare and violence between the Bradbury and Ainsworth families.⁴⁶⁰ The cover, however, focuses on the beginning of the romantic thread of the story, for it depicts the moment in which Abner first sees Charlotte. The viewer is placed in Abner's position watching this daughter of the West, who represents the link between the old (land barons and cattle ranchers) and the new (homesteaders). Surrounded by chaos – the splayed legs of her charging horse, the rocks and brambles of a wild countryside, her flying hat, hair, and cape – she nonetheless sits firmly in the saddle and determinedly reins in her charging steed. As an image of Victorian womanhood, her position within the composition and her

⁴⁶⁰ This dime novel cover seems geared towards a larger audience of readers, being neither overtly violent nor romantic and perhaps therefore appropriate for both sexes. In consideration of the publication date of this work (1866) it is also tempting to contemplate the illustrator's avoidance of all allusions to the narrative's inter-family violence and warfare given the still-recent horrors of the Civil War. The story is further distanced by being set in the late eighteenth century, although Charlotte's attire as depicted on the cover would be appropriate to the 1860s. Indeed, I cannot account for some of the historical incongruities of the story. The date is identified as 1769, and Bradbury is described as a Pennamite, while Ainsworth is a Yankee. This correlates with the Pennamite-Yankee Wars from 1769 to 1799, which refers to conflicts between settlers from Connecticut (Ainsworth's place of origin) regarding land claims in what is now known as Wyoming Valley. The dime novel narrative, however, is one of homesteaders and cattle ranchers appropriate to the American frontier. I leave a consideration of this creative fusion of historical references to another scholar.

determined poise reinforce a strength nurtured by her upbringing. Her training as a cultured woman significantly has not compromised her ability to live in a region requiring an inordinate amount of courage. We do not see a shrinking violet aboard this careening horse, but rather a woman who is in possession of her mind, wits, and body. The strict moral, cultural, and religious training of True Womanhood has strengthened Charlotte for life's challenges, especially those related to the mission of civilizing the West. Significantly, of course, although she rides alone in this illustration, the text illuminates the fact that she, as a symbol of Victorian womanhood, rides from father to husband. While they fight over the fate of new lands, she ensures a bridge of cultural continuity once the landscape has been appropriately delineated and "tamed."

This cursory analysis serves to emphasize the importance of an assumed function of the True Womanhood model: namely, to promote civilization via the influence of white Christian women's moral and cultural superiority, and to reinforce their importance as progenitors of the race. However, the extent to which real women fulfilled this ideal was based on specific geographic, cultural, and social elements. It is not surprising, then, that new types of women sprang up who carved their existences out of a West rife with opportunity and difficulty. In fiction, stock female characters such as Mabel and Charlotte continued to serve as beautiful pawns passively influencing others through their moral goodness, but their popularity paled in comparison to that of new types based on living frontier women.

Calamity Jane

In the widely successful *Deadwood Dick* series, published by Beadle & Adams as part of their Half-Dime Library from 1877 to 1885, author Edward L. Wheeler (c. 1845-1885) constructed the most famous of fictional heroines inspired directly from news reports of Martha

Jane Canary, better known as Calamity Jane. Born in 1852, Canary was orphaned at a young age and became a military camp follower, most likely supporting herself as a prostitute and dance hall girl. Traveling throughout Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota, she had established a reputation by 1872 at the age of nineteen for her rather riotous alcoholic binges and boisterous behavior. Three years later, she was nationally famous as “Calamity Jane” after supposedly having accompanied the 1875 Black Hills Expedition as an Indian scout.⁴⁶¹

In his 2005 biography of Canary, James D. McLaird published two early photographs of her as a scout. The first he dates to 1875 (**Figure 4.4**) and the second to 1876 or 1877 from Deadwood, South Dakota. (**Figure 4.5**) Victorian viewers may have been challenged to identify the sitter in these photographs as a woman. The earliest is surprisingly informal. Seated on a rocky outcropping, Canary leans deeply to her right, her forearm, elbow, and right hip pressed against the rough surface. She crosses her left leg over her right, resting her left arm along the length of her body and left thigh. She stares forward into the camera from under a hat tilted towards the back of her head. The exaggerated languor of her pose and her masculine clothing reference images of cowpunchers relaxing on the ground near campfires after a long day’s work. Her androgynous facial features are even more apparent in the carte-de-visite taken the following year. (**Figure 4.5**) A heavy brow, small eyes, straight but flat nose, and small mouth held within the confines of high cheekbones and square jawline could easily be mistaken as the features and inscrutable gaze of a man, especially without any identifiably feminine hairstyle. In this studio

⁴⁶¹ Followed closely by the national press, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer (1839-1876) led the expedition to explore the Black Hills in search of a suitable fort location. Rumors of gold in the area, sacred to the Sioux and supposedly protected by treaties, instigated a rush that antagonized local communities. Ultimately this expedition led to the Battle of the Little Bighorn in June of the following year (1876). Canary’s biographer James D. McLaird points out that although most scholars are skeptical of her claim to having been on this expedition, he has found primary documents that attest to her presence if not to her having actually served in the role of a scout. See James D. McLaird, *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 53.

portrait, Canary is again dressed as a scout but with more panache. She wears a fringed buckskin trouser and jacket ensemble, plaid collared shirt buttoned to the neck, and thin necktie pulled slightly off-center. A thick leather belt hugs her waist, causing her oversized coat to bunch around her upper torso, its wide neck falling slightly off her right shoulder and framing the slight dishevelment of her necktie and shirt collar. The long fringe on her shoulders, chest, sleeves, and lower jacket hem seem to pull her heavy jacket downward, mimicking the falling line of the holster and pistol on her right hip to her strong bare hands. Her oversize trousers bunch at the knees and ankles, revealing the toes of heavy boots. Her hat rests jauntily at an angle, the curved brim running from under her right ear up to her forehead and arching high over her left ear before plunging behind her head. Although held rigidly in place by a metal stand, the base of which can be seen behind her feet, the photographer cleverly creates a continuous line of movement through her body by posing her in a gentle contrapposto pose, and her cascading buckskin attire and insouciant hat enhance the S-line of this posture.

The young scout Calamity Jane comfortably took up tropes of masculinity in her choice of clothing, pose, and activities. Her labor, which ranged from dishwashing and prostitution to stagecoach driving and moving cattle, reflected the realities of frontier life. An analysis of her representations and autobiography demonstrate that she was keenly aware of opportunities for self-marketing and self-fashioning, for she encouraged the rumors, quickly turned into national publicity, that labeled her a scout and linked her to Wild Bill Hickok (1837-1876).⁴⁶² The two photographs illustrated here are highly constructed and keenly self-aware. Although it may not

⁴⁶² Although unlikely that Canary and Hickok had any kind of romantic liaison, stories quickly sprang up about the duo after Hickok's untimely death in Deadwood in August 1876. Canary was partly responsible for this discrepancy and seemed to have enjoyed embellishing stories of her life, even stating at one point that she had been responsible for tracking down Hickok's killer Jack McCall and bringing him to justice. This has since been proven untrue. Most scholars agree that Canary and Hickok were only platonic acquaintances, though they have been lastingly associated in the popular imagination.

have been unusual for women to participate in masculine labor in the American west, rarely were they depicted in associated work attire. Rather, when sitting for photographs they were more likely to wear their Sunday best and pose with their families as wives and mothers, categories to which Canary also laid claim. Indeed, the logistical requirements of wet and dry plate photography often necessitated posed, static subjects in very bright natural light. Having one's photograph taken during the 1870s and 1880s was a ritual replete with socio-cultural import, and sitters realized that such image production would carry their reputations, identities, and achievements into posterity.⁴⁶³

Cross-dressing women were not a new phenomenon in America, but they merited attention and often risked arrest.⁴⁶⁴ Many women on the Western range rode sidesaddle, while others learned to ride astride and wore split skirts or trousers for ease and practicality in movement.⁴⁶⁵ Canary intentionally dressed as a scout in order to increase her notoriety and therefore sell a larger number of her photographs and autobiography, but she also posed in more feminine guises that presented alternative versions of a multifaceted life as a wife and mother.

⁴⁶³ Solomon Butcher's (1856-1927) photographs of homesteading families in Nebraska are excellent examples of how pioneer families self-presented for photographs. Butcher's remaining glass plate negatives have been digitized and are available online through the Nebraska State Historical Society (www.nebraskahistory.org) and the Library of Congress (www.loc.gov).

⁴⁶⁴ Many came to prominence during the Civil War, such as Dr. Mary Edwards Walker (1832-1919) and Mrs. Frances Clalin Clayton (dates unknown). Some women dressed as men in order to find new lives in the West: Josephine "Jo" Monaghan passed as a man while living on a remote Idaho ranch, and her real gender was discovered only upon her death in 1904. Photographer Evelyn Cameron (1868-1928), an accomplished sidesaddle rider, switched to split skirts around the turn of the century after moving to Terry, Montana. Although she risked arrest by riding astride into nearby Miles City, by the time of her 1914 *Country Life* article regarding the cowgirl in Montana, this attire had become standard. See Evelyn Cameron, "The 'Cowgirl' in Montana," *Country Life*, XXXV, June 6, 1914, 829-832.

⁴⁶⁵ While growing up on a ranch in west-central New Mexico, Agnes Morley Cleveland (1874-1958) gradually replaced conventional feminine attire with "a costume suited for immediate needs" – namely a Stetson hat, double-breasted flannel shirt, and knickers worn under her skirt. Her clothing migration "from the existing standards of female modesty to purely human comfort and convenience," ultimately resulted in her abandonment of the sidesaddle by the mid-1890s in preference for riding astride. See Agnes Morley Cleveland, *No Life for a Lady* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941).

Authors and readers alike seemed interested in Canary's choice to appear in men's and women's attire,⁴⁶⁶ and throughout the 1880s and 1890s she was photographed alternately in her buckskin scout's attire and in women's clothing.⁴⁶⁷ **(Figure 4.6)**

McLaird states that Canary's "flamboyant behavior made it impossible for newspapers to ignore her."⁴⁶⁸ She capitalized on this publicity by aggrandizing the retelling of her own narrative, by associating herself with key events and men, by dressing in men's clothing, and by entertaining (or terrorizing, depending on the narrator) local residents during drunken binges. However, her most powerful incarnation was that of a powerful, sexy, diamond-in-the-rough dime novel Western heroine invented by Wheeler. Reinforcing a romanticized and sensational depiction of the American West, this latter image of Calamity Jane the Girl Pard would, for the rest of the nineteenth century and the entirety of the twentieth, dominate and obscure the less palatable life of Martha Canary.⁴⁶⁹ The Calamity Jane legend eventually grew to have very little in common with the "real" Calamity Jane other than a catchy name, and it was less the fictional heroine's attachment to a living woman of the West and much more her emblematic construction as a tomboy heroine that ensured her longevity in the American imagination.

⁴⁶⁶ McLaird published sketches taken from Thomas Newson's *Drama of Life in the Black Hills* (1878) depicting her leaning against a bar smoking a cigar and wearing trousers, a long buttoned jacket, and short-brimmed hat, and alternately holding a pistol while wearing a corseted bodice, long skirt, and similar hat. Text accompanies each illustration ("Calamity in Male Attire" and "Calamity in Female Attire"), otherwise her features are too indistinct to make an immediate identification. McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 80-1.

⁴⁶⁷ McLaird jokes that Canary is "decked out in a fine dress and hat and looking every bit a brothel madam" in an 1882 studio portrait by L. A. Huffman. **(Figure 4.6)** *Ibid.*, 119. Other photographs of Canary reveal that she often wore dresses, but these were rarely as highly embellished as the dress she wears in the Huffman portrait.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁶⁹ McLaird points out that prior to his own scholarship only one other biographer, Richard Etulain, had recognized the importance of nineteenth century authors to the construction of the Calamity Jane legend, a testament to the longevity of a narrative built on fact but conflated into historical fiction. He references Etulain's essay "Calamity Jane: Independent Woman of the Wild West" in Glenda Riley and Richard Etulain, eds., *By Grit and Grace: Eleven Women Who Shaped the American West* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997).

The evolution of Calamity Jane: dime novel heroine

Wheeler introduced the Calamity Jane character in the first *Deadwood Dick* dime novel released by Beadle & Adams on October 15, 1877. His engaging first-person narrative style brought adventures on the American frontier powerfully alive. McLaird points out that Wheeler appropriated Horatio N. Maguire's supposedly accurate (but largely embellished) first-person description of Calamity Jane in *The Black Hills and American Wonderland* (1877) when introducing her in the *Deadwood Dick* franchise as:

Of medium height and symmetrically built; dressed in a carefully tanned costume of buck-skin, the vest being fringed with the fur of the mink; wearing a jaunty Spanish sombrero; boots on the dainty feet of patent leather, with tops reaching to the knees; a face slightly sun-burned, yet showing the traces of beauty that even excessive dissipation could not obliterate; eyes black and piercing; mouth firm, resolute, and devoid of sensual expression; hair of raven color and of remarkable length; - such was the picture of the youth.⁴⁷⁰

At first mistaken for a young man by the narrator, certain details alert the reader to this “youth’s” real gender. The dainty feet, traces of beauty, and long hair allude to ideals of feminine beauty, while aspects of the youth’s character, such as the allusion to dissipation, piercing eyes, and resolute mouth reference the masculine determination required for dealing with life on the American frontier.

An illustration of Calamity Jane (**Figure 4.7**) published in Maguire’s *The Coming Empire: A Complete and Reliable Treatise on the Black Hills, Yellowstone and Big Horn Regions* (1878) reinforces the romanticized textual description provided a year earlier. Amidst a landscape of Western grandeur, a romantic figure of youth and strength sits astride a galloping steed. With its head up pulled up and neck back, the horse prepares to place its forelegs upon the

⁴⁷⁰ Edward Wheeler, *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road: Or, the Black Rider of the Black Hills*, Beadle’s Half Dime Library, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 October 1877. Reprinted in E. F. Bleiler, ed., *Eight Dime Novels* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), 80. See also McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 91-2.

ground while its hind legs gather for the next powerful thrust. Its exaggerated body pushes forward, and Calamity's figure, seated precariously astride with legs extended and head turned dramatically to the left, is caught between being propelled forward and pulled back towards an unknown subject. A landscape frame confines this explosive duo. To the right, a tree trunk rises out of sight, one heavy limb extended to the left and upward, tracing the outline of Calamity's horse and gun. Behind her, a row of sharp vertical cliffs recedes into the left distance, framing her form and directing the viewer's line of sight back to the same unknown distance into which Calamity stares. The illustration is chopped vertically by branches and grass in the left foreground, cliffs in the left background, Calamity's legs and torso, her horse's neck, and the tree in the right middle ground, creating a landscape staccatoed by sharp, dynamic lines that visually echo the sound of her firing pistol. The path that creates the lower horizontal axis falls slightly off balance to the right along the bottom of the composition just behind her horse's legs, while the background cliffs rise quickly from the center left-hand side of the image upwards, mirroring the upward angle of her outstretched arm. Unlike the cover illustration of *The Maid of Wyoming* (**Figure 4.2**) in which Charlotte firmly holds her sidesaddle seat, sharply reigning in her frightened steed and concentrating all force and attention to the centrality of her physical and psychological control amidst a chaotic environment, Calamity reaches out into her surroundings. She represents the extension of a romanticized form of female prowess: that of the American Amazonian equestrian adventuress who negotiates the wildness of her environment and uses it according to her needs.

While meant to be sensational, this image of the American female body in the Western frontier also revealed changing and contradictory attitudes towards the physical and intellectual capabilities of young American women and the maturation of the Western frontier. The model of

True Womanhood, seemingly transported into the West by figures similar to Charlotte, the Maid of Wyoming, was one of many ideal models of Victorian femininity. Scholar of British and American Victorian literature Frances B. Cogan writes that uncertainty about women's roles at a time of dramatic social and cultural change resulted in diverse and conflicting opinions regarding the health of adolescent female bodies and the education of young women's minds. A model she terms the "Ideal of Real Womanhood"⁴⁷¹ advocated "intelligence, physical fitness and health, self-sufficiency, economic self-reliance, and careful marriage."⁴⁷² Its focus on physical health encouraged the cultivation of tomboys.⁴⁷³ In her scholarship on the tomboy figure in literature, Michelle Abate writes that

During an era in which the health of middle- and upper-class young white women had become imperiled from equating femininity with frailty, tomboyism emerged as an antidote. Calling for sensible clothing, physical exercise and a wholesome diet, this code of conduct was designed to improve the strength and stamina of the nation's future wives and mothers and, by extension, the offspring that they produced.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷¹ While acknowledging the importance of influential scholarship by Barbara Welter and Carol Smith-Rosenberg, Cogan argues that their views present a monolithic view of Victorian womanhood rather than reflecting the nuanced debates regarding women's bodies during the second half of the nineteenth century. Cogan also points out that "the very field of women's history owes its existence to the feminist movement," resulting in a biased tendency to "regard primary sources as evidence either for or against a concept of 'progress' up an evolutionary slope toward the pinnacle of feminism and modern consciousness." Primary sources are therefore made to fit within this linear trajectory or dismissed. Her goal is to provide insight into an alternative model of womanhood, which she calls the Ideal of Real Womanhood, rooted in specifically American economic concerns and realities. See Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 10.

⁴⁷² She acknowledges that "American women, dealing with the complexities of real (as opposed to advice book) life, probably followed *neither* [True Womanhood nor Real Womanhood] slavishly." See Cogan, *All-American Girl*, 4 and 9. Jacqueline Moore, discussing changes regarding boyhood and male adolescence, states that young men were under a similar impetus to become physically stronger and more aggressive in order to combat their seeming feminization through over civilization and anxiety regarding an influx of immigrants. The Strenuous Life was therefore promoted: "Boys should be encouraged to break away from overprotective mothers and to cultivate aggression... However, there was a thin line between aggression and savagery. Thus, as boys grew older, they also needed to learn to restrain their passions and channel them into productive behavior." See Moore, *Cow Boys and Cattle Men*, 20.

⁴⁷³ Previous to the mid-nineteenth century, the word "hoyden" was more commonly invoked to refer to a girl who acted like a boy. By mid-century, however, "hoyden" had been almost completely replaced by "tomboy." Michelle Ann Abate, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), xiv.

⁴⁷⁴ Abate, *Tomboys*, xii.

The tomboy figure thus positively represented freedom, strength, and unlimited possibility.⁴⁷⁵

After the crisis of the Civil War, an emphasis on the health and maturation of young (white) women rendered the tomboy a symbol around which the (white) nation could rally.

Regarding the pre-teenage tomboy, art historian Sarah Burns acknowledges that “gauging [her] place in the complex process of historical change remains a guessing game. Yet at the very least, this figure was symptomatic of underlying political, cultural, social, and economic forces at work to modernize and to a certain degree liberate women from the domestic realm.”⁴⁷⁶ Western heroines of dime novel fiction became poster children, albeit sensational ones, for an adolescent model of American tomboyism. Their consistent identification as “girls” in dime novels – *Girl Pards*, *Girl Sports*, and, later, *Cowgirls* – clarified their single marital status and youth. According to conservative discourse “womanhood was produced by marriage: ‘woman’ almost necessarily meant ‘married woman.’”⁴⁷⁷ Hence the usefulness of the word “girl,” which “suggested a female who was not yet contained within the domestic space of marriage and maternity.”⁴⁷⁸ Nineteenth century heroines were typed as girls, making them “not quite mature, not entirely whole. Girls *could* have careers... but grown women were married and

⁴⁷⁵ They were “linked with such elements as social surprise, gender duplicity and unlimited possibility.” Abate, *Tomboys*, xiii. The widespread popularity of Josephine “Jo” March in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, published in two volumes in 1868 and 1869, signaled the beginning of the tomboy literature heyday in the late 1860s that lasted until the Great Depression. *Ibid.*, xv.

⁴⁷⁶ Despite the popularity of the fictional tomboy, Burns notes that “in American painting, and visual culture more generally, the tomboy is a rare bird relative to the angel.” See Sarah Burns, “Making Mischief: Tomboys Acting Up and Out of Bounds” in Holly Pyne Connor, ed., *Angels & Tomboys: Girlhood in 19th-century American Art* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Communications Inc., 2012), 87.

⁴⁷⁷ Sarah Bilston, *The Awkward Age in Women’s Popular Fiction, 1850-1900: Girls and the Transition to Womanhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

⁴⁷⁸ Kristine Moruzi, *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850-1915* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 9. Hunter states further that the word “girl” “suggested the subordinate status of either a prepubescent child or a domestic laborer, or it was faintly sexualized. Over the nineteenth century, however, the term extended its reach through menarche and the years of secondary school.” Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls*, 5.

homemakers.”⁴⁷⁹ This was reinforced by the spaces in which Western heroines such as Calamity Jane acted. Their adventures could not occur within the home, which had to remain a safe, private, domestic space. Rather, they took place in male-centric public spaces such as the open range, mining towns, and saloons. Dime novel authors recognized that, by keeping their entertaining tomboys arrested in adolescence,⁴⁸⁰ sensational adventures could continue.

A Western heroine did not work alone, but rather lent her expertise to the hero in his quest to defeat villains of the Western frontier. Burr calls her “the quintessential ‘American girl.’ Unquestionably white... she is a patriot and does her part in hunting buffalo and killing Indians... she has played an active role in civilizing the West, according to male standards if not female ones.”⁴⁸¹ Often called upon to implement aggressive methods of control and punishment in order to discipline her environment, she utilized the strength of her body and intelligence of her mind to continuously support the Western hero’s goals for domination and civilization. This did not, however, compromise her trajectory to wife and mother, for she underwent a process of maturation at the same time that she helped civilize the West. While girls could enjoy the boyish behavior for a time, tomboyism was not about girls growing up to be more like men. Rather, it was about girls becoming women via nontraditional alternatives, and, once a woman, leaving tomboyism behind.⁴⁸² The taming of these tomboys and their subsequent placement within a

⁴⁷⁹ Jennifer K. Stuller, *Ink Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 13. Burr points out that “Women who remain in the arrested development of ‘cowgirlhood,’ can go on shooting, roping and riding without the constraints of a husband, children and a house to keep.” See Burr, “The American Cowgirl,” 79.

⁴⁸⁰ Although the word “adolescence” was not widely used until the early twentieth century, Lessing points out that Americans had already considered “the transition from childhood to adulthood as a distinct phase of life with its own particular qualities and problems.” See Lessing, “Roses in Bloom,” 108.

⁴⁸¹ Burr, “The American Cowgirl,” 72.

⁴⁸² “Although the nation may value strength, independence and assertiveness in young girls, it does not esteem such qualities in adult women.” See Abate, *Tomboys*, xix.

stable home represented a metaphor in which the West was also conceived as an adolescent space undergoing a maturation process of settling, organizing, and civilizing.⁴⁸³

Dime novel heroines presented a romanticized and eroticized version of the adolescent American tomboy meant to celebrate an expanding country and appeal to audiences searching for humor, titillation, and a fast-paced plot line. By Victorian standards, the living Calamity Jane was too heavy in build and feature to retain a semblance of femininity when dressed in her buckskin attire. In comparison, dime novel heroines, although rough around the edges in speech and behavior and often dressed as men, had identifiably feminine physical features. Wheeler's introduction of Calamity Jane in the first *Deadwood Dick* dime novel (Number 1 of the Half-Dime Library Series published on October 15, 1877), appropriated from Maguire and cited previously, almost completely eradicated any visual resemblance to Canary. The 1878 cover illustration (**Figure 4.8**) of *Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, the Heroine of Whoop-Up* (Number 73 in the Half-Dime Library Series published on December 17, 1878) continues the fiction of her appearance. Here she is shown with flawless skin and idealized feminine features, notably an oval face bisected vertically by a long nose and horizontally by large eyes and arched eyebrows, a small plump mouth, firm chin, and long sculptural neck shown to advantage due to the turn of her head into a three-quarter profile.⁴⁸⁴ Her dainty hands grasp taught reins, and the rifle slung across her back directs attention from her left shoulder down across her ample bosom to her pistol. Her buttoned bolero jacket fits snugly against her sloping shoulders, bosom, and

⁴⁸³ Regarding the Western heroine as a metaphor of the West, see also Shelley Armitage, "Rawhide Heroines" in Sam B. Girgus, ed. *The American Self: Myth, Ideology, and Popular Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 178.

⁴⁸⁴ As previously discussed, these ideals were largely based on physiognomic and phrenological theories, which hypothesized that internal qualities of character manifested themselves directly through the shape, arrangement, and size of facial features and skull. Ideals of (white) beauty often referenced physical qualities associated with classical sculpture, thereby reinforcing both a perceived racial and aesthetic superiority.

tiny waist. A knotted scarf encircles her shirt collar, which blows open to reveal a generous amount of neck, referred to in the text as her “breast of alabaster purity,”⁴⁸⁵ and her wide-brimmed hat frames her face in the halo of the American West. In Calamity’s determination of spirit and beauty of body we see echoes of Charlotte, the Maid of Wyoming, but this reimagined Western heroine has embraced her West, sitting comfortably astride while gazing outward at the limitless surroundings of the frontier.

In the first of the series, we are told that Calamity “can ride like the wind, shoot, like a sharp-shooter, and swear like a trooper. Is here, there and everywhere, seemingly all at one time.”⁴⁸⁶ As a Girl Pard she contributes her skills to the cause of Deadwood Dick, the vigilante hero.⁴⁸⁷ Deadwood Dick recognizes in Calamity’s narrative the injustices of his own,⁴⁸⁸ and he repeatedly defends her, stating at one point that

she was *ruined* ... and set adrift upon the world, homeless and friendless; yet she has bravely fought her way through the storm, without asking anybody’s assistance. True, she may not now have a heart; that was trampled upon, years ago, but her character has not suffered blemish since the day a foul wretch stole away her honor.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ From the same dime novel (number 73), quoted in McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 96.

⁴⁸⁶ Edward Wheeler, *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road: Or, the Black Rider of the Black Hills*, Beadle’s Half Dime Library, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 October 1877. Reprinted in Bleiler, *Eight Dime Novels*, 80.

⁴⁸⁷ The Girl Pard is closely related to the Girl Sport, both of which have been discussed by Martha Burr and Armitage, although neither fully clarifies the nuanced differences, if there are any, between the two. The Girl Sport seems to be a snappier dresser. Armitage calls Calamity Jane a Girl Sport, yet states that the Sport never gets the guy, whereas Calamity Jane and Deadwood Dick ultimately marry. I agree with Burr’s identification of Calamity Jane as a Girl Pard. See Burr, “The American Cowgirl,” 126 and Armitage, “Rawhide Heroines,” 172.

⁴⁸⁸ Before he became the road agent Deadwood Dick, the hero of these sagas was named Edward (Ned) Harris. His evil uncle Alexander Filmore killed his parents and abused young Ned and his sister Anita. Ned eventually stole money from his uncle and escaped into the West, where his adventures involve fending off assassins and other evil-doers sent by his uncle expressly to destroy him. For a summary of the Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane storyline, please see McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 92-8.

⁴⁸⁹ Italics the author’s. Edward Wheeler, *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road: Or, the Black Rider of the Black Hills*, Beadle’s Half Dime Library, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 October 1877. Reprinted in Bleiler, *Eight Dime Novels*, 80.

Even though Calamity's virtue was taken against her will, she realizes that her "fallen" state requires her to shun polite society by adopting socially unacceptable behavior such as smoking, drinking, gambling, and swearing with abandon. Her narrative is one of penance through self-sacrifice and submission to a greater good. The tragedy of her past turns her into a trustworthy and reliable loner who maintains a sensitive moral compass.

Although she sometimes wishes to have been born a man and often takes on male characteristics in her habits and clothing, Calamity does not pretend to be anything other than a woman. She never attempts to "pass" as a man, nor is she sexually attracted to other women.⁴⁹⁰ Her choice of attire is made for ease and comfort, rather than transgression. Her vulgar speech and behavior combined with her beautiful and youthful features render her a diamond-in-the-rough figure whose maturation consistently, if subtly, drives the plot. Her rough comportment distances her from romantic liaisons. In contrast, Deadwood Dick regularly indulges in romantic adventures, marrying three women over the course of the series before finally marrying Calamity. Wheeler maintains Calamity's role as Girl Pard to assist Deadwood Dick's agenda, sometimes even rescuing him from certain death. Her humorous speech and behavior softens her character's transgressions and provides levity during particularly dramatic moments, such as in *Deadwood Dick's Doom* (Number 205 of the Half-Dime Library Series published June 28, 1881) when she commands a villain to: "Slack up yer lokermotive, ef ye please!...or I shall perforate you!"⁴⁹¹ The text continuously reinforces that she is not a loose woman but rather a jester figure with a tragic past. The humorous vulgarity of her character diffuses the threat of her physical

⁴⁹⁰ Joyce Gibson Roach, *The Cowgirls* (Houston: The Cordovan Corporation, 1977), 152.

⁴⁹¹ Edward Wheeler, *Deadwood Dick's Doom*, Beadle's Half Dime Library, No. 205, 28 June 1881. Reprinted in Bleiler, *Eight Dime Novels*. As Burns has pointed out, the use of humor in relation to misbehaving tomboys softens and disguises their threat. See Burns, "Making Mischief," 103.

vigor and personal agency. References to a more innocent past hint that she might ultimately enjoy a nobler future.

While the text regularly reinforces Calamity's rough manners, the cover illustration of *Deadwood Dick in Leadville; or, A Strange Stroke for Liberty* (**Figure 4.9**, Number 100 of the Half-Dime Library Series, published on June 29, 1879) clearly reinforces her sex appeal.

Divided into vertical thirds, the composition features Calamity coming to the rescue of a seated gambler who unsoundly wagered his own head on a losing bet and now sits to lose it to the man standing in the center of the image. Her hips and shoulders facing the villain, the forceful horizontal lines of Calamity's outstretched pistol-pointed arms move the viewer's eye from her determined face to the man's surprised visage. Calamity seems to have just pushed off her extended right leg, placing weight firmly on her left and reinforcing her dramatic entry onto the scene. The visual rhythm created by the repeated triangles of Calamity and the villain's legs is curtailed by the seated victim, whose feet and knees point down and back to the left, thereby causing the viewer's eyes to circle in a large loop of movement that encompasses the tense moment. The forceful direction of Calamity's hips and outstretched guns, placed at point-blank range next to the central figure's face, constantly direct attention back to the center of this tableau, creating a dramatic space crowned by the villain's knife held at chest height as he looks away from his victim and directly into Calamity's pistols. Receding walls that meet directly behind her weapons further emphasize the danger of the pistols' point-blank presence, while the repeated circles of three kegs on the back wall allude to the potential "pop pop pop" of her guns while also contributing to the claustrophobic closeness of this space.

Wearing a dashing buckskin skirt-and-legging combination, Calamity's widespread legs and thrown-back shoulders emphasize her small belted waist and vigorous action. Her pose

cleverly combines the desired female hourglass silhouette with a scandalous reveal of leg under the guise of “practical” yet fashionable Western attire. Many of the visual indicators of sexual attractiveness – a small waist, dainty feet, idealized facial features, and abundant hair – are consistently emphasized in textual and visual descriptions of the Western heroine, which comes as no surprise considering that the Half-Dime Library, in particular, was marketed to boys. This representation of her well-defined body thereby served as a locus for the erotic imaginings of male readers and also, perhaps, for the fantasies of female readers engaged in their own versions of tomboy upbringings. Although eroticized, the *Deadwood Dick* version of Calamity Jane was not threatening. Her problematic activities, nontraditional attire, and vigorous presence in masculine spaces were tempered by humor and subservient to Deadwood Dick’s mission, just as, ultimately, she became Deadwood Dick’s wife and bore him a son.⁴⁹²

During a time when the American economy experienced rapid fluctuations, the nation recovered from a disastrous Civil War, and immigrants and railroads pushed westward through difficult territory, tomboyism represented an optimistic model for growing young girls into physically and mentally robust women. As McLaird points out, although Wheeler’s Western heroines “may have appealed to adolescents in rebellion against adult standards, they were hardly emancipated, quickly returning to traditional submissiveness and domesticity when

⁴⁹² Wheeler unfurled the rather torturous love affair between Calamity Jane and Deadwood Dick over the course of thirty-three stories published between 1877 and 1885. Having refused to marry him once because of her “fallen” state, Calamity Jane finally wed Deadwood Dick in 1881. Marriage and a son did not ensure them an easy life, and they continuously fought off villains and evil pursuers. At one point, Deadwood Dick accused Calamity Jane of infidelity and won the rights to their son, Deadwood Dick, Jr., over a game of euchre. After parting bitterly, they eventually reunited and reconciled only to be killed in 1885, after which the Deadwood Dick, Jr. series began. The conclusion of the original Deadwood Dick series appears to have corresponded with Wheeler’s death in 1885. Because of the immense success of the Deadwood Dick series, the publishers hired a ghostwriter to continue writing under Wheeler’s name. After 1885, however, no original Wheeler publications appeared, whereas previous to 1885 he had published numerous original works including those featuring Deadwood Dick. See Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams*, 293-4. For a summary of the Calamity Jane and Deadwood Dick story line, see McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 92-8.

involved in relationships with men.”⁴⁹³ On the scale of tomboy misbehavior, fictional Calamity Jane represented an extreme end of the spectrum, but she nonetheless fulfilled her biological destiny out of duty and desire. Her story became one of redemption as well as an emblem of hope for the American frontier.

Performing the Western tomboy heroine

The story of Calamity Jane demonstrates how authors appropriated various reports of Western women and molded them into dime novel types. In lieu of visual evidence of women’s roles on the American frontier, illustrations and texts such as these powerfully shaped the way the United States viewed its expansion, especially after Wild West show managers incorporated Girl Pard and Girl Sport character types into their “educational and historical” spectacles. The performances of sharp-shooter Annie Oakley with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West constituted some of the most memorable incarnations of the Western heroine, even though Oakley herself had grown up in Ohio far from the frontier. Her ability to negotiate expectations of femininity, the Wild West performance arena (hardly an environment conducive to polite Victorian manners), and excellence in a predominantly masculine sport reveal the extent to which she understood how to best leverage representations of her body and performance character.

When William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill, 1846-1917) launched the Wild West in 1884 with the assistance of Nate Salsbury (1846-1902),⁴⁹⁴ he already enjoyed widespread fame as a hero of

⁴⁹³ McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 92.

⁴⁹⁴ Riley writes that around 1882 Cody spoke with Nate Salsbury about starting a traveling Wild West performance: “stage plays, vaudeville, some fifty circuses, and a growing number of rodeos” exploited a national and international interest in the American West, a fact about which Cody and Salsbury were fully aware. Salsbury at first backed out, and Cody joined forces with shooter W. F. Carver in 1883 to produce the Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition in Omaha on 17 May. Although wildly successful, Cody and Carver’s relationship did not last, and Salsbury finally agreed to join forces and form “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West - America’s National Entertainment,”

the Western frontier thanks to popular dime novels written by Prentiss Ingraham (1843-1904). Ingraham's exaggerated versions of Cody's adventures as Indian scout and buffalo hunter rooted him firmly in the legend of the American West, an association that helped make his Wild West one of the most seemingly "authentic" and by far one of the most nationally and internationally popular. Within this context, Oakley and her husband Frank Butler (1847-1926) constructed a performance persona based on a pre-established dime novel Western heroine narrative that had proven its entertainment and instructional value of tomboy taming and happily-ever-after. Her ability to perform a nontraditional role while maintaining respectability in the public eye attests to her skilled negotiation of representational extremes of women at the time, which ranged from submissive models of sweetly domestic hearth-bound angels to potentially threatening New Women caricatured as masculine harridans. Oakley negotiated a fraught but ultimately productive liminal space between these poles and, in so doing, excelled in a male-dominated athletic profession.

She first stepped into the ring with Buffalo Bill's Wild West at twenty-five years of age in 1885. A cabinet card dating to the same year reveals her roots as a huntress, (**Figure 4.10**) for she had supported her family by hunting game after the premature death of her father in 1866. Oakley stands upright within a painted frame of well-ordered deciduous trees receding linearly to a point on a low horizon line. Facing to the right, she stands at military attention with heels pulled together and toes pointed at a forty-five-degree angle. The three-quarter view of her face presents her soft left cheek and jawline against the darkness of her wavy hair. Diffuse light traces her straight nose, firm small chin, set mouth, and gentle eyes. The comfortable and relaxed placement of her rifle on her right shoulder, a gloved hand holding the butt end of the

which opened in St. Louis the spring of 1884. See Glenda Riley, *The Life and Legacy of Annie Oakley* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 28-9.

gun, reinforces the confidence and self-reliance of her upright posture and direct gaze, while the dead rabbit in her left hand completes the hunting narrative. Oakley wears a woolen hunting ensemble of form-fitting woolen gaiters that cover, but do not deny the shape of, her boots, angles, and calves. A loose-fitting long-sleeved blouse, buttoned completely to a high collar, tops her knee-length pleated skirt. Her right arm, bent at the elbow in front of her body, presents her weapon, which creates a visual barrier between her body and the viewer. She communicates the integrity of a woman confident in her skills who understands how to deploy them for survival and self-defense. However, this same self-confidence would have rendered Oakley, a woman accomplished at a masculine sport, a potentially threatening figure. In order to alleviate the threat of a woman's skill with a gun, Oakley – in her mid-twenties and married – and her show managers consistently promoted her as a “girl” of the West.

During her long career with Buffalo Bill's Wild West,⁴⁹⁵ Oakley's birth year was advertised as 1866 (rather than 1860), reducing her age to nineteen when she first began performing. It was not difficult for Oakley to maintain this ruse. Standing five feet tall and weighing just over one hundred pounds, she had a lithe, athletic figure, dark hair, and clear skin. Cody and Salsbury purposefully emphasized Oakley's youth,⁴⁹⁶ referring to her as “Missie”⁴⁹⁷ and promoting her friendship with Chief Sitting Bull (1831-1890), who had given her the honorary title “Little Sure Shot” (Watanya Cecilla).⁴⁹⁸ This association linked Oakley with the

⁴⁹⁵ Oakley worked with Buffalo Bill's Wild West from 1885 to 1913, with a few short breaks in between.

⁴⁹⁶ Oakley's niece Hazel specifically remembers that Cody wanted Oakley to look as young as possible. From notes on an interview with Hazel in Annie Oakley's Honoree file at the National Cowgirl Museum.

⁴⁹⁷ In contrast, Oakley referred to Cody as “Colonel Riley. See *Annie Oakley*, 32.

⁴⁹⁸ Oakley and Chief Sitting Bull first met in Minneapolis March 1884 and remained friends until his death. *Ibid.*, 26.

West in a tangible way that reinforced a racialized rhetoric specific to tomboys who were often described as “wild,” “savage,” “rambunctious,” “uncivilized,” “little apes,” thereby linking them with “primitive” races assumed to be closer to nature.⁴⁹⁹ Repeatedly labeled “Little Sure Shot” and “Miss Annie Oakley” in Wild West publicity, text and image consistently emphasized an appearance of eternal adolescence. When show manager Salsbury had the opportunity to see her perform,⁵⁰⁰ he must have quickly identified her near-perfect embodiment of the Western tomboy heroine. According to Oakley’s autobiography, when Salsbury first saw her perform one of his primary questions was “Have you got some photographs with your gun?”⁵⁰¹ As a performer, Oakley could ensure success with a combination of incredible talent and convincing performance as a pre-established dime novel trope.

Analysis of a photograph from the later 1880s illustrates an overt attempt to dress the part of Western heroine. **(Figure 4.11)** A corseted form-fitting bodice decorated with medals of achievement has replaced Oakley’s much looser blouse, and a wide-brimmed Western hat crowns her head. Her long hair, cuffed gloves, pleated skirt, gaiters, and boots remain, as does her rifle,

⁴⁹⁹ Abate argues that this racialized language serves to reinforce white racial dominance since “playing dark” is ultimately in the service of whiteness. See, for example, her discussion of E. D. E. N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*. Abate, *Tomboys*, 17. Dyer affirms this when writing that when white people tan they may take on stereotypical qualities of “darker” people (being closer to earth and nature, acting freer, wilder, etc.), but can return to whiteness if so desired. See Dyer, *White*, 49.

⁵⁰⁰ Riley explains that Oakley and Butler had approached Cody and Salsbury regarding a position with the Wild West towards the end of the performance season in 1884. The Wild West had suffered the loss of a steamer and freight en route to New Orleans and, although they had quickly regrouped, were in the midst of a dismal forty-four days of rain and low ticket sales. Further, Cody already had a star shooter, Captain Adam H. Bogardus. However, Bogardus decided to retire from the show in March 1885, and Cody and Salsbury agreed to give Oakley an audition in Louisville, Kentucky that spring. Oakley and Butler rehearsed for months and, upon arriving early to the deserted performance grounds in Louisville, decided to run through the practiced act. It was at this point that an unidentified man – Nate Salsbury – watched the rehearsal, immediately approaching them about a contract. See Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 30-1.

⁵⁰¹ Because she did not, she and her husband Frank Butler dashed to a tintype gallery, and Salsbury “placed an order for \$7000 worth of printing about me.” Annie Oakley, *The Story of My Life*, 1926, 22. From a manuscript held at the National Cowgirl Museum in Oakley’s Honoree file. The manuscript was typed by Toni T. Seller in January 1980 and compiled from newspaper clippings from the Gast Museum’s files (Greenville, OH).

which stands as rigidly upright as her body. Oakley's medal regalia, evocative of military decoration, and at-attention stance – chin up, chest out, shoulders back, stomach in, arms fixed at the side, eyes to front, blank facial expression, heels together, toes at a forty-five degree angle – present her as a girl soldier properly regimented in duty to her country. Her clenched hands signal her readiness for action, and the vertical fence posts painted on the studio backdrop seem to line up as members of her army. As previously cited from Burr, the cowgirl was considered a patriot who “played an active role in civilizing the West, according to male standards if not female ones,”⁵⁰² and here Oakley poses as an active agent in the settling of the American west: the Western heroine who took up arms in the cause of Manifest Destiny.

Tellingly, this photograph was used to create lithographic poster advertisements for Buffalo Bill's Wild West. **(Figure 4.12)** Placed in the foreground of the lithograph, “Miss Annie Oakley, The Peerless Lady Wing-Shot” stands rigidly attired in her corseted brown ensemble and shining medals of yellow and orange. Compared to the photograph, her feet have been drawn slightly smaller, and she is less rigidly posed, the left foot extended slightly forward to showcase her now-daintier toe. Her fair skin has been given a slight blush and her lips an eye-catching vermillion which, like the hand-colored cabinet card of Lady Lonsdale **(Figure 3.1)**, renders her healthy whiteness legible. Posed on an endless expanse of low grass, she is flanked by two vignettes of herself performing. In the left background, a man (probably her husband) throws glass balls as she kneels to shoot, while in the right background she stands upright and aims towards a series of clay pigeons ejected from a mechanical thrower in the background. Her central representation presents a formal military portrait: Oakley showcased as girl soldier extraordinaire whose medals have been hard-won in competitions such as those depicted in the

⁵⁰² Burr, “The American Cowgirl,” 72.

background. The fact that Oakley agreed to wear a corset for Wild West publicity seems a distinct choice to indulge the marketing possibilities of an hourglass silhouette while also reinforcing the formality of her pose. In an 1892 interview, Oakley stated that it was “impossible... absolutely impossible” to shoot in a tight-fitting bodice,⁵⁰³ which is why she wore belted, rather than corseted, blouses when performing.

The Wild West show formula distinguished her shooting routines as a “wing shot” aiming at living and clay pigeons and glass balls from those of her “Colonel” Buffalo Bill, whose “practical marksmanship” from horseback was rendered in service to dramatic stadium reenactments including rescuing a settler’s cabin and the Deadwood Stage Coach from Indian attacks and hunting buffalo. In order to avoid direct competition with Buffalo Bill, Oakley did not shoot from horseback, although she became a highly talented side saddle trick rider and later performed shooting feats while riding a bicycle.⁵⁰⁴ This choice reinforced the hierarchy of dime novel narratives in which the heroine’s role was secondary to that of the hero.

Biographer Glenda Riley writes that Oakley and Butler seemed to have been in agreement with Cody and Salsbury’s marketing strategies. Further, the amount of time and effort Oakley and Butler put into refining Oakley’s performance

indicated that they realized that the right combination of shooting and personality would ensure them continued success but that real stardom required more. [They] obviously understood that everything from costumes, accessories, lighting, and music to the performer’s social and technical skills during the act and his or her personal behavior in private life demanded careful orchestration.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ See Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 114.

⁵⁰⁴ Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 36 and 54.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

Oakley and Butler, both hard workers of strict moral integrity, believed in the reality of the American dream, the importance of a belief in the possibilities of the American West, and the necessity to display an honest, clean, family-friendly spectacle.⁵⁰⁶ Positioning Oakley in a supportive role to the primary hero Buffalo Bill corresponded with their personal convictions regarding the structure of home and family. Further, the antics of her tomboy heroine persona was balanced by her return to appropriately tamed and domesticated wife upon exiting the arena. Riley writes that when in the ring, “dressed in leggings, knee-length skirt, loose blouse, and cowboy hat with a six-pointed star pinned to its turned-up brim, Annie presented a vision of Victorian sexuality; she was demure, feminine, and, with her hair hanging loose down her back, both girlish and erotic.”⁵⁰⁷ **(Figure 4.13)** A surprisingly candid photograph of Oakley jumping over a table illustrates the degree to which Oakley presented athleticism, charm, and titillation. Her blurred left arm and skirt pivot around the still point of the clearly delineated fingers of her outstretched right hand. A smile graces her shadowed face as she leaps exuberantly over a rickety table. Her skirts flip dangerously upward and over her bent left leg.

Supported by her youthful physical appearance, Oakley performed the role of adolescent girl who bowed to the audience, entered and exited wafting kisses, and made jaunty kicks when successfully hitting a mark. She performed cartwheels, guaranteed to show a bit of petticoat, as in the previous image, and remarkably fast sprints. Additionally, she clearly and purposefully pouted at the audience when she missed a shot.⁵⁰⁸ These calculated actions charmed the crowds

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁰⁷ Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 32. Riley later states that Oakley had good genes: “Annie appeared girlish, sexy, and appealing well into the early 1900s. Male fans often desired her, perhaps as much for her power and wealth as for her appearance.” Ibid., 119.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 32 and 57.

and provided moments of levity that alleviated the intense drama of a noisy spectacle. Like the verbal humor of Calamity Jane's dime novel character, such tomboy antics "whittled transgression down to manageable size and kept it within bounds."⁵⁰⁹ Oakley's intentionally endearing youthful behavior provided the humor necessary to assuage any suspicions regarding her vigorous sharp-shooting character.

A second photograph (**Figure 4.14**) from the same sitting as that used for her corseted "soldier" portrait (**Figure 4.11**) reveals another instance in which Oakley, a modest woman, embraced the erotic potential of the Western heroine figure. Her pose, meant to imitate a trick in which she shoots targets behind her with the use of a mirror, shows off thick hair tumbling luxuriantly down her back. This perspective, which allows the viewer to contemplate her accentuated hips, small waist, and elongated bodice, seems a daring choice given that long hair worn down and untamed could represent sexual freedom, particularly when worn by a mature woman.⁵¹⁰ Typically, girls were advised to wear their hair down – pulled back, braided, or loose – until around age nineteen, at which point it could be styled up.⁵¹¹

Without a clear view of her face, this photograph reduces her to an eroticized body available for viewing pleasure in the same way that the figure of Calamity Jane on the front of *Deadwood Dick in Leadville* (**Figure 4.9**) is only partly about the dramatic action of the narrative and more so about the exaggerated pose of her body. Calamity's pose and Oakley's corseted bodice draw attention to their slim waists, and their loose hair and delineated lower legs highlight

⁵⁰⁹ Burns, "Making Mischief," 103.

⁵¹⁰ Ribeiro writes that "in an age when women's hair was bound up on the head, long and untamed hair represented sexual freedom." See *Facing Beauty*, 262.

⁵¹¹ Although it is unlikely that these rules were consistently followed, they established an acknowledged transatlantic etiquette of public display. Hunter points out that the following of these rules would have greatly varied depending upon local and regional practices and culture. See Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls*, 141.

their sexually attractive bodies. Both figures are caught in the moment of wielding their weapons, which enhances the potential drama of their unfolding narratives. But, where Calamity's posture features a dramatic combination of far-flung legs, thrown back shoulders, and rigid arms, Oakley holds herself firmly upright and controlled, her feet again in military stance, appropriate both for the photographer's needs and for the achievement of this difficult feat. While Calamity seems to expand with abandon into the budding barroom brawl, Oakley's stiff body, regimented by the embrace of her corset and the static studio environment, seems much less comfortable as an object of a voyeur's gaze.

Oakley's long hair in conjunction with calf-length skirts over leggings and gaiters preserved an image of her as "little, tiny, dainty, and girlish."⁵¹² Though she was careful to cover as much skin as possible, her leggings, gaiters, boots, and skirts inevitably revealed a delineation of her legs. The point of a long skirt was to completely eradicate this visual, hence the reason why some adolescent women were hustled into longer skirts during their early teenage years: the temptation of legs was, for some, simply too provocative.⁵¹³ Riley emphasizes that Oakley "had no desire to wear trousers, gamble with the fellows, or swagger and swear,"⁵¹⁴ all typical of the

⁵¹² Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 114.

⁵¹³ Hunter writes that the decision of when to lengthen skirts was often a difficult one. Extending childhood as long as possible was viewed as the healthiest option, and so long skirts were often postponed. Short skirts, however, presented their own problems: "Long dresses signified adult status and therefore should be resisted as long as possible. On the other hand, long dresses covered girls' legs and therefore should be adopted as soon as such legs might invite unseemly attention." See Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls*, 141. Lessing points out that many girls "expressed ambivalence about the transition to long skirts, which impeded their movements and forced them to behave." See Lessing, "Roses in Bloom," 119.

⁵¹⁴ Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 113.

Girl Pard type. However, she clearly modified particular sartorial and behavioral characteristics that enhanced her persona as a mischievous and flirtatious tomboy.⁵¹⁵

Many of the feats upon which Oakley built her legacy challenged Victorian expectations of femininity, particularly her athletic sprints and cartwheels, sharpshooting, and trick riding. To perform this behavior for eastern American and European audiences, especially at a time when women's rights were increasingly politicized, was potentially transgressive for a woman who valued a traditional lifestyle. However, this was the era of P. T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth (later the Barnum & Bailey Circus), dime shows, and freak shows. Audiences were familiar with this genre of spectacle and expected to be alternately shocked, humored, and awed. The Wild West provided entertaining spectacles but also – with the aid of livestock, authentic props, Native Americans, large painted backdrops, and figures easily recognizable from news reports and dime novels – encouraged their audiences to suspend disbelief amidst gun smoke and war whoops. Oakley fit within the requirements of this spectacle by convincingly performing a tomboy heroine role that provided a balance of levity and skill.⁵¹⁶ Acting the Western heroine was an effective ruse for negotiating the tension between femme fatale and angel of the hearth. By avoiding both of these within the ring, Oakley could indulge a performance type that allowed her to enjoy and hone her own athleticism and sharp-shooting skills without censure. Burns writes that images of misbehaving tomboys often “opened up loopholes, or knotholes, through

⁵¹⁵ She further modified the heroine type by insisting on riding side saddle and wearing appropriately long skirts when doing so; when she took up bicycling in the 1890s, an activity laden with significance for women's liberation, she wore similar long skirts while shooting targets from her bicycle seat.

⁵¹⁶ Supposedly Oakley's presence in the Wild West assured children and female audience members that the spectacle was safe enough for viewing. Riley cites Wild West publicity manager John Burke stating that “Women and children see a harmless woman there, and they do not get worried.” Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 50.

which beholders, not least little girls, might glimpse new and powerful roles for women.”⁵¹⁷ Just as the dime novel heroine allowed female readers to imagine themselves within the parameters of a Western adventure, Oakley’s performance provided an avenue for women to experience a sense of thrill and empowerment.

Unlike teenage sharp shooter Lillian Smith (1871-1930), whose voluptuous body and supposedly lax behavior around men resulted in rumors of a tarnished reputation, Riley writes that Oakley consistently downplayed unwarranted sexual advances from hopeful suitors and avoided inappropriate self-presentation.⁵¹⁸ When competitively performing in shooting events outside of the Wild West show, she often surprised other participants with her ladylike behavior. Oakley was able to maintain a paradoxical combination of “proper Victorian image with a simple, innocent sexuality”⁵¹⁹ because of the interrelation between her arena performance, photographic representation, and text-based interviews, the conglomeration of which repeatedly told a story of tomboy-turned-wife. Her performance encapsulated both her athletic arena skills as well as her personal life, which, as an international celebrity, was very much in the public eye. As will be further discussed in the next chapter, outside of the ring Oakley presented a well-mannered domestic woman who reassured visitors of her fundamental sophistication.

Oakley’s performance was not a new trope, but rather a successful embodiment of a dime novel figure. Having been inundated with decades of news reports, dime novel fiction, circuses,

⁵¹⁷ She continues: “Unmoored from whatever moralizing text anchored them, comic pictures of bad girls having fun engaged in a sort of cultural guerrilla action, launching random but relentless attacks on long-standing conventions.” See Burns, “Making Mischief,” 103.

⁵¹⁸ Riley cites a marriage proposal from a twenty-one-year-old man who wrote that Oakley “was the one little girl” he could ever love, and which she tactfully refused. See Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 119. For a discussion of the apparently hostile relationship between Smith and Oakley as well as Smith’s temperamental presence in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, please see Riley, *Annie Oakley*, 34-7.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

and stage plays that dealt with the subject of the American West, viewers would have already understood her role as supportive Western heroine within the extensive program narrative. Performing as a tomboy heroine allowed Oakley a space in which to perform and succeed in a male-dominated profession and allowed her to perform a supportive role in keeping with her personal convictions about the relationship between men and women and the importance of family, hard work, and honesty. Within the parameters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, Cody and Salsbury presented a spectacle that brought the preexisting parameters of a dime novel Western to life, with Oakley starring as its requisite tomboy heroine.

Such was the power of a pre-established Western narrative and its expected characters that, when the real Calamity Jane (Canary) went on stage, she was a disappointment. Looking nothing like the fictional version of her legend, Canary's self-presentation was masculine enough to link her with caricatures of the New Woman. For example, an 1896 dime museum advertisement conflated her appearance with that of an aggressive buckskin-clad knife-wielding mountain man. **(Figure 4.15)** By identifying her as "PIONEER NEW WOMAN Calamity Jane," the poster text aligned her with the ever-increasing visual presence of the New Woman an independent and educated figure who intentionally eschewed traditional feminine roles and therefore, to some, represented social disorder.⁵²⁰ Ultimately the life of Canary, who expired from poverty and alcoholism in 1903, proved too far removed from the romanticized and entertaining vision of American westward expansion enshrined in dime novel fiction and Wild West spectacle lore.

⁵²⁰ For sources regarding the New Woman, please see Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan Press, 1978) and Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-siècle Feminisms* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, in Association with Institute for English Studies, School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 2002).

Conclusion

The tomboy heroine represented optimism regarding the possibilities for the maturation of American women in the West and, more broadly, for the development of an expanding country. Dime novel fiction modified the harsh realities of life in the West by elevating romanticized ideas of tomboy adolescence, and the freedoms it represented, in unspoiled nature. This corresponded to period debates regarding the health of American girls, for such discussions often posited the “health” of the country in direct contrast to the ills of modernity, and particularly of the industrialized urban environment which “assailed” adolescent girls’ bodies “from within but also from without.”⁵²¹ Such a distinction is reinforced by the comparison of an 1881 engraving entitled “Beauty and the Beer”⁵²² from the Sins of New York series (**Figure 4.16**) and Maguire’s previously discussed illustration of Calamity Jane from his 1878 *The Coming Empire* (**Figure 4.7**). Both feature young women in charge of a horse, Canary astride and the city girl commanding her father’s beer wagon. The Beauty, however, represents Linton’s Girl of the Period, summarized by Burns as “the spoiled, overdecorated, boisterous young misses who seemed to have overthrown the domestic angels of an earlier day.”⁵²³ The ostentatious ruffles, lace, and contrasting vertical fabric pattern of her fashionable dress juxtapose sharply

⁵²¹ Lessing, “Roses in Bloom,” 121. One purported “evidence” of his negative influence was the reduced age of menarche over the course of the nineteenth century. Hunter references a study by physician Elizabeth Blackwell in which girls from wealthy classes reached menarche before those from poor classes. Although the reasons for this difference, and for what appears to have been a general decrease in the age of menarche among American girls, are still undetermined, improvements in diet, hygiene, and health may explain it. See Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls*, 131-2. Jacqueline Moore points out that anxiety about the weakening of the race in urban centers included men as well: “Social scientists and politicians at the end of the century both worried that white men were becoming weakened by over-civilization and argued that it was the duty of whites to put their superior manhood to good uses such as conquering the ‘childlike’ races of Africa and Asia.” The rough and physically demanding work of the cowboy represented activity that could overcome weakening through “overcivilization” while also being symbolic for domination of the land. See Moore, *Cow Boys and Cattle Men*, 10 and 73.

⁵²² The text reads: “An incident of the beer maker’s strike in New York – how the dashing daughter of a brewer supplied the place of one of her father’s striking employees – a pretty girl’s practical protest against teetotalism.”

⁵²³ Burns, “Winslow Homer and the Natural Woman,” 18.

against her wagon's wood-grained planks and the cargo of heavy dark beer barrels. Her composed expression and controlled posture – down to her pointed toes and graceful fingers – signal her self-confidence in a dangerous situation as well as her seeming enjoyment of the brisk breeze engendered by her reckless driving, which exposes a generous amount of leg to the interested men in the background. The framing of her figure within the parameters of a beer wagon hold her firmly within this masculine space to which she should not belong, and in which she makes a provocative spectacle of herself.

Such an illustration, while humorous and entertaining, also points to worries regarding young women in urban environments, their precociousness, the inappropriateness of their position outside the home, and the multitude of temptations to which they exposed themselves. Their increased social and educational freedoms may have indicated cultural progress to some but were also “a source of great anxiety for many Americans who feared that their future roles as wives and mothers would be compromised by the corrosive influence of modern life.”⁵²⁴ However, when dressed in buckskin and placed her on a galloping horse in the sublime nature of the West, a similar girl becomes a symbol of healthy adolescent vigor. By displacing the precociousness of young urban women onto the Western heroine, tomboyism was safely distanced yet continued to fulfill a powerful fantasy regarding the possibilities of the American West and the health of the nation.⁵²⁵ The next chapter will consider how in 1887 Buffalo Bill's Wild West had the opportunity to discover that such a formula worked just as well in the Old World Empire as it did in the New.

⁵²⁴ Lessing, “Roses in Bloom,” 109.

⁵²⁵ Similarly, Sarah Burns writes that Winslow Homer painted large, powerful rural working women “at least in part to dispel the threat of female nature run amok by displacing it onto the subservient bodies of distant, rustic, laboring women.” Burns, “Winslow Homer and the Natural Woman,” 35.

Chapter Five:

The American Exhibition in London

The last chapter presented tomboyism in the United States as a model for improving the health of young white American women and, by extension, white American mothers. One popular tomboy model – that of the Western heroine sensationalized in dime novel fiction and performed to acclaim by Annie Oakley – thrived amidst a romanticized American West that purposefully overlooked the non-picturesque moments of frontier life. The presentation of a vigorous, humorous, but ultimately tame-able Western heroine against a backdrop of sublime landscapes proved a potent combination, especially when her nontraditional behavior was hitched to the mission, home, and body of the primary male protagonist, as was the case with Calamity Jane in the *Deadwood Dick* dime novel series. While such constructs overlooked many of the realities of life in the American West, they nonetheless provided a structured formula for envisioning westward expansion that supported the underlying racial and imperial ideologies of Manifest Destiny.

The focus of this chapter is a cultural event – the American Exhibition of 1887 in London (**Figure 5.1**) – in which the similarities between British and American imperialism were purposefully highlighted. Both American and British imperialism relied upon the conviction that their people were specially chosen and most capable of conquering and ruling. While presented under the cloak of a “civilizing” mission – bringing light to “the supposedly dark places of the world”⁵²⁶ – British and American imperialism was rooted in the desire for greater capital represented by raw natural resources and fertile agrarian land. This chapter will argue that

⁵²⁶ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 8.

organizers of the Exhibition, in which Buffalo Bill's Wild West was one component, strove to demonstrate that the reasons and means for Anglo-Saxon westward expansion in America were not dissimilar from those of Britain's global expansion: that, indeed, these Atlantic "cousins" were united in a shared capitalist empire that depended upon the subjugation of indigenous peoples in order to profit from the raw materials of their lands.

From its inception, the American Exhibition was intended to showcase the technological and cultural products of a new capitalist empire that, according to the Exhibition catalogue, had been constructed largely in the image, or at least followed upon the example, of Britain. The 1880s marked what has been called a "New Imperialism," summarized by Sarah Bilston, scholar of Victorian literature, as "a growth in imperialist fervour marked by profound jingoism."⁵²⁷ Witnessing a performance of successful American westward expansion alleviated, in part, anxieties regarding British rule resulting from the crises of earlier colonial conflicts such as the Anglo-Zulu War discussed in the third chapter.⁵²⁸ The spectacle of Cody and Salsbury's Wild West at the American Exhibition reaffirmed a shared belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority and in the imperial purpose of military force. Historian Paul Reddin writes that many British viewers "saw reflections of themselves" in the American Exhibition, and particularly the Wild West spectacle.⁵²⁹ Whether or not they purposefully sought to alleviate anxieties regarding the fragility of the British Empire, organizers of the American Exhibition nonetheless reassured

⁵²⁷ Bilston, *Awkward Age*, 130.

⁵²⁸ In particular, the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Jamaica Rebellion of 1865 shook British confidence. See Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Bilston, *Awkward Age*, 130; and Chapter 11 "Wild West London" in Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005): 282-339.

⁵²⁹ Reddin points out that William Gladstone stated after his visit: "God Almighty made Englishmen and Americans kinsmen, and they ought to have affections for one another." Further, the *London Illustrated News* wrote of the language, literature, social sympathies, ancestral traditions, common history, similar manners, institutions, laws, and morals shared by Americans and Britons alike. Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 91-4 and *London Illustrated News*, 16 April 1887 (cited in Reddin).

British audiences of the benefits, possibilities, and superiority of Anglo-Saxon imperialism within a spectacle that traced the effects of “savage” nature to “civilized” industry. In the context of the 1880s, Bilston writes that “White nations... had to find new ways of justifying their inalienable right to rule, usually choosing to redefine or recodify their sense of the national ‘character’.”⁵³⁰ The imperialism on display within the American Exhibition – evident in the different “stages” of linear progression represented by the Wild West spectacle, the gardens, Machine Hall, and Fine Art Galleries – presented a brand of American “national character” promoted by Exhibition propaganda as an outgrowth of America’s racial and cultural affinities with Britain.

As historians Robert Rydell and Rob Kroes have pointed out, “the Wild West made a splash in a pond already filled with images of the American West.”⁵³¹ Having been foreshadowed by decades of fiction and non-fiction literature⁵³² and promoted by a savvy marketing

⁵³⁰ Bilston, *Awkward Age*, 132.

⁵³¹ Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 111.

⁵³² Nonfiction accounts of travels in the American West had been published in Britain throughout the nineteenth century by authors such as Washington Irving, George Catlin, Mark Twain, Isabella Bird, and many others. I am indebted to Douglas Seefeldt and Frank Christianson on behalf of the William F. Cody Archive for providing a list of nonfiction works published in London prior to 1887. In Britain, the fictional novels of James Fenimore Cooper were particularly popular and given prominent space in bookseller’s windows prior to the American Exhibition. Dime novels had been published in London since 1861 when Beadle & Adams set up a London office and released the first English edition on February 15th of that year. Routledge eventually bought out the American firm’s London operations. See “Chapter VII: 1861-1862” in Albert Johannsen. *The House of Beadle and Adams in Its Dime and Nickel Novels: The Story of a Vanished Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), managed by Northern Illinois University Libraries and accessed 1 October 2015, <http://www.ulib.niu.edu/badndp/chap7.html>.

campaign,⁵³³ Buffalo Bill's Wild West was attended by tens of thousands of people.⁵³⁴ Although exhibition organizer John Whitley (1843-1922) understood the necessity of harnessing the popular appeal of this spectacle, he may have underestimated the extent to which the Wild West's success would render the American Exhibition "a sideshow to Buffalo Bill, rather than vice versa."⁵³⁵ While a full consideration of the American Exhibition would constitute a book-length project, this chapter will consider Annie Oakley's British reception during the Wild West's 1887 summer tour in London.⁵³⁶ I will argue that Oakley's performance as a "Western girl," rather than scandalizing fashionable audiences due to her short-skirted attire and sharpshooting

⁵³³ Major John Burke (1842-1917) was largely responsible for the Wild West's marketing and public relations. He wrote copy for the press and, with the help of his team, successfully raised public enthusiasm prior to each new tour. Benedict Burton records that the city of London was plastered with Wild West marketing material, leading *The Globe* to write: "I may walk it, or bus it, or hansom it: still / I am faced by the features of Buffalo Bill. / Every hoarding is plastered, from East-end to West, / With his hat, coat, and countenance, / Lovelocks and vest." Benedict Burton, "The American Exhibition of 1887" in *World's Fair* 5 (2), 3. Reddin describes the marketing team's thorough process, which included pasting posters and billboards, purchasing space in newspapers for advertisements, sending prepared stories about the show and its performers to various news outlets, arranging in-person interviews with reporters and performers, hosting dinners, and organizing street parades. Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 63-5.

⁵³⁴ Burton records that an average of 30,000 people paid to see each Wild West performance, and on Easter Monday an overflow crowd of 83,000 attended. Regarding the American Exhibition as a whole, "in the 151 days it was open, 2,230,173 visitors paid for admission." Burton, "The American Exhibition of 1887," 3-4.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2. The large amount of space given to descriptions of the Wild West in contemporary reviews, as well as the predominance of scholarship on Buffalo Bill and the Wild West over that of the American Exhibition as a whole, has resulted in a rather lopsided view of the event. While it cannot be denied that the Wild West represented the most attention-grabbing attraction within the spectacle of the Exhibition, organizers and participants would have experienced it as part of a larger architectural, electrical, and industrial extravaganza. Divorcing the Wild West from a consideration of the whole in fact waters down not only the narrative of conquest skillfully performed by the "authentic Cowboys and Indians" from the American West, but also ignores the clever extension of a much more complex narrative of Anglo-Saxon conquest woven into the ground's twenty-three acres. In the American Exhibition, every character in the prepackaged story of Manifest Destiny had an identifiable place, and, not unintentionally, these characters were completely legible, even familiar, to British audiences. For some of the most recent scholarship on Buffalo Bill's Wild West, see Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular Culture* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), William F. Cody and Frank Christianson, ed. *The Wild West in England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), Alan Gallop, *Buffalo Bill's British Wild West* (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2001), Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁵³⁶ While Oakley was not the only woman to perform with the Wild West, the majority of material that exists regarding the female performers of the 1887 season consists of Oakley-centric material.

proWess, reinforced British expectations regarding the merits of raising girls away from the city while also reaffirming the cultural maturation of Britain in comparison to its Atlantic neighbor and former colony.

There are many reasons why Oakley could have scandalized, or at least offended, British audiences amidst period debates regarding women's work, property, and political aspirations. Her arena performance, as discussed in the previous chapter, presented the nontraditional spectacle of a sharp-shooting female. Further, being made into a spectacle rendered her vulnerable to criticisms of various sorts, not the least of which could have been the dubious status of a female performer in short skirts acting in any kind of stage, circus, or arena performance. Oakley conformed to the popular fiction narrative of tomboys-turned-tamed Western women in order to prove what she was *not*, namely a misbehaving or dangerous woman. The 1887 Exhibition catalogue reassured readers that the "daughters of pioneers and frontiersmen" performing with the Wild West had "become accomplished rifle shots, and bold and daring horsewomen" due to the "circumstances and stern necessities of their early life."⁵³⁷ Their self-sacrifice to the nation was presented as subservience to a need established by American expansion. In this construct, men always preceded women, who followed as helpmeet dedicated to the cause of father or husband, thereby supporting a pervasive "madonna of the prairie" model common throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵³⁸ While both men and women on the frontier served the interests of civilization, their packaged roles were codified into a chain of command that corresponded with Victorian ideas of gender complementarity.

⁵³⁷ *American Exhibition, London, 1887: Official Catalogue of the Exhibition, with an Illustrated History of the United States, Their Origin and Growth, A Century of Progress.* (New York and London: J. J. Garnett, and B. W. Dinsmore & Co., 1887), 19.

⁵³⁸ For a recent exhibition on the topic, see "Madonnas of the Prairie: Depictions of Women in the American West" at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, accessed 3 February 2016, <http://panhandleplains.org/gallery.asp?pageid=7&galid=333>.

Men took up arms to civilize, while women took them up for necessity, sustenance, and self-defense. Girls, when activated within dime novel plots and Wild West spectacles, made for attractive and entertaining “soldiers” whose behavior could be excused in context of the needs of their environment.

Oakley’s popularity was in part due to her personal charms, but also because the narrative arc of her performances, which including “live” shows, interviews, and representations, presented a wholesome “Western girl” turned modest housewife. These representations addressed contemporary British concerns regarding the health and maturation of female bodies. The urban environment in particular was considered a place of dangerous temptation, an idea emphasized by conservative social critics such as Linton. Her 1868 essay “The Girl of the Period” set the parameters of one particularly loathsome urban type – the overly-decorated self-centered and thoughtless young woman – who would be upheld throughout the rest of the century by some as evidence of cultural, social, and racial degeneration. We can read Linton’s work in part as a critique of the city as a place of corruption. In contrast, the country represented a location of wholesome well-being,⁵³⁹ and this chapter will consider Linton’s thoughts regarding a rural female adolescent type she termed the “nymph” as a British response to the ills of modernity that mirrored, in some ways, the American tomboy, a version of which was performed by Oakley.

⁵³⁹ The paradox of Linton’s highly conservative opinions regarding the behavior, attire, and labor of women while she herself was an independent, self-supporting, childless urban woman separated from her husband has not been lost on scholars, and will not be directly relevant to this discussion. For more on Linton, see Nancy Fix Anderson, *Woman against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) and Andrea L. Broomfield, “Much More than an Antifeminist: Eliza Lynn Linton’s Contribution to the Rise of Victorian Popular Journalism,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29:2 (2001): 267-83 and “Eliza Lynn Linton, Sarah Grand and the Spectacle of the Victorian Woman Question: Catch Phrases, Buzz Words and Sound Bites,” *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 47:3 (2004): 251-72.

Both of these types depended on an elevation of the “country” and its romanticized environs over that of the “city” and its temptations. At the close of the century, America and Britain experienced crises of conscience regarding their non-urban spaces: in the United States, the closing of the frontier corresponded with a push to preserve “pristine” wild lands – and especially those considered most crucial to American identity as a place of geographical wonder and diversity⁵⁴⁰ – via various conservation movements and the creation of national parks. Similarly, art historian Jan Marsh has pointed out that during the latter part of the nineteenth century in England, “the visible decline of the countryside” caused in large part by mass migration to the cities for better financial prospects “prompted a sudden rush of nostalgia for rural life.”⁵⁴¹ Nature’s cultural cachet rose in direct correlation with its perceived demise at the hands of an urban, industrialized modernity, and, while both men and women suffered from the neurasthenic effects of such modernity, I will consider the ways in which images of women’s bodies and a metaphorically virginal Nature were often combined to more potently underline anxieties about Britain’s health and imperial status.

The chapter will begin by establishing the organizers’ goals for the American Exhibition and the ways in which they presented the United States and Britain as “cousins” with shared cultural and imperial values. In particular, I will highlight visual materials that reinforced the sense that Victoria, Queen of Great Britain Ireland and Empress of India (1820-1901), reigned over this display of America’s accomplishments. I will then turn to a discussion of hunting as a colonizing process and consider the gendered use of firearms in the Wild West, which will lead

⁵⁴⁰ Warren writes that, partially in order to alleviate an inferiority complex regarding the sense that they were imitators of European culture, Americans pointed “to the uniqueness of their natural assets, particularly in the West, where natural wonders balanced Europe’s cultural treasures.” See Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, 293.

⁵⁴¹ Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), 4.

to my final discussion of Oakley's British reception as a reflection of conservative British hopes for a return to a more "natural" model of womanhood.

The Queen is present

1887 signaled Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee year and a summer of celebrating her fifty years of reign. Although she had largely withdrawn from public events after the death of Prince Albert in 1861, the Jubilee brought her prominently – in representation, if not often in actual body – before the public. Within the American Exhibition she was most visible within the Fine Art Galleries organized by John Sartain (1808-1897).⁵⁴² Located on the west side of the main Exhibition building, the Galleries complex, which included a Trophy Hall of taxidermic mounts, featured roughly one hundred and seventy American artists from American and international ateliers displaying a variety of oil paintings, sculptures, watercolors, engravings, and photographs.⁵⁴³ Even though the Galleries opened late,⁵⁴⁴ the accompanying catalogue was not printed until the end of the month,⁵⁴⁵ and a display model of Philadelphia's City Hall shattered

⁵⁴² Originally born in London, Sartain immigrated to the United States in 1830 and was known for his mezzotint engravings. He also became very involved in various art institutions and academies in Philadelphia and organized the art department of the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. A number of his eight children also became artists, and he gave his daughter Emily particularly prominent exhibition space on the line in the Queen's Gallery (Gallery C) of the American Exhibition. See Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, 27 May, 1887. From John Sartain papers at Archives of American Art (AAA), microfilm roll 4563.

⁵⁴³ The *Morning Post* wrote that "the American studios at Paris, Rome, Florence, Düsseldorf, Philadelphia, Boston, and New York are full of animation consequent upon accepted invitations to exhibit pictures and sculpture prepared expressly for this occasion." See "The American Exhibition," *Morning Post*, London, 12 April, 1887. Available at codyarchive.org (accessed 10 August 2015).

⁵⁴⁴ See Our Roving Correspondent, "The American Exhibition and the Wild West." *The Sporting Life*, Tuesday, 10 May (1887), in the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁵⁴⁵ Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, 31 May, 1887. From John Sartain papers at AAA, microfilm roll 4563.

during its Atlantic voyage,⁵⁴⁶ the galleries were “sometimes packed solid with visitors so that one [could not] move about but with difficulty.”⁵⁴⁷ Of particular note to reviewers were Peter F. Rothermel’s (1817 – 1895) monumental 1871 *Battle of Gettysburg*,⁵⁴⁸ a number of landscapes by Thomas Moran (1837-1926) and Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902),⁵⁴⁹ and Thomas Sully’s (1783-1872) portrait of Queen Victoria painted in 1838. **(Figure 5.2)**

When viewers entered the Galleries via a large arched door on Fourth Street in the exhibitors’ hall, they were confronted by Sully’s portrait of the Queen **(Figure 5.3)** placed on walls painted in Indian Red and festooned with “a drapery scarcely (sic) differing from it in color, looped and tucked at intervals, spreading right and left, and at last hanging perpendicularly to the floor, or near it,” accompanied by “a rich velvet of the same color.”⁵⁵⁰ The paucity of works on this wall, especially in contrast to the salon-style arrangement of the other rooms, focuses attention on the youthful monarch. The electric globes hanging from the ceiling, the doors in each corner of the room, and the skied paintings on the upper side walls reinforce the

⁵⁴⁶ Sartain lamented to Emily that “The superb model of the public building of Philadelphia was destroyed in transit to the extent of fully three fourths of it. A woeful disappointment. It would evidently have been one of the greatest attractions of the galleries, judging by what is left, and the inquiries and remarks of the visitors.” See Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, 27 May, 1887. From John Sartain papers at AAA, microfilm roll 4563.

⁵⁴⁷ Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, May 27, 1887. From John Sartain papers at AAA, microfilm roll 4563. These dense crowds of visitors numbered between 30,000 and 80,000 on a daily basis between May 9 and October 31.

⁵⁴⁸ Currently on display in The State Museum of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁴⁹ For the full list of exhibitors, please see John Sartain, *American Exhibition Art Catalogue 1887: Exhibition of Pictures, Etc., in the Art Galleries of the American Exhibition, London, 1887*. (J. J. Garnett, B. W. Dinsmore & Co., 1887). Digitized by Harvard at <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/47732971> (accessed 10 August 2015). At the moment it is not entirely clear which works by Moran and Bierstadt were exhibited: the only information given in the catalogue are artist’s names and the titles of works, many of which are vague. I have consulted with Melissa Speidel, who maintains databases on both artists and is currently working on a Bierstadt catalogue raisonnée, and so far it appears that none of these artists’ works have been labeled as exhibited in London in 1887.

⁵⁵⁰ He continued that “Outside all this are two delicate marble statues by Turner from Florence, one of ‘Sabrina’ the other of the ‘Fisherman’s Daughter,’ on dark green marble pedestals and outside all, against the two doors in the corners, right a left, a dwarf palm tree.” See Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, 31 May, 1887. From John Sartain papers at AAA, microfilm roll 4563.

symmetrical arrangement of this photograph, created for the American Exhibition *Souvenir Album*,⁵⁵¹ and demonstrate the centrality of the Queen as viewed by those entering the Galleries complex.

Sully's beautiful portrait of the youthful Queen depicts her ascending to her throne.⁵⁵² Composed predominantly of deep red, lush gold, and silvery white highlights, Sully's use of chiaroscuro highlights the Queen's idealized face, crown, sloping shoulders, and rounded arm against the rich shadows of her velvet cape and darkened throne. While planting her small right foot, she places her left foot atop the dais. She turns her head to look directly at the viewer with soft-eyed rosy-cheeked confidence. After contemplating Sully's majestic gilt-framed portrait, viewers may have been stuck by the objects flanking the red wall through the gallery doors: to the left, a full-body taxidermy mount of a mountain sheep, and, to the right, a model of Philadelphia City Hall. Her body and throne sits in a nexus above and between the viewer and the rest of the Galleries. Sully's youthful Queen represents an idealized maternal figure presiding over the fruits of her labor, including the intellectual, scientific, and artistic products on display in the Galleries.

In early May Queen Victoria ordered a private performance of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. The event, which included an arena performance followed by interviews with some of the performers, took place on May 11 and lent credence to the event as a cultural, economic,

⁵⁵¹ The American Exhibition 1887 *Souvenir Album* (MS6.3830) in the collection of the BBCW is available online at codyarchive.org (accessed 28 July 2015). Sartain wrote to Emily that photographs had been taken – he assumed for the Queen – which may refer to this album. See Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, 27 May, 1887. From John Sartain papers at AAA, microfilm roll 4563.

⁵⁵² For more regarding the execution of this portrait, see Carrie Reborá Barratt, *Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

military, and diplomatic force.⁵⁵³ Rydell has pointed out that “the combination of power and entertainment represented by the Wild West... quickly became an alchemy that Europeans and much of the rest of the world would associate with the United States for much of the 20th century.”⁵⁵⁴ The marketing team of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West enshrined this combination of “power and entertainment” in posters and billboards printed to commemorate the successful 1887 tour and, in particular, the Queen’s visit. In an 1888 billboard entitled *Her Majesty Queen Victoria at Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, London, May 11th, 1887*.⁵⁵⁵ (**Figure 5.4**), the artists employed by Calhoun Printing (Hartford, Connecticut) depict the Queen, Edward, the Prince of Wales, his wife Alexandra, and a series of unrecognizable “brilliantly attired fair ladies who formed a veritable parterre of living flowers around the temporary throne”⁵⁵⁶ whose standardized large

⁵⁵³ See Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005) and Robert W. Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887: How a Cultural Farce became a Political Force” in *Over (t)here: Transatlantic Essays in Honor of Rob Kroes*, 60 (2005).

⁵⁵⁴ Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887,” 68.

⁵⁵⁵ According to printer and scholar Mike Parker, the preparation and execution of this poster may have taken upwards of a year, and so production of the blocks could have feasibly begun during the 1887 London (May – October) tour. One hundred and twenty-five copies of this poster were made for display in New York City. They would have originally been strategically installed to garner the most attention, such as on the sides of buildings, and a photograph of such display is available in his article “Buffalo Bill’s Billboards” in *Points West* (Summer 2014), 25. The sale catalogue in which this poster was listed states that it is “the largest woodblock-engraved poster ever printed in this country.” See Jack Rennert, *Rare Posters: A Truly Big Show, September 8, 2011* (New York: Poster Auctions International, 2011). This may not be completely accurate, however, as an equally large (26’ x 10’) woodblock-printed Buffalo Bill-related billboard was discovered in 2002 under a crumbling brick wall in Jamestown, NY and is now on display at the Reg Lenna Center for the Arts (formerly the Allen Opera House). See “1878 Buffalo Bill Poster is Found in Jamestown” in *The Daily Gazette*, New York State, 2 July, 2002 and a 14:25 minute video by Edmond Tomassini on [youtube](#) (published 27 December 2013 and accessed 28 July 2015). Regarding the Buffalo Bill Museum’s billboard, thirty-two sections were printed on blocks measuring 20 by 40 inches each. Because four colors were used throughout the composition, four separate color blocks were required for each section, thereby requiring the total number of five hundred and twelve blocks plus extra blocks used for special sections. Mike Parker and Marguerite House both report that a total of seven hundred and sixty-three blocks may have been used. See Marguerite House, “Wild West Posters: 19th Century Billboards,” in *Points West Online Blog*, 21 April, 2014 at [centerofthewest.org](#). For a more detailed account of the printing process, see Mike Parker, “Buffalo Bill’s Billboards” in *Points West* (Summer 2014), 20-25.

⁵⁵⁶ Cited in Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, 283 from Cody, *Story of the Wild West*, 734-7. On the note of decoration, reports conflict about whether the Royal Box, here shown draped in crimson with gold tassels, was in fact draped in red or purple velvet. *The Washington Post* reports that it also had a canopy “upon which the royal arms were embroidered in gold.” Further, the box “was decorated with flowers. There was also a line of flowers and plants in front of the box on the track.” See “The Queen at the Show. Victoria Attends Buffalo Bill’s Wild West

eyes, straight noses, small mouths, and modish attire reduce them to the beautiful types found in mass-produced fashion plates, though viewers may have assumed that the two seated in the front row with the Queen represented Princesses Beatrice and Louise.⁵⁵⁷

Moving from left to right through the horizontal composition and embraced within the sweeping curve of the grand stand, vivid colors and sharp-edged woodblock lines capture the “Mexicans in all the extravagance of velvet and silk; Indians painted and tattooed (sic) in every imaginable colour” and “cowboys in sashes and corduroy” described by *Lloyd’s Weekly London*

Circus.” In *The Washington Post*, 13 May, 1887. Available online at codyarchive.org (accessed 28 July 2015). However, in *The Wild West in England*, ghost written by Major Burke in 1888, the box is described as draped in crimson with orchids surrounding it, a situation supported by “The Queen in London. Visit to Westminster and American Exhibition.” in *The Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 12 May, 1887 in Annie Oakley scrapbooks at BBCW. The artists took liberties with this interpretation of the event, conflating a variety of royal visits into one image. For example, although *The Washington Post* reported that the Queen attended with about forty guests, the crowd depicted in the poster is decidedly smaller. Alan Gallop argues that an audience of twenty-six ultimately watched the command performance. These included Queen Victoria, Princess Beatrice, Prince Henry of Battenberg (Beatrice’s husband), the Dowager Duchess of Atholl, the Honorable Ethel Cadogan, Sir Henry and Lady Ponsonby, General Lynedoch Gardiner, Sir Henry Ewart, the Marquis of Lorne (husband to Princess Louise, who does not appear to have been present), Colonel Russell and John Whitley (organizers of the American Exhibition), and fourteen British and American officials from the organization’s executive council. To come up with this number, one must exclude the Dean and Lord Chamberlain, listed by Gallop, with whom the Queen had tea before the performance; however, the *Washington Post* correspondent lists the Earl of Latham (the Lord Chamberlain) as present, which would modify Gallop’s number to twenty-seven. See Alan Gallop, *Buffalo Bill’s British Wild West* (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2001), 97 and *The Washington Post*, 13 May, 1887 available at codyarchive.org (accessed 28 July 2015). The *Washington Post* probably refers to Edward Bootle-Wilbraham (1837-1898), the Earl of Lathom (notice the slight spelling difference) and Lord Chamberlain of the Household from 1885 to 1892 and from 1895 until his death. See note 7 of the digitized *Washington Post* article and the National Portrait Gallery at npg.org.uk for the correct spelling of his title. The Prince and Princess of Wales attended a performance on May 5, four days before the official May 9 opening, and brought with them their three daughters (Victoria, Louise, and Maude), Princess Louise (sister to the Prince of Wales) and her husband the Marquis of Lorne, the Duke of Cambridge, the Duke of Teck, the Duke of Teck’s son Prince Francis, the Comtesse de Paris, Crown Prince Frederick of Denmark, and various Lords and Ladies in Waiting and members of the Prince’s royal household. See Gallop, *Buffalo Bill’s British Wild West*, 75. Buffalo Bill supposedly became friends with Edward, the Prince of Wales, even teaching him to play poker, and hosted the Prince, the Princess of Wales, and various European nobility at the Wild West multiple times throughout the 1887 season.

⁵⁵⁷ Princess Beatrice, the fifth and youngest of Victoria and Albert’s daughters, attended the May 11 performance with her husband, Prince Henry of Battenberg, whose recognizable mustache is nowhere to be found on the poster. Princess Louise, Victoria’s fourth daughter, attended the May 5 performance requested by the Prince of Wales, but does not seem to have attended the May 11 performance, although her handsome husband the Marquis of Lorne attended both. These two couples and the Queen are reproduced in photographic and illustrated form in the American Exhibition 1887 *Souvenir Album* (MS6.3830) in the collection of the BBCW available online at codyarchive.org (accessed 28 July 2015).

Newspaper.⁵⁵⁸ In particular, three mounted Native American figures – including Red Shirt, the headlining Native American performer, on the right – have been printed with particular attention to detail, seen in the minute delineation of beads, quills, feathers, and claws. The rich color values used to depict their costumes and their horses, including the energetic tonal contrast of the central horse’s paint (or pinto) markings, visually stabilize the foreground of the “picturesque line”⁵⁵⁹ of performers who “paraded before her Majesty.”⁵⁶⁰ This performance took place at five o’clock in the afternoon; hence, bright daylight illuminates the faces and features of those within. In contrast, the inset vignette of the grand stand in the bottom left corner of the poster depicts an evening performance, and the artists have taken pains to emphasize the notable degree of electric lighting that allowed the entire Exhibition to remain open late.

The composition features the moment at which, following the dramatic entrance of his troupe, Colonel Cody rode towards the Royal Box, backed “upon his graceful horse,” and “bowed in front of [Queen Victoria].”⁵⁶¹ Dressed in the fringed buckskin of the dime novel plainsman, Cody sits deeply in the saddle as he reins in his horse, his hat swept off his head and his hair and buckskin fringe flowing behind him. The artists leave no doubt regarding the literal and metaphorical centrality of Buffalo Bill’s image. The darkened shadow behind horse and rider push their figures forward, while the color pop of Cody’s yellow buckskin and red sash further enhance this eye-catching ploy. Along a horizontal band of stacked vertical figures and

⁵⁵⁸ See “Opening of the American Exhibition. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” in *Lloyd’s Weekly London Newspaper*, n.d. (probably May 1887), in the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁵⁵⁹ “The Queen at the Show. Victoria Attends Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Circus.” In *The Washington Post*, 13 May, 1887.

⁵⁶⁰ “The Queen in London. Visit to Westminster and American Exhibition.” in *The Daily Telegraph*, Thursday, 12 May, 1887.

⁵⁶¹ “The Queen at the Show.” *The Washington Post*.

static architecture, the body of Cody's horse presents a dynamic diagonal line that starts from the point of its tail and juts upwards through its body, ending at the forceful point of its knee towards the Queen. Still dressed in mourning, Victoria is immediately recognizable by her black attire and stoic visage.⁵⁶² While Cody's compositional centrality reinforces the marketing function of this work, his arrangement along the same sight line as the Queen harkens to the efforts organizers made to put America and Britain "on the level." The British press repeated Exhibition propaganda that lauded America and Britain as "cousins" with comparable racial and cultural affinities⁵⁶³ and also invoked Britain as the "mother" country and wise Old World parent of the New World power.⁵⁶⁴ Representations of the Queen therefore came to symbolize not only British Empire, but also the influence of British imperial ideals as displayed within the American Exhibition.

The American Exhibition

Exhibition orchestrator John Whitley, a well-traveled British businessman originally from Yorkshire,⁵⁶⁵ "foresaw what an excellent opportunity such an Exhibition afforded Americans for

⁵⁶² *The Washington Post* correspondent described her thus: "Her forehead is full and prominent. Her eyes are cold gray-blue. Her nose is prominent and Roman in character. Her mouth is very determined in its expression." See "The Queen at the Show." *The Washington Post*. Since the Queen's accession to the throne in 1837, millions of her portraits were produced across various media, including photographs after the publication of John Jabez Edwin Paisley Mayall's *Royal Album* in 1860. Her portrait in this poster would have been easily recognizable.

⁵⁶³ See Rydell, "London's American Exhibition of 1887," 67, the *Official Catalogue*, and statements given at the Grand Opening in the John Sartain papers at the AAA.

⁵⁶⁴ The assassination of President Garfield in 1881 had engendered a similar feeling of kinship. *The Lady's Pictorial* wrote that the death of the president "has drawn closer the bonds of sympathy which knit together the two great English-speaking races." *The Lady's Pictorial*, Vol. II, 1 October, 1881, no. 31, 88.

⁵⁶⁵ Trained as an engineer and business partner of the inventor of linoleum, Whitley participated in several fairs as an exhibitor on behalf of dozens of firms. After taking a break in order to travel the world, he "had a revelation" in New York: "The problem with world's fairs, he decided, was that, because of their size, they restricted the space for exhibits from individual nations. Why not rectify this problem by dedicating an entire exhibition to a single nation...?" Rydell, "London's American Exhibition of 1887," 58. See also Charles Lowe, *National Exhibitions in London and Their Organizer* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892).

making what might be termed an official *début* in the biggest market of the Old World.”⁵⁶⁶ According to the Exhibition catalogue, organizers hoped that proof of American progress would “extend commercial relations with Europe, and also with the British Colonies,”⁵⁶⁷ even after recent political tension.⁵⁶⁸ Divided into five main categories – Agriculture, Mining and Metallurgy, Machinery, Education and Science, and Fine Arts – the Exhibition fell within the parameters of previous international exhibitions, yet also represented “a thoroughly new departure”⁵⁶⁹ by devoting the entire display to the products of a single country in which they hoped British businessmen would invest. While Americans “desired to know... whether even a peaceful invasion... would be really welcome in the Old World,”⁵⁷⁰ English organizers reassured such worries by forming a Council of Welcome composed “of about a thousand gentlemen distinguished in art, literature, science, manufactures, and commerce.”⁵⁷¹ The catalogue further emphasized that the exhibition was not an aggressive display of market competition, but rather a representation of the commercial foundations upon which both countries could unite as cousins in a global economic empire. “The achievements in the arts, sciences, manufactures and industrial pursuits... exemplified in this American Exhibition,” wrote the authors, did honor to the “mother country” England.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁶ *Official Catalogue of the Exhibition*, 11.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁶⁸ Britain had outfitted ships for the Confederacy during the Civil War. See Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887,” 57-68.

⁵⁶⁹ *Official Catalogue of the Exhibition*, 12.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

Utilizing “a number of maneuvers that might have made P. T. Barnum envious,”⁵⁷³ Whitley negotiated unstable public opinion and hedgy investors to bring about the grand event,⁵⁷⁴ thanks in part to the recruitment of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West as a headlining spectacle and to the securing of twenty-three acres of land owned by private railway companies that controlled four key stations at West Brompton, West Kensington, Addison Road, and Earls Court.⁵⁷⁵ The Exhibition complex sprawled across railroad tracks and wedged up against preexisting buildings.⁵⁷⁶ **(Figure 5.1)** The majority of the buildings were constructed with maximum economy of “wrought iron tie-rods, old railway rails... a roof of galvanized iron, and glazed skylights,” all of which resulted in an appearance “imposing and elegant.”⁵⁷⁷ The main exhibition building, which included the Machine Hall in its northern section, was nearly four

⁵⁷³ Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887,” 59.

⁵⁷⁴ Rydell describes the waxing and waning of the popularity of Whitley’s American Exhibition in its planning stages. Whitley sold stock in the American Exhibition by “dropping names of prominent individuals who allegedly had given support to the undertaking.” These included Edward, the Prince of Wales, and President Grover Cleveland who, when he found out the Prince was, in fact, not a direct supporter, backed out himself. Whitley and his associates were accused of fraud. In this context, Rydell posits Buffalo Bill’s Wild West as Whitley’s “gift from the gods:” after securing the Wild West to perform with his American Exhibition in London in 1887, Whitley was able to repair his relationships, and the Exhibition opened to great acclaim, thanks in part to the media-generated frenzy resulting from the Wild West’s marketing team. See Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887,” 59-60.

⁵⁷⁵ Three of the seven entrances to the Exhibition were railroad stations. Burton writes that “tickets could be purchased at any station in England to travel directly to the grounds,” ensuring that attendees could easily access the site from far beyond London’s environs. See Burton, “The American Exhibition of 1887,” 3. At first, however, this location held very little promise: the area was “a stinking pile of refuse, made higher every day by visits from dozens of horse-drawn dust carts and rubbish tippers.” While Whitley assured exhibitors that the site would be presentable, easily accessible by train, and installed with modern sanitary and drainage facilities in time for the May 9 opening, the grounds were largely unfinished even by April 1887. Workers labored day and night, completing the grounds and erecting the Wild West grand stand in time. See Gallop, *Buffalo Bill’s British Wild West*, 37.

⁵⁷⁶ The Earls Court/Olympia complex remains in the same location today between Warwick Road (to the east), Lillie Road (to the south), and North End Road (to the west). However, Earls Court is currently being demolished in order to make room for a retail and residential development.

⁵⁷⁷ *Official Catalogue of the Exhibition*, 14. The buildings were conceived by architect John Gibson. Appreciation in the value of the iron railroad rails used in the construction of the buildings enabled Whitley to borrow money towards construction costs since these rails could be sold for a profit. See Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887,” 61.

football fields long (1,140 feet by 120 feet). Its interior was arranged along four “avenues” (Washington, Franklin, Lincoln, and Cleveland) and ten numbered “streets” placed at right angles to each other in American fashion. A refreshment and dining salon (measuring 90 feet by 240 feet) and Fine Arts Galleries made of fireproof brick sat on the southeast side of the main building. The covered Washington Bridge spanned the tracks of the West London Railway to the east and connected the main building with the Wild West arena built to host twenty to twenty-five thousand spectators. Seven other bridges facilitated movement between sections, particularly in the north end of the garden, and a variety of refreshment stands ensured guests would not go thirsty on hot summer days. An outdoor bandstand and indoor concert hall that could seat eighteen hundred sat near the west entrance to the gardens, which also hosted the tobogganing slide at the north entrance near West Kensington Station, a switch-back railway along the west side of the gardens, and a diorama of the New York City harbor, including a replica of the Statue of Liberty made by M. Bartholdi (artist of the original), a cast of the original statue’s ear, and photographs of its construction.⁵⁷⁸ Other features included a soda-water pavilion in the main building, an English clubhouse provided by the Council of Welcome, endless kiosks and pavilions, and lager beer saloons.

Large electric plants – one on the north side of the arena and one on the west side of the main building – ensured that the Exhibition could remain open well past sunset. The aesthetically compelling evening lighting incited comment from many. Sartain wrote that “The gardens are beautiful, especially at night, when the thousands of colored and yellow lights

⁵⁷⁸ The toboggans could seat three people at a time and had rollers fixed underneath that could be steered right or left. The switch-back railway, a precursor to the rollercoaster, could hold twelve people at a time and rolled over gradients of various steepness that rose up to twenty feet, nine inches high. See Gallop, *Buffalo Bill’s British Wild West*, 95.

sparkle every where, and seen in near and remote distances look like fairy land,”⁵⁷⁹ a sentiment echoed by the *Evening News and Telephone*, who wrote that the Exhibition grounds “look like a choice bit out... of a fairy scene.”⁵⁸⁰ Painter Philip Wilson Steer (1860-1942) captured the evening effects of the peach-colored electric fairy lamps, strung in even undulations along garden promenades, in *The Swiss Alps at the Earls Court Exhibition* (1887). **(Figure 5)** Using a muted palette of pastel pink, purple, blue, and teal, Steer captures the soft shadows of a downy summer evening within the Exhibition’s cultivated gardens. On the left side of the composition, two girls – identifiable by their long hair and short skirts – stroll in unison behind the blurred bodies of women drifting towards an indistinct mass on the right side of black suits relieved by dashes of sartorial color. Delicate Whistlerian washes⁵⁸¹ seep into the canvas like watercolor, on the surface of which contour lines rendered in ebbing calligraphic strokes and quick rounded coils flatten the composition and point to the influence of Japanese prints as well as, possibly, an allusion to John Singer Sargent’s *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* on display in the Royal Academy’s 1887 Summer Exhibition. In contrast to the rich colors, painterly strokes, and sensuous layers of Sargent’s painting, however, Steer’s image of evening appears sparse, and sparsely constructed:

⁵⁷⁹ Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, 27 May, 1887. From John Sartain papers, AAA, microfilm roll 4563.

⁵⁸⁰ A Sightseer, “At the Yankeries,” *Evening News and Telephone*, Tuesday, 10 May, 1887, in the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW. Gallop writes that the *Illustrated London News* reported: “In the evening, the Exhibition will be lighted by two hundred and fifty electric lights, each of two thousand actual candlepower, and nine huge searchlights, each of ten thousand actual candlepower. It is wonderful to think of this picturesque and fairy-like park and buildings, created by magical quickness on a piece of wasteland. And what will it be to see it at night, illuminated by lights equal to half a million candles!” Gallop does not specifically credit each citation. See Gallop, *Buffalo Bill’s British Wild West*, 45.

⁵⁸¹ Although Whistler influenced Steer’s early work, it appears they did not have a personal relationship. Steer’s biographer D. S. MacColl explains that “Of Whistler Steer never saw very much, fearing that intimacy might mean ‘a whole-time job,’” and, further, “Whistler... liked courtiers better than possible rivals.” See D. S. MacColl, *Life Work and Setting of Philip Wilson Steer* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1945), 36.

the raking “teeth” of the white-washed canvas span the entire composition,⁵⁸² and short, scintillating dashes in pinky white and rose signal lights in the far distance, glints of fountain play in the middle ground, and blossoms in the foreground. A stark vertical line placed just off-center at first appears a flawed fold in the canvas, but upon closer inspection becomes a pole upholding the suspended lamps. These lamps, one of the most noted aesthetic attractions of the gardens, helped visitors transcend metropolitan London for fantastical realms. They signaled a constructed, composed environment meant to appeal, like any good pleasure garden, to the senses. Like Whistler’s nocturnes, Steer seems much less concerned with the details of an event and more interested in the mood of this particular evening, which depended partially upon climatic conditions and more heavily upon the fantastical fabrication of the Exhibition’s “life-picture”⁵⁸³ of America. Steer’s beautiful but incongruous painting of British schoolgirls amidst a cultivated garden of North American flora in front of carefully delineated Swiss mountains (supposedly the backdrop of the switch-back railway⁵⁸⁴) points to the topic of ultimate interest to this paper, and to which I shall later return: the relationship of young women’s bodies to Nature and natural spaces. The path painted before them implies they will follow their mature female

⁵⁸² MacColl writes that Steer’s “canvases were mostly half-primed a near white, with a ‘tooth’ to them.” See MacColl, *Philip Wilson Steer*, 109.

⁵⁸³ Charles Lowe called the Exhibitions organized by Whitley “life-pictures” of each nation. See Charles Lowe, *National Exhibitions in London and Their Organizer* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 15.

⁵⁸⁴ Apparently an early record by Collins Baker of this painting, in the Tate Britain’s collection since 1942, describes the work thus: “Figures walking across foreground, lanterns festooned above; peaks of the switchback railway Alp scenery.” See Mary Chamot, Dennis Farr, and Martin Butlin, *The Modern British Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture: Volume II*, (London: Oldbourne Press, 1964), 688, and also the Tate Britain’s website (accessed 7 October 2015), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/steer-the-swiss-alps-at-the-earls-court-exhibition-n05375/text-catalogue-entry>. At this time, I do not have any visual evidence to corroborate whether or not the switch back railway had such scenery. Artists’ views of the grounds, such as that in the *Souvenir Album* and another published by the *Illustrated London News* on 16 April, 1887 do not provide adequate detail. The latter work is illustrated in Gallop, *Buffalo Bill’s British Wild West*, 47.

predecessors into the mixed crowd of evening revelers on the right, thereby exiting this picturesque mountain frame at their own peril.

The gardens and the Wild West encampments were both described as places that transported visitors outside the realities of London. One reporter entered the Wild West grounds at night and “in an instant... was transported from the heart of the metropolis of the world, with its five millions of people, to the heart of the Rocky Mountains. The camp was lit up with the faint flickering light of the camp fires... As I approached Buffalo Bill’s tent, which is located on a point at the foot of the bluff, I saw him standing by the fire side, with his arms folded, lost in thought.”⁵⁸⁵ Even under the light of day, however, visitors were ready to participate in the purported “authenticity” of the Wild West spectacle, in part because the performers were trumped as “the genuine article” from the American West, but also because the clever staging of the arena backdrop catered to the audiences’ willful suspension of disbelief. One reviewer noted that while one side of the arena reminded him of a Spanish “Torrea,” the other featured “artistic scenery of the old Vauxhall and Cremorne reminiscence, representing the Rocky Mountains and the Wild West.”⁵⁸⁶ While London’s best-known urban pleasure gardens seem a far cry from the geographical realities of the American frontier, the point was not that the Wild West creators successfully reconstructed the West’s large spectrum of geographic diversity (those concerned with scientific accuracy could enjoy the Trophy Hall of taxidermic mounts, the carefully curated gardens of North American flora, or the photographs on display in the Fine Art Galleries, which

⁵⁸⁵ “The Anglo-American Boom. The Wild West in Camp in London – The Exhibition ‘Ready’ to Open.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 May, 1887. Available at codyarchive.org (accessed 15 October 2015).

⁵⁸⁶ “A Private View of Buffalo Bill,” *The Sporting Life*, 4 May (1887), from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

“[gave] one a very accurate idea of the diversified scenery of the vast continent,”⁵⁸⁷), but rather that enough of the whole evoked the idea of an American West popularized by novels, dime novels, travel writing, photographs, paintings, and prints to suffice as a convincing backdrop to this spectacle of conquest. And, amidst this backdrop, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West did not disappoint.

The Wild West

Covering seven acres of the Exhibition’s twenty-three, the Wild West grounds could be accessed by four different entrances, though the primary entrance led from the main exhibition building over Washington Bridge. The arena was about one-third of a mile in circumference, and its size combined with “the picturesque scenery which inclosed (sic) half of the circle” resulted in “the impressiveness of [its] *coup d’oeil*.”⁵⁸⁸ The “picturesque scenery” – composed of monumental canvas painted by Matthew Somerville Morgan (1837-90)⁵⁸⁹ – was enhanced by the Vauxhallian rocks, trees, and “realistic representation of a rocky pass in the mountains through which the scouts and Indians decline upon the plains.”⁵⁹⁰ Although these canvases no

⁵⁸⁷ “Royal Visit to the Wild West.” *The Sporting Life*, Thursday, 12 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁵⁸⁸ “The Wild West Show.” *The Era*, Saturday 14 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁵⁸⁹ Matthew “Matt” Morgan was a British illustrator who moved to the United States where he collaborated with Steele MacKaye on a Civil War cyclorama and Cody and Salisbury’s *The Drama of Civilization* performed at Madison Square Gardens in 1886. While recent scholarship has focused on Morgan’s illustrations and his collaboration with MacKaye, close analysis of his canvases for the Wild West remains to be done. See J. A. Sokalski, *Pictorial Illusionism: The Theatre of Steele MacKaye* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007); Christopher Kent, “War Cartooned/Cartoon War: Matt Morgan and the American Civil War in “Fun” and “Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper”” in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 36 (Summer 2003): 153-181; Richard Scully, “Sex, Art and the Victorian Cartoonist: Matthew Somerville Morgan in Victorian Britain and America,” *International Journal of Comic Art*, 13:1 (Spring 2011): 291-325; Richard Scully, “The Epitheatrical Cartoonist: Matthew Somerville Morgan and the World of Theatre, Art and Journalism in Victorian London” in *Journal of Victorian Culture* 16:3 (December 2011): 363-384.

⁵⁹⁰ *Official Catalogue of the Exhibition*, 17.

longer exist, the London photography firm Elliott & Fry took a series of photographs of the Wild West performers within the Exhibition grounds that reproduce portions of the backdrops. The correlation between three different portraits of Cody on horseback taken from slightly different angles (**Figure 5.6**) shows sheer cliffs and rocky outcroppings on the right, forested hills in the center behind Cody, and a scree face or sloping riverbank on the lower left. Although the photographs have faded, snow-capped peaks appear to rise above his head and disappear to the left behind a false wall. The sag and pull of wrinkles in the suspended canvas ripple above the head of Cody's horse "Charlie," and trees planted along various points of the perimeter attest to the fact that a scraggly dead tree was considered just as effective for evoking the West as was a living one. A view of "The 'Round-Up' of Buffalo, Elk, and Texas Steers" within the arena (**Figure 5.7**) depicts a backdrop of sharply rugged cliffs and strangely curtailed peaks, behind which peer windows of London buildings. A number of portraits also feature the "mountain pass" constructed of dense rocks and trees within the arena.⁵⁹¹ (**Figures 5.8 and 5.9**) In one, the photographer has cropped a portrait of lanky Buck Taylor, "King of the Cowboys," (1857-1924) and his horse so that the rocks and trees disappear off the edge of the frame, thereby rendering him more convincingly in frontier wilderness. In another, Jim Nelson, "The Returning Hunter,"⁵⁹² (1826-1903) has been posed as if emerging from the mountain pass where performers would have entered and exited. A corral near the far eastern entrance on Warwick

⁵⁹¹ Reddin writes that proximity to railroad tracks allowed for the delivery of seventeen thousand car loads of rock and earth to construct the Wild West arena environs and encampment. See Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 87.

⁵⁹² Best known as "Squaw Man Jim Nelson," Nelson lived with his Native American wife Jenny Yellow Elk Woman and three sons in a teepee but also performed as the pioneer husband to Margaret "Ma" Whitaker (1827-1893, who also sewed costumes for the Wild West troupe) during the scene in which Native Americans attacked a pioneer cabin, a portion of which can be seen in the photograph of the livestock round-up.

Road held the “exotic” livestock, including bison,⁵⁹³ elk, mountain burros, and deer, while stables housing around two hundred horses lined the eastern curved extremity from Warwick Road southward. The encampment of Indians, Cowboys, Cowgirls, and Mexicans was found on the southern outer perimeter of the grandstand and extended towards Lillie Road.⁵⁹⁴ Photographs from the 1892 London tour, which utilized the same grounds, show that the tents and teepees were neatly ordered, tightly grouped, and elevated on even mounds of flattened earth. The grounds of the Wild West, including the encampments and stables,⁵⁹⁵ could be visited by any ticket holder during the Exhibition’s open hours from 10:30am to 10:30pm.

In the catalogue’s color map (**Figure 5.1**), the round Cyclops eye of the Wild West arena – heavily lashed by the grandstand delineated in red, and pooled within the negative space of the three most prominent railway lines – visually dominates the rigid authority of the main exhibition building and gardens meandering to the north and west. Rydell and Reddin have pointed out that the gardens to the west and “wilderness” to the east “gave graphic evidence about the rise of a new civilization from the gardens of the world” and “suggested the forces of nature that had to be overcome” in the process of Anglo-Saxon conquest.⁵⁹⁶ The “picturesque”

⁵⁹³ “American bison” is the correct identification for the species that inhabits the Rocky Mountain region (and formerly the Midwest), although nineteenth century sources often refer to them as buffalo.

⁵⁹⁴ The encampment of Indians was of particular interest, featuring Native Americans from the Sioux, Cheyenne, Ogallala, Arapahoe, and Shoshone tribes, among others, and all led by Red Shirt, a Lakota from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (formerly Red Cloud Agency), who “intelligently accepted the situation, since being conquered.” *Official Catalogue of the Exhibition*, 19. While my dissertation only indirectly addresses Native American performers and issues of race, it is a rich field of inquiry. See, for example, Kate Flint’s *The Transatlantic Indian: 1776-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁵⁹⁵ According to the passenger list for the ship *Nebraska*, which transported the Wild West across the Atlantic, passengers included two hundred and eighteen people, ninety-seven of them Native Americans, one hundred and eighty horses, eighteen buffalo, ten elk, five Texas steers, four donkeys, and two deer. These numbers are taken from Burton, though they vary slightly depending on the source. Burton, “The American Exhibition of 1887,” 2. See, for example, an account published by *The Times* and reproduced in Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887,” 61.

⁵⁹⁶ Quote from Rydell, “London’s American Exhibition of 1887,” 87.

participants of the Wild West dramatically acted out a structured version of this conquest, and visitors symbolically traveled from civilization to wilderness as they journeyed over Washington Bridge. The lives of the Wild West performers were presented as historical realities of the settling of the frontier from the perspectives of soldier, scout, hunter, and pioneer. Enclosed by monumental painted canvases evoking a “wild” and rugged mountain wilderness, performers rehearsed twice daily (at 3pm and 8pm) repeated motifs of Cowboys against Indians, particularly in the scenes of the Deadwood Stagecoach and pioneer cabin under attack. Demonstrations of skills such as sharpshooting, trick riding, roping, and even a square dance on horseback relieved the tension of more intensely dramatic, noisy, smoke- and war-whoop filled scenes such as the Indian attacks, buffalo hunt, and bronco busting. The Cowboy Band played “Yankee” songs at regular intervals, and the sonorous voice of orator Frank Richmond (Jame E. Twitchell, d. 1889) explained each of the scenes and activities.⁵⁹⁷ This dramatic and highly structured “National Entertainment” presented a history of westward expansion already on the wane: by 1887 conflicts with Native Americans had dwindled as their communities were sequestered onto reservations,⁵⁹⁸ and millions of acres previously devoted to ranging cattle were increasingly fenced and cultivated by farmers brought west by the Homestead Act.⁵⁹⁹ Buffalo Bill’s 1887 tour

⁵⁹⁷ I am grateful to the Buffalo Bill Center of the West for providing the opportunity to publish a short article on Frank Richmond in their membership publication *Points West* (Winter 2016), which draws in part on this dissertation chapter.

⁵⁹⁸ While conflicts between the US government and Native Americans continued into the twentieth century (the Indians wars spanned the colonial period until 1924), the regularity of aggression between settlers and Native Americans had decreased by 1887. Clashes still occurred, however. Geronimo finally surrendered in 1886 after the last US military campaign against Native Americans in the Southwest, and performances of the Ghost Dance resulted in the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 in South Dakota. See Gregory F. Michno, *Encyclopedia of Indian Wars: Western Battles and Skirmishes 1850-1890* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2009) and Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

⁵⁹⁹ President Lincoln passed the first Homestead Act in 1862, which was repealed by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. Between 1862 and 1934, the US government granted 1.6 million homesteads comprising 270,000,000 acres. See the National Archives online: “Teaching with Documents: The Homestead Act of 1862” at <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/homestead-act/> (accessed 7 September 2015).

therefore tapped into a powerful sense of nostalgia for a disappearing pioneer and cattle era.⁶⁰⁰ Crossing Washington Bridge was not only a journey between civilization and frontier, but also from recent past to present and future from the American West to the heart of American technology, innovation, and industry in the heart of the most powerful global empire's metropolis. The fact that the bridge passed over a railroad, a dominant symbol of industrial technology that allowed for the true "uniting" of the American States,⁶⁰¹ functioned as a reminder of the role of rail transportation in the settling of the West. The future of America was one in which the conquest of aggressive "primitive" people, so forcefully on display in the Wild West arena, and the acquisition of their lands resulted in access to rich deposits of natural resources. The Exhibition's emphasis on agricultural and mining equipment underscored the prevalence of opportunities for industrial expansion and international investment in America's seemingly inexhaustible spaces and raw materials. The exhibits placed around Mathews's soda-water stand on Fourth Street, the thoroughfare connecting the Wild West, Washington Bridge, and the Fine Arts Galleries, featured some of the finer finished products, such as artificial flowers, ostrich feathers, grand pianos, brass lamps, watches, jewelry, and St. Jacob's oil (for "conquering pain"). **(Figure 5.10)** The transition from frontier violence over Washington Bridge into this thoroughfare of tasteful urban consumer culture starkly illuminated the civilization narrative.

⁶⁰⁰ David M. Wrobel writes that the 1880s saw the emergence of "frontier anxiety," an outgrowth of the perception that the American frontier no longer existed. As Reddin points out, Cody and Salisbury's Wild West addressed this nostalgia by presenting an "authentic" version of a particularly American historical moment. See David M. Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1993) and Reddin, *Wild West Shows*, 60. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner would "officially" announced the frontier closed. During the same years that the Wild West mounted their first show in Madison Square Gardens (1886) and then took it to Britain (1887), Charles M. Russell's illustration *Waiting for a Chinook* was widely reproduced throughout the United States. Depicting a gaunt cow circled by wolves during the particularly harsh winter of 1886-7, this image came to symbolize the end of a great cattle era.

⁶⁰¹ The first transcontinental railroad, owned by the Union Pacific, was completed on 10 May 1869.

As the Exhibition's primary attraction, the Wild West was a boon to other exhibitors and ensured regular daily attendance in the tens of thousands.⁶⁰² Cody's troop filled the void of frontier history almost completely absent from the two hundred and four-page official catalogue, which consisted of lists and descriptions of exhibitors as well as "an Illustrated History of the United States, Their Origin and Growth."⁶⁰³ While the eastern, southern, and central states received numerous pages devoted to their history, development, and economic opportunities, little to no explanatory text accompanied descriptions of the Western (Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska) and Pacific (Colorado, Oregon, California, Nevada) states and territories (Indian, Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, New Mexico, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Washington, and Alaska).⁶⁰⁴ Wild West organizers capitalized upon this gap: the spectacle program explained that

it is to the end that the people of the East, or rather those who are not acquainted with the rough life of the border, and especially that portion of it in which the rifle plays so important a part, may personally witness some of the feats of Western men, that Messrs. Cody & Co. have determined to introduce in their 'great realistic pictures of Western life' a series of shooting exhibitions.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰² This is not to say, however, that every exhibitor welcomed the Wild West crowds, as it was not always certain that they attracted the "right" kind of visitors. A letter from Anna Lea Merritt (1844-1930) to Sartain reveals a telling bias to which Sartain, among others, must have been sensitive. After expressing regret that she had nothing to exhibit, she wrote that "the sort of people" who attend Wild West and other popular spectacles "don't care a pin for pictures – if you succeed in attracting any attention to [the exhibition of American art], it will be a triumph." See letter from Anna Lea Merritt to John Sartain, 27 February, 1887. From John Sartain papers at AAA, microfilm roll 4563. While Sartain's galleries did attract regular large crowds, and even merited a visit from the Royal family, sales were abysmal.

⁶⁰³ From the title.

⁶⁰⁴ Washington and Alaska Territories have no accompanying description, even though settlements had been established in Washington since the late 1850s. The catalogue's emphasis, however, is on the mineral and industrial opportunities of each region: while Montana had gold and silver and Wyoming herds of livestock, Alaska's Klondike Gold Rush had not yet occurred, and Washington's timber was not, it appears, an industry of note.

⁶⁰⁵ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West. America's National Entertainment, An Illustrated Treatise of Historical Facts and Sketches* (London: Allen, Scott & Co., 1887), 38.

It is telling that the twenty events staged over the course of the two-hour spectacle were described as “pictures,” a word used in the nineteenth century to refer to paintings. While a painting of the West required the viewer to trust in the artist’s eye and interpretive abilities, here the viewer could see for him/herself the “realities” of frontier life performed by “authentic” people and stock. This was reinforced by a quote provided by General Dave Cook of Denver and printed in the 1887 Wild West program:

It is not a show. It is a resurrection, or rather an importation of the hottest features of wild Western life and pioneer incidents to the East, that men, women and children may see, realise, understand and forever remember what the Western pioneers met, encountered, and overcame. We see pictures of Washington at Valley Forge, and crossing the Delaware. Pictures of the landing of Columbus, the discovery of the Mississippi by De Soto, pictures of the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, the battle of Bunker Hill, surrender of Cornwallis, etc., etc. They represent on canvas or plate what once transpired as great historical incidents. Here we have not pictures, but actual, living, powerful, very much alive and in earnest delegates from the West, all of whom have most effectively participated in what they here reproduce as a most absorbing entertainment.⁶⁰⁶

General Cook’s comments, like many others republished in the Wild West program, emphasized an authenticity that depended on a direct physical link to specific geographical locations which, in this case, consisted of people who had purportedly lived, worked, and fought on the American frontier.⁶⁰⁷ Like other Exhibitions in Britain before this one, ethnographic displays of non-Western people demonstrated “authenticity” by corroborating the behavior, attire, and other cultural markers codified by British travel writers and explorers. While Cody and his white performers were upheld as the “genuine item” representing Anglo-Saxon victors in a New World conquest, their “authenticity” was dependent upon a vision of the American West

⁶⁰⁶ *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. America’s National Entertainment*, 44.

⁶⁰⁷ Nadja Durbach points out that by the late nineteenth century it was relatively common for freak show and circus entrepreneurs to recruit locals to play “exotic” foreigners. For example, lower-class Irishmen sometimes played African “savages.” Such substitutions were common knowledge. Therefore, the fact that Cody’s Native American performers were “real” gave credence to the authority of their spectacle. See Nadja Durbach, *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (University of California Press, 2009), and particularly the fifth chapter, “‘When the Cannibal King Began to Talk’: Performing Race, Class, and Ethnicity,” 147-170.

and its picturesque inhabitants codified by popular texts and landscapes. General Cook's insistence of the spectacle as a "living picture" relies in part upon the perceived racial and geographical origins of its performers but also on the reproduction of particular stereotypes – sartorial, behavioral, and geographic – of a constructed West.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West as a spectacle of conquest reinforced the purposes and necessity of military action of American and British imperialism: the "good (white) guys" always won, sometimes just at the last minute, and the results of their aggression, which enabled the extraction of natural resources and control of land, could be toured at leisure throughout the American Exhibition. The next section of this chapter will discuss the ways in which the Trophy Hall and the Wild West promoted the use of firearms as a justified means of westward aggression. This development was increasingly tempered, however, by a current of ambivalence since the Exhibition's promotion of investment in American materials also inevitably signaled diminished wilderness. To Britons, American expansion signaled the success of an imperialist model, access to geographical adventure, and opportunities for capital, but "civilization" inevitably meant "industrialization," which had resulted in the noticeable rural decline and worrying urban decadence of the late nineteenth century. An analysis of Oakley's British reception will reveal the extent to which conservative audiences saw her as a figure who pointed to the possibilities of a healthier future by returning women's bodies to a pastoral past romanticized through an antimodern lens. Her successful embodiment of this symbolic type, however, was predicated upon a British understanding that the narrative of American conquest was largely, if not inherently, English, which allowed them to take Oakley under wing as a familiar, and even familial, figure. At the same time, however, British audiences required full evidence of her authenticity as a product of the American West. Oakley's skill with firearms

ultimately fulfilled and united these two requirements because of the imperial ramifications of hunting and firearm aggression and a gendered discourse regarding how, where, and towards what/whom guns were deployed.

Hunting and empire

Consisting of over one hundred full- and partial-body taxidermy mounts “contributed by a number of English sportsmen, who have hunted in America,”⁶⁰⁸ the walls of the Trophy Hall (**Figures 5.11 and 5.12**) were evenly filled with heads of caribou, elk, moose, bison, mountain goats, mountain sheep, antelope, and various types of deer. Hides and Native American objects framed the doors and accentuated walls, along the bottom of which full-body mounts of bears, mountain sheep, a mountain lion, and mountain goats stood at stiff attention. Like all the rooms in the Galleries, the Hall was illuminated with skylights during the day and electricity at night.⁶⁰⁹ The clear diffuse lighting of the Trophy Hall and the regular stratified arrangement of animal parts within underlined an emphasis on scientific categorization and intellectual observation. Here, the Native American specimens were not merely curiosities, but more profoundly statements of conquest, empire, and intellectual pursuit. This gallery provided a common foothold for sporting audiences to feel immediate kinship while also reinforcing the need for, and benefits of, enforcing proprietary control using aggressive methods.

⁶⁰⁸ *Official Catalogue of the Exhibition*, 13.

⁶⁰⁹ In a letter to a member of the Executive Council who had inquired after the quality of the electric lights in the Galleries, Sartain wrote “The pictures look quite as well as if daylight was on them, and the whiteness of the light is so deceptive that one forgets that is not daylight. The ground glass globe around each light is essential in producing a diffused light.” Letter from John Sartain to John Gilmor Speed Esq (member of Executive Council), who had inquired about the quality of light in the Galleries after dark, 2? October, 1887. From John Sartain papers at AAA, microfilm roll 4563.

The Hall of American Trophies presents a compelling venue for considering a narrative of conquest utilized by Exhibition organizers to render their presentation of America familiar to British audiences while also raising the young country's status from former colony to new capitalist power. When Exhibition President Henry S. Russell hoped that the event would "prove another strong link in that chain, sometimes strained by never to be broken, which binds the United States to Old England, the child to its mother,"⁶¹⁰ he emphasized a racial lineage that elevated both Anglo-Saxon nations above their conquered subjects. Organizers took pains to emphasize likeness and shared commercial interests over difference and competition, and the Trophy Hall represents the foundational meeting ground of like-minded men interested in sport and, more broadly, in conquest for the sake of civilization and science under the aegis of the British Empire and, within the Galleries, of Queen Victoria herself.

Historian Greg Gillespie writes that travel narratives of British big-game hunters in the North American west utilized "specific systems of meaning and proprietary forms of representation to portray the land and its peoples in understandable and reproducible terms."⁶¹¹ Big game hunting, which included "identifying new animal species, collecting trophies, mapping the terrain, and sketching the landscape," created a symbolic imagined geography that also "resulted in the cultural appropriation of the land and its resources."⁶¹² Promoting themselves above aboriginal peoples who "hunted merely for subsistence," British hunters participated in a code of conduct that justified their pursuits as manly and in service to civilization, thereby

⁶¹⁰ Henry S. Russell opening remarks from an undated, untitled document in John Sartain papers at AAA, roll 4564.

⁶¹¹ Greg Gillespie, "'I Was Well Pleased with Our Sport among the Buffalo': Big-Game Hunters, Travel Writing, and Cultural Imperialism in the British North American West, 1847-72," *The Canadian Historical Review* 83.4 (December 2002): 556.

⁶¹² Gillespie, "'I Was Well Pleased with Our Sport among the Buffalo'," 557.

linking “their aristocratic sport to the activities of respected and adventurous empire builders, not uncivilized butchers.”⁶¹³ While hunters reinforced the intellectual nature of these pursuits by publishing books on the behavior of their pursued game and arguing about the appropriate Latin classification of North American flora and fauna, they also brought home trophy heads and skins that rationalized their endeavors in the name of science. Gillespie demonstrates that the pursuits of British hunters in North America and the results of their sport – including travel narratives and trophy heads – were intertwined with a colonial ideology that justified the possession of lands due to perceived racial and cultural superiority. This assumption also propelled the capitalist message of the American Exhibition: at the opening remarks on 9 May, Russell intoned that the object of the event was “to show what improvement we have made since the days when our ancestors reclaimed the American Forests from the families of the very redmen who are with us here.”⁶¹⁴ Russell’s use of the word “reclaimed” reinforced the idea that the racial and cultural superiority of Anglo-Saxon explorers justified – indeed, necessitated – the possession (or, in his words, re-possession) of aboriginal lands. It is therefore not surprising that Native American artifacts were exhibited in the Trophy Hall, and that the subjugated “red” bodies who would have worn these artifacts performed their “savage” natures just across Washington Bridge in the Wild West spectacle. Further, while Russell emphasized a shared ancestry, his words also alluded to

⁶¹³ This code stated that sportsman should not kill an injured or trapped animal, only shoot wildfowl on the wing, restrict their hunting to proper seasons, and aim only for stags and bulls to conserve herds. Fly fishing was favored over other “cruder” methods of angling such as spear fishing. Active pursuit and stalking was greatly preferred over “lead-shooting” (essentially sitting and waiting for the lead animal to pass with herd in tow), and the intellectual and nature-loving aspects of the hunt were stressed over any need for sustenance. Of course, the existence of this code does not mean that it was always followed. Gillespie, “‘I Was Well Pleased with Our Sport among the Buffalo’,” 559.

⁶¹⁴ Henry S. Russell opening remarks from an undated, untitled document in John Sartain papers, AAA, roll 4564.

the fact that many landowners in the American West during the late-nineteenth century were British.⁶¹⁵

By granting British trophies of American game prominent visual and ideological space in the American Exhibition, organizers harnessed a British ideology of empire to an American model of Manifest Destiny. It is telling that Whitley first suggested that the hunting trophies be interspersed within the Fine Art Galleries, which would have put American artists and British hunters on par as fellow contributors to American Culture and civilization. However, Sartain rigidly opposed this suggestion, and, instead, the trophies were given two rooms of display space within the Galleries complex.⁶¹⁶ Although Sartain's ultimate reasons for opposing Whitley's preference remain unknown, Sartain may have considered not only the perceived gap between art and craft, but also the logistical concerns of display and sale. If Whitley had had his way, the Galleries could have looked more like an aristocratic hunting lodge than an art gallery, which would have impacted the legibility of the Galleries as a commercial venue. Compartmentalizing the Galleries maintained a division between objects of art and those of natural science, both of which played important, but differing, roles in the narrative of conquest to culture. However, as hard as Sartain may have tried, he could not fully divorce his art from the natural specimens, which justified the aggression of conquest for the sake of science and civilization, and therefore led to the cultural expression of the fine arts on display in the remainder of the Galleries. While

⁶¹⁵ Morin references R. G. Althearn, who writes in *Westward the Briton* that by the late nineteenth century, one out of every three ranches in Colorado belonged to an Englishman. See Karen M. Morin, "Peak Practices: Englishwomen's 'Heroic' Adventures in the Nineteenth Century American West," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89:3 (1999), 495 and R. G. Althearn, *Westward the Briton* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953). In 1881 *The Lady's Pictorial* wrote that "The migration from England to America, this seems to be almost as great as that from America to England." *The Lady's Pictorial*, Vol. II, 24 September 1881, No. 30, 63.

⁶¹⁶ According to an unspecified source referenced by Charles Lowe, one of Whitley's strengths was "the faculty of persuading others to see things as he does." It seems, however, that he met his match in John Sartain. When Whitley deferred, Sartain wrote, satisfied, that "there is not a single specimen in the picture galleries proper." Letter from John Sartain to Emily Sartain, 27 May, 1887. From John Sartain papers, AAA, microfilm roll 4563. For the former quote, see Lowe, *National Exhibitions in London*, 2.

sales of the artworks were abysmal, regular crowds in the tens of thousands passed through the Exhibition, including the Fine Art Galleries, and these visitors who would have come away with the sense that the mother of the “mother” country, Queen Victoria herself, presided over the event; that America, too, benefited from the cultural products of imperial conquest and industrialized civilization; and that Britons had grounds for staking a claim in America’s westward expansion.

While the Trophy Hall demonstrated the prowess of British sportsman hunting for the sake of science and conquest, across Fourth Street and Washington Bridge William F. Cody performed a “Genuine Buffalo Hunt.” Although many of the spectacle’s twenty events – a number of them performed by women – included the skilled use of firearms, only “Buffalo Bill” Cody, accompanied by a troop of Indians, recreated a hunting scene. He was not, however, the only performer to have fashioned his fame from the use of firearms, and the striking difference between descriptions of Cody’s hunting and that of Oakley reveals a gendered rhetoric tied to masculine concepts of justified aggression in the name of expansion that carried over into the Wild West spectacle: while men’s hunting was glorified as a means of strengthening and expanding the nation, women’s hunting was framed as self-sacrifice to the necessities of frontier life. Further, although the physical and mental training required of an accomplished shootist was considered beneficial to men and women alike, women did not participate in the same kind of hunting as did sports*men*, the results of whose labors were so clearly on display in the Trophy Hall. Nonetheless, whether wielded by man or woman, the Wild West placed guns in a starring role of American expansion.

The tool of civilization

The sixty-six-page Wild West program functioned in part as informational propaganda for the use of firearms. An essay entitled “The Rifle as an Aid to Civilization” explained that “The bullet is the pioneer of civilization” and “has gone hand in hand with the axe that cleared the forest, and with the family Bible and school book.”⁶¹⁷ According to this logic, attaining an appropriate level of moral, spiritual, and intellectual cultivation could not be attained without the consistent use of a firearm for asserting authority, subduing enemies, and providing sustenance. However, it was not enough to simply have a rifle: the efficacy of its violence relied upon “the quick eye, the sure aim, coolness in the moment of extreme danger, whether threatened by man or beast”⁶¹⁸ of the firearm operator. According to historian Louis S. Warren, successful frontiersman had to maintain equilibrium between “the (manly) fearlessness of the savage with the (womanly) restraint of the civilized,”⁶¹⁹ and the way in which a person handled guns (with their attendant sexual symbolism) came to represent their degree of self-control. Because of his ability to balance the potentially indiscriminate aggression of a gun with cool-headed rational decision-making, the male sharpshooter represented the epitome of “sexual restraint, the conscious redirection of masculine energy, individual success, and national power.”⁶²⁰ Female sharpshooters also balanced this potent combination of individual virtues but had more to

⁶¹⁷ *Buffalo Bill's Wild West. America's National Entertainment*, 38.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶¹⁹ Warren writes that this balance became particularly important during a perceived crisis of masculinity in the 1880s. Neurasthenia in men, which manifested in a variety of symptoms such as increased anxiety, reliance on stimulants and narcotics, and hopelessness (according to George M. Beard's 1880 *American Nervousness*), was thought to result from over-civilization and feminization; however, over-indulgence in male sexuality was also considered a culprit. Extremes were to be avoided in favor of rational balance. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 212-13, 221, 242.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 242.

“prove”: they had to overcome not only societal expectations, but also their supposedly intellectually inferior, emotionally sensitive, and physically frail feminine natures. Women were considered inherently less fit than men to become sharpshooters, hence one reason why the Wild West’s “girl shots” merited attention: they were posited by show materials as extra-ordinary self-sacrificing young heroines whose exceptional skills had been honed amidst the rigors of the American frontier.

The biographies of female sharpshooters Oakley and Lillian Smith in the Wild West program spent some time situating them within a frontier context that justified their use of firearms. The first part of the formula was simple: they could not have avoided guns since both (supposedly) grew up in the American West. As elaborated above, the gun was the “tool of civilization,” and the frontier an area in need of such influence. The program explained that sixteen-year-old Smith had grown up in the saddle and at a young age preferred guns to dolls, a partiality that corresponded with expected behavior in California, where, as the program explained, good marksmanship was considered a mark of excellence.⁶²¹ Oakley had pursued game in order to feed her family and to pay off her father’s homestead mortgage at the age of fourteen “with the money earned from the sale of game and skins, shot and trapped by herself alone.”⁶²² Therefore, not only was she a naturally gifted and precocious girl, but she also directly helped her family by providing food and ensuring the retention of their homestead. In one interview, Oakley stated that while she formerly shot game for meat and hides, she switched to fancy shooting once she was able to make a living doing so.⁶²³ While performing in the Wild

⁶²¹ *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. America’s National Entertainment*, 49.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶²³ “Camp Sketches. – No. VII. Miss Annie Oakley.” unknown publication, 13 August, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley BBCW. This is not to say, however, that she gave up hunting altogether. The Wild West program implied that she continued to hunt for sport, and the gun club events in which she participated often used various

West arena, she aimed at glass balls and clay pigeons.⁶²⁴ The spectacle program explained that “in deference to the humanitarian sentiment,” clay pigeons, which imitated a bird’s flight without sacrificing the bird, allowed “ladies and children” to “witness and enjoy this unique exhibition with no violence to the feelings, while the expert and experienced sportsman can still appreciate the excellence of the shooting, the clay pigeons heightening rather than diminishing the sport.”⁶²⁵ Oakley and Smith took aim at these imitations, demonstrating that the skills honed out of necessity on the frontier had been modified into non-threatening metropolitan entertainment.⁶²⁶

The context of Oakley’s spectacle reconciled the seeming paradox of a girlish Diana or winsome Amazon, labels often applied to her by the British press. The Wild West program clearly situated Oakley’s early life within established expectations of frontier tomboys whose exceptional circumstances merited a certain degree of nontraditional labor and, when needed,

types of pigeons. British reporters noted the difficulties Oakley had with their blue rocks, a type of pigeon that Oakley described as very fast and strong. Oakley herself supposedly said that aiming for the English blue rock was the most difficult shooting she had ever done. She had many opportunities to improve after her first attempt with blue rocks in May 1887, and appears to have done so. See “The Woman Rifle Expert. Return of Buffalo Bill’s Wonderful Feminine Attraction.” *The World*, Sunday, 8 January, 1888; “Pigeon Shooting. The Gun Club.” *Land and Water*, 7 May, 1887; “Shooting with One of Two Eyes Open,” *The Field*, Saturday, 2 July, 1887. All from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶²⁴ The clay pigeons used by the Wild West were made from red clay and measured four inches in diameter and just over an inch in depth. Clay pigeons became popular in the 1880s because, when released from the thrower (called a “trap” and activated by a simple spring mechanism and handle), they replicated the movement of flying birds and could therefore allow accurate practice without the expense or logistical concerns of real pigeons. Oakley reported, for instance, that blue rocks could cost as much as one US dollar per bird. “The Woman Rifle Expert. Return of Buffalo Bill’s Wonderful Feminine Attraction.” *The World*, Sunday, 8 January, 1888, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW. See also *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. America’s National Entertainment*, 38.

⁶²⁵ *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. America’s National Entertainment*, 38.

⁶²⁶ In contrast, Buffalo Bill performed as an “All-Round Practical Shot” and, with his Native American contingent, replicated the “realities” of a hunt when chasing the herd of buffalo around the arena, guns blazing. Those participating in the dramatic portions of the Wild West such as the buffalo hunt, pioneer cabin siege, and attacks on the Deadwood Stage and covered wagon utilized modified ammunition that would not harm the animals, performers, or attendees, but would imitate the sound, smell, and appearance of gunfire. These events put speed and action on display, and the results of authentic hunts in the American West could be viewed in the Trophy Hall and at the main entrance of the American Exhibition, where a number of taxidermic bison set “a preliminary tone colour to the Exposition.” Our Roving Correspondent, “The American Exhibition and the Wild West,” *The Sporting Life*, Tuesday, 10 May (1887), from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

aggression for the sake of self-protection and sustenance. Outside of the ring, Oakley regaled interviewers with stories that illustrated the amount of pluck necessary for life in the West. For example, she told of having ridden the mail to coach to Greenville (Ohio) when a teenager. When a robber hijacked the coach, everyone was told to get off the coach, but the thief did not bother with Oakley, who appeared to be nothing more than a harmless girl. Since Oakley was always armed, she “put on a very childlike look, and opened my bag as if to take out a handkerchief,”⁶²⁷ and of course took out her pistol, with which she successfully scared off the thief and drove the mail into Greenville.

Oakley’s performances fulfilled the narrative of a monolithic American frontier in which exceptional men and women developed nearly super-human abilities for the sake of a greater mission, thereby rendering them living American heroes and heroines. Dime novels created and popularized specific hero types and figures. Much of Cody’s early fame was due to Ned Buntline (Edward Zane Carroll Judson, Sr., 1821 or 1823-1886) and Ingraham’s dime novel tales of his adventures (some authentic, many not). Cody’s performance attire corresponded with that of the Western hero: tall boots, fitted trousers, belt and buckle, fitted and often embellished jacket, wide brimmed hat, shoulder-length and often curly hair, and a Van Dyck beard and mustache. As argued in the last chapter, Oakley adopted the attire and behavior of the dime novel Western heroine even though she did not have her own dime novel franchise. These figures most often supported the mission of the hero rather than their own personal agendas, thereby rendering their nontraditional labor and behavior acceptable in service to a greater patriarchal cause. Within the parameters of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, Cody represented a father figure whose mission was hinged to a metanarrative of an American West in which the Anglo-

⁶²⁷ “‘Little Sure Shot.’ An Interview with Miss Annie Oakley.” in *The Evening News*, Dramatic Review, Friday, 10 June, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

Saxon race starred as the primary protagonist. Thus, the performances of female Wild West participants, including Emma Hickok's fancy riding, Della and Bessie Ferrell's horseback racing and trick riding, and Oakley's and Smith's sharp shooting, presented the extraordinary skills required by and honed in the wild open spaces of the American West during the course of empire.

Oakley's popular success signaled that this formula worked in Britain, reflecting the international influence of Western Americana and Oakley's strategic negotiation of Western and female stereotypes. Her various performances – in the arena, outside of the arena, in studio photographs, and in interviews – provided enough legible points along the tomboy trajectory for audiences to pick the particularities that most pleased their purposes. While skipping, kicking, and wafting kisses, Oakley's demeanor, compounded by her attire, appeared the playful, plucky embodiment of a youthful dime novel heroine. Further, she employed scripted tactics to build up suspense: one reporter noted that

as a shot, [Annie Oakley is] more than clever; her performances partake of genius, and when she missed at first to break two glass balls thrown up in the air at the same time, she having her back to the balls, and obliged to take up the rifle from the ground, the orator's remark of 'She can dew (sic) it,' caused rounds of applause; and she did it – in fact, her performance is perfectly marvellous (sic).⁶²⁸

The light humor of her girl-like persona in conjunction with this planned build-up of tension allowed the audience to enjoy her charming pout when she missed and sigh in relief once she hit the targets. For this reason, a reporter for *The Referee* wrote that “The loudest applause of the night is reserved for Miss Annie Oakley, because her shooting entertainment is clever, precise, and dramatic. The vast audience feel a relief at witnessing something that they can follow and

⁶²⁸ The Local Lounger, *The Metropolitan*, n.d., from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

understand from start to finish.”⁶²⁹ Her performances were entertaining in their drama and charm, precise in their execution, and legible because of her ability to embody a heroine type, and that type’s most entertaining behavioral markers, to an audience already familiar with sensational Western fiction.

Portraits of Oakley that cycled through the British press captured her youthful face and “Western” clothing but also her rigidly serious gaze and pose indicative of the gravity of life on the frontier. Because the Wild West presented the narrative of a civilizing mission based on the use of military force,⁶³⁰ Oakley’s presentation labeled her a “girl shot” but visually presented her as a girl soldier. For example, the full-length portrait used to illustrate the cover of Oakley’s biography *Rifle Queen, Annie Oakley* (**Figure 5.13**) published in London and sold during the 1887 season depicts her standing in performance attire with a rifle at attention. Her knee-length skirt with fringe and embroidered panels, loose long-sleeved blouse buttoned to the neck, gloves, wide-brimmed hat, and gaiters buttoned tightly over booted feet are recognizable from other portraits engraved after photographs. Long wavy hair cascades down the front of her shoulders, while curled bangs and a wide hat brim frame her calm gaze towards a distant target. Static posed portraits such as this stem from photographic limitations and commercial studio traditions adopted from formal portraiture, and thereby render her form seemingly legible, familiar, and knowable.⁶³¹ While Oakley’s sharpshooting ability was considered out-of-the-ordinary, portraits

⁶²⁹ *The Referee*, n.d., from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶³⁰ Here I refer broadly to the use of firearms and violence depicted in which the Native American contingents inevitably fell to the white men, but also to the fact that members of the US cavalry also performed in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.

⁶³¹ The earliest photographs of Oakley in action, that I have seen, date to 1892 and were taken in London during the Wild West’s second British tour. These are located in an album in the Nathan Salsbury Collection at the Denver Public Library and show a variety of “behind the scenes” and “action” shots possible because of the diminished size of cameras and the increased speed of exposure. Dry plates became increasingly popular during the 1880s, and by the 1890s smaller cameras – such as the Kodak Brownie – and gelatin film were more widely used, allowing for more spontaneous photographs.

such as these reinforced her normalcy. A serious “little lady” with correct posture and attractive, regular features, she was not a freak of nature, but rather a female model of white dominance on the frontier. The combination of her legible, normal appearance, accounts of her correct behavior, and her stunning demonstrations of physical and mental prowess reinforced expectations of American and British imperialism: in their mission to bring civilization to aboriginal lands, white women would not be corrupted into something “other,” but rather would maintain strength of purpose and purity of race while developing necessary skills for self-defense and self-sufficiency. Oakley provided visual proof of the beneficial outcomes of a tomboy upbringing and American expansion because she so well performed the girl heroine type at the same time that she demonstrated her own tame-ability. Further, her figure tapped into debates on both sides of the Atlantic regarding the state of the Anglo-Saxon race as represented by its female bodies.

American tomboys and British nymphs

Organizers of the American Exhibition took great pains to underline the cultural affinities between Britain and Britain’s younger “cousin” America, and in this context attendees could take female performers such as Oakley under wing as their own. Tales of Oakley’s life provided in interviews and the printed Wild West program reassured readers that young women could survive on the frontier (with a surprising degree of charm and wit) and proved that a vigorous rural childhood led to more intelligent and self-sufficient women devoted to home and family. The female performers of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West did not challenge British audiences to rethink Victorian gender ideology, but rather conformed to preexisting conservative ideas regarding young women’s bodies in rural landscapes. The skilled, picturesque performances of the

“Western girls” of the Wild West reinforced the idea that “pristine” landscapes offered possible alternatives to the ills of the city. They therefore represented one means of alleviating over-civilization by establishing a closer bond with nature, which corresponded with a movement in England to return to the agricultural communities that had deteriorated over the course of the nineteenth century.⁶³² Oakley’s performances amidst the monumental painted canvas backdrops of the Wild West spectacle evoked visual associations between a pristine female “state of nature” and Nature itself. These associations not only tapped into a post-Civil War American conception of the vigorous tomboy, but also harkened to an idealized image of British female adolescence rendered especially potent amidst late-nineteenth century concerns regarding women’s rights, bodies, and labor. Just as Oakley’s performances depended in part upon the sublime geography of an imagined American West, the call by some critics to return to a pre-industrial ideal of English character often corresponded with the associated virtues of a female adolescent type amidst a virginal, pristine landscape.

This was certainly the case in Eliza Lynn Linton’s essay “Nymphs,”⁶³³ the subject of which was “an out-of-door, breezy, healthy girl, more after the pattern of the Greek Oread than the Amazon... found only in the country”⁶³⁴ where she frolicked “among the mountains, in the secluded midland villages, or out on the thinly-populated moorland tracts.”⁶³⁵ Linton’s clarification that her subject was more an Oread – a mountain nymph, from the Greek “oros” for

⁶³² See Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982).

⁶³³ “Nymphs” was republished in the 1883 collection of Linton’s social essays, but to date I have not found reference to its original date of release. Most likely it was written for the *Saturday Review* and published in the late 1860s or 1870s.

⁶³⁴ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 137.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

mountain – than a warrior woman established a fundamental distinction that her female youth rejoiced in the vigor of nature without aggression, in comparison to the girls of the American West often militarized (at least in sensational fiction) to support a larger mission.⁶³⁶ The nymph existed only in the short window “Between the time of the raw school-girl and that of the finished young lady... when the physical enjoyment of life is perhaps at its keenest, and a girl is not afraid to use her limbs as nature meant her to use them, nor ashamed to take pleasure in her youth and strength.”⁶³⁷ She wandered the countryside, climbed mountains, and swam and rowed heartily – often coaxing her brothers to join – and, while both curious and a quick learner, was naive and charmingly devoid of self-awareness. She made friends with every living thing she encountered and unintentionally entertained her rural neighbors, who found humor in her often careless antics.

Linton’s invocation of mountains, moors, and ruins situated the nymph within a British landscape tradition that had matured alongside the visible effects of industrialization evident since the late eighteenth century. According to art historian Tim Barringer, landscape registered “the momentous historical developments of the era – sometimes through direct transcription, sometimes by offering a commentary or an alternative vision”⁶³⁸ and reflected the tension between the opulence and anxiety of an expanding industrial nation. During the mid- to late-nineteenth century in particular, anxieties regarding women’s rights, work, property, and health were often posited as by-products of particular environments. In this formula, the primary villain

⁶³⁶ Linton also states that her nymph could not be called a tomboy, since for “stricter women” this word had associations of misbehavior that could not be associated with the innocent nymph. However, the similarities between her description of the nymph and romanticized notion of American tomboyhood are quite clear. *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 137. The age she specifies – between “raw” school girl and finished lady – would be between approximately ten or twelve years of age to sixteen or eighteen.

⁶³⁸ Tim Barringer, *Opulence and Anxiety: Landscape Paintings from the Royal Academy of Arts* (Warkwickshire: Compton Verney, 2007), 9.

was often The City, a place where young women were exposed to the physical and emotional temptations of modernity. A vision of healthy rural women devoid of material and sexual desires amidst a romanticized British pastoral landscape provided one powerful, if largely imagined, antidote.

Linton was one among many British critics who, over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, worried about cultural corrosion due to over-civilization and decadence. In her consideration of women's Aesthetic dress, Kimberly Wahl points out that "Many intellectuals viewed modern life with a sense of ambivalence, leading to disquieting questions about the loss of basic and time-honored values as a result of the development of mass-produced goods, increasing mechanization, urban crowding, and, most crucially, a growing level of commercial materialism."⁶³⁹ While in the 1860s Aesthetic attire represented a healthier and more beautiful mode of dressing in contrast to the over-decorated and tight-laced styles popular at the time, by the 1880s it "was increasingly viewed as indicative of spiritual and physical illness as well as questionable morals."⁶⁴⁰ Because the appearance, attire, behavior, display, and health of the British female body represented the state of British culture, the perceived decadence and lax morals of Aestheticism and the unnatural women targeted by Linton – namely fashionable women, bad mothers, New Women, and materialist girls – supposedly represented a present cultural crisis. Linton presented the materialistic desires of narcissistic young women as a pervasive evil threatening women's imperatives to become healthy and morally upright wives and mothers. How would the English race maintain its preeminence, she wondered, if girls did

⁶³⁹ Kimberly Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), 30.

⁶⁴⁰ Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting*, 145.

not care to learn from their mothers, but rather sought to imitate the frivolous and morally degraded fancies of fashionable, and often “loose,” women?

In “Nymphs” Linton addressed her concern that urban women were no longer the only sensitive beings under threat from the temptations of modernity: “railroads and the penny-post, cheap trains, fashion and fine-ladyism have penetrated even into the heart of the wild mountains, and now the nymph there is only a transitional development—not, as formerly, a fixed type.”⁶⁴¹ In this construction, the corruption of Nature correlated directly with the degeneration of women’s bodies and, by extension, the British race and its culture. Railroads, one of the most conspicuous industrial technologies of the time, provided easier access to Britain’s health-giving and inspirational wild spaces but, at the same time, threatened the purity that made them desirable destinations.⁶⁴² The influential critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) also worried about the effects of industrial technology and development on Britain’s countryside. A *Punch* illustration by Edward Linley Sambourne (1844-1910) from February 1876 entitled “Lady of the Lake Loquitur” (**Figure 5.14**) depicts Ruskin – his recognizable head atop a paint-tube body – protecting the Lady of the Lake, here a personification of nature who speaks in an accompanying poem on behalf of Britain’s remote insular landscapes.⁶⁴³ With paint palette and palette knife wielded, Ruskin defends Nature from the snake-like train that twists along the left side of the composition. To Ruskin and Linton, the incursion of railroads allowed the dissemination of modernity’s worst characteristics, both physical and moral, to the heart of Britain’s most iconic

⁶⁴¹ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 144.

⁶⁴² Taking this into consideration, Edwardes’ specification that the location of her novel *Vivian the Beauty*, discussed in the third chapter, had only recently heard the whistle of a train was meant to underline its continued state of purity, since it had only recently been “pierced” by such development.

⁶⁴³ This is indicated by the title: loquitur, from the Latin “to speak,” is often abbreviated to “loq.” to indicate, such as in stage directions, when a person speaks.

landscapes, including the lush greenery of its rolling hills and thick woodlands, the wildness of its windy moors, the crags of its highlands, and the glories of its Lakes District.⁶⁴⁴ The slithering train of the *Punch* illustration clearly alludes to the corrupting serpent Satan in the biblical Garden of Eden as well as the contemporary rape of virginal lands by corrupt capitalists. In its insidious penetration of the Country, the city-centric railroad pierced not only Nature, but also the bodies and minds of rural British women.⁶⁴⁵

The dual crises of diminishing natural spaces and increased threats to women's bodies and behavior in the late nineteenth century was shared both by the United States, who sought reassurance that the quality of the country would regenerate after the crisis of the Civil War and fulfill the demands of Manifest Destiny on the Western frontier, and by Britain, whose increasingly decadent culture signaled, to some, the potential implosion of the global empire from within the heart of its primary metropolis. Visualizing healthy, self-sufficient young women amidst an unchanging countryside presented a powerful warning and a possible antidote for envisioning racial improvement – a return to what Linton called the Englishwoman's "distinctive natural character"⁶⁴⁶ – and the maintenance of appropriately maternal women. Many

⁶⁴⁴ An excerpt published alongside the illustration in *Punch* explained that Ruskin feared that a plan to extend the railway into the Lakes District was not, as stated, to provide tourists better access to one of England's wonders, but rather to develop the area's mining potential. According to biographer Nancy Fix Anderson, Linton also held the Lakes District very dear to her heart, noting that Linton not unintentionally called the area "Eden" in her fictionalized autobiography and writing that Linton "shared with the Romantic poets a lifelong love for this northern English region of gently sloping mountains and clear lakes." See Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, 1.

⁶⁴⁵ Asleson points out some artists including Edward Poynter (1836-1919), G. F. Watts (1817-1904), and William Blake Richmond (1842-1921) feared the effects of industrialization, and that such concerns informed their return to a classically inspired aesthetic. See Asleson, "Classic into Modern," 63-7.

⁶⁴⁶ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 6. Linton described the characteristics of these ideal women: "a creature generous, capable, modest; something franker than a Frenchwoman, more to be trusted than an Italian, as brave as an American but more refined, as domestic as a German and more graceful. It meant a girl who could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of her nature, but who was neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind; a girl who, when she married, would be her husband's friend and companion, but never his rival; one who would consider his interests as identical with her own, and not hold him as just so much fair game for spoil; who would make his house his true home and place of rest, not a mere passage-place for vanity and ostentation to pass through; a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress." *Ibid.*, 1-2.

characteristics invoked by Linton's essay correspond with the age, behavior, and appearance of the American tomboy, the romanticized Western version of which Oakley performed in the Wild West arena. A portrait of Oakley reproduced in the London press (**Figure 5.15**) and pasted into the 1887 Annie Oakley scrapbook at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West presents a figure who could easily pass for a teenage girl. She wears garters, a pleated skirt, and shapeless collared blouse. Some of her features have been modified: her gloved hands, booted feet, and mouth have been daintily reduced, her almond eyes and nose enlarged, and her face rendered a pleasingly full oval. By consistently repeating that her birthdate was August 13, 1866 (rather than 1860), Oakley maintained an appearance of youth abetted by her pretty features and small stature.⁶⁴⁷ Contemporary descriptions of Oakley as a "girl" or "little lady" reveal the extent to which the ruse convinced viewers, predisposed to support her entertaining role as a young Western heroine because of exposure to sensational fiction and news reports. The *London Evening News* described the "decidedly pretty and winsome face... sweet and gentle manners, and... soft, girlish voice" of the young Amazon. *The Sportsman* invoked the "expressive eyes" and "voice as soft and silvery as the rustle of a summer's breeze amongst the trees" of the "Western girl."⁶⁴⁸ The "splendid little lady"⁶⁴⁹ noted by *The Society Times and Tribune* at a British gun club made her American compatriots at home very proud, for *The American Field*

⁶⁴⁷ "Only 110 pounds!" was regularly crowed by astonished reporters, and the official Wild West program ended her biography with, "What makes Miss Oakley's feats more surprising is the fact that she is small in stature and weighs only 110 pounds." See, for example, various untitled and undated news clippings from the 1887 Annie Oakley scrapbook at BBCW as well as "'Little Sure Shot.' An Interview with Miss Annie Oakley." in *The Evening News*, Dramatic Review, Friday, 10 June, 1887 and *Buffalo Bill's Wild West. America's National Entertainment*, 47. A 13 August, 1866 birthdate would have rendered her twenty years old when she arrived in London, rather than her actual twenty-six.

⁶⁴⁸ "Chit-Chat and the Drama" in *The Sportsman*, Wednesday, 4 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁴⁹ *The Society Times and Tribune*, 30 July, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

wrote that “it is gratifying to know that our little American girl proved herself an expert shot”⁶⁵⁰ and that “The English papers are very lavish with their notices”⁶⁵¹ of the entire Wild West.

The poetic descriptions of her soft voice diffused any concerns that this Western tomboy would develop into a brashly shrill woman, a criticism often leveled against American female tourists in London and increasingly applied to suffragists and outspoken New Women.⁶⁵² In some reports, however, a frontier dialect (whether real or invented) underscored the sharpshooter’s origins and tied her to a popular Western type. For example, one reporter recorded Oakley saying “I reckon,” and, after some banter (to which the author playfully says his feelings have been hurt), Oakley supposedly responded “Well, I’m real sorry if I’ve hurt your feelings.”⁶⁵³ This colloquial language evoked humor and tied Oakley, like Western dime novel heroines, to an imagined American frontier, but the contrast between “the refined English delicacy of speech of this little Diana, and the hoarse gutturals of the ochre-smearred Redskins who are her neighbours”⁶⁵⁴ assured visitors that she was soft-spoken and self controlled.

Linton, an acidic critic of the “shrieking sisterhood” of New Women and suffragists, invoked descriptions of voice to emphasize the nymph’s innocence and close relationship with nature. The nymph, she wrote, “can imitate the sounds of animals for the most part with wonderful accuracy; though she can also sing simple ballads without music, with sweetness and

⁶⁵⁰ *The American Field*, undated and untitled, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵² For a thorough discussion of representations of suffragists, see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁶⁵³ “Camp Sketches. – No. VII. Miss Annie Oakley.” unknown publication, 13 August, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁵⁴ “Chit-Chat and the Drama” in *The Sportsman*, Wednesday, 4 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

correctness.”⁶⁵⁵ In the same way that Oakley’s association with Sitting Bull tangibly united her to the West and to a racialized rhetoric of the tomboy (in which the female adolescent may act like an “uncivilized” and “primitive” “little ape” while ultimately maturing into a white woman), Linton makes the nymph’s connections to nature, beyond her ability to imitate its sounds, patently clear: “that wonderful grace of unconsciousness which belongs to savages and animals belongs to [the nymph] also, and she moves with a supple freedom which affection or shyness would equally destroy.”⁶⁵⁶ Oakley’s athletic abilities were also described as the graceful movements of a creature at ease in nature.⁶⁵⁷ Her performances included vigorous sprinting, jumping, and riding with precision and a playful attitude, much like Linton’s nymph, who found “a sharp run down a steep hill, with the chance of a tumble midway... clambering over gates, stiles, and even crabbed stone-walls” — even if at risk of an “undignified display of ankle” — “leaping a ditch” during a marshland walk, and riding a half-broken or bareback horse all enjoyable activities.⁶⁵⁸

According to Linton, the nymph could not exist in the city but, by definition, had to remain a rural type: “In the town she degenerates into fastness, according to the law which

⁶⁵⁵ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 142.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁵⁷ One reporter wrote that she was “small in stature, but quick and sure in her movement, [rode] with unsurpassed grace, and [shot] with unerring accuracy.” “Miss Annie Oakley. (Little Sure Shot).” *The Rifle*, n.d., from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW. In an interview, Oakley is reported to have said “one of my few accomplishments is that I can run like a deer.” “The Woman Rifle Expert. Return of Buffalo Bill’s Wonderful Feminine Attraction.” *The World*, Sunday, January 8, 1888, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁵⁸ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 137. Not only did Oakley’s athletic antics harken to such activities, but she was also “passionately fond” of “horse exercise” and supposedly in 1884 (at the fictional age of eighteen and the real age of twenty-six) had tamed a horse with a vicious reputation in only three days. See “‘Little Sure Shot.’ An Interview with Miss Annie Oakley.” in *The Evening News*, Dramatic Review, Friday, June 10, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

makes evil merely the misdirection of force, as dirt is only matter in the wrong place.”⁶⁵⁹ This underscores Linton’s fundamental argument: in the city, girls too often “misdirect” their energy to frivolous concerns, whilst in the country the nymph directs her energies to communing with and learning from Mother Nature. Crucially, Linton insisted that if the nymph were allowed to mature “in the fresh pure air of her native place, she retains her youth and strength long after the age when ordinary women lose theirs, and her children are celebrated as magnificent specimens of the future generation.”⁶⁶⁰ Here, Linton seems to invoke a nymph-turned-mother figure similar to Marcus Stone’s *My Lady is a Widow and Childless* (**Figure 5.16**) exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874. Within the foregrounded family group, the mother faces away from the viewer and towards her husband, who reaches to take the infant from her hip. Stone directs attention away from her apparently pretty features and towards the curves of her arched body. The physical stability and strength is echoed in her rounded, sculptural arms, which contrast with the veined muscles of her laboring husband.⁶⁶¹ Unlike the lascivious couple of William Holman Hunt’s (1827-1910) notorious *Hireling Shephard* (1851, **Figure 5.17**), this working class couple takes a pause from honest and appropriately gendered labor – apparent in the shovel and canteen at the husband’s feet and the lunch basket held in the wife’s left hand – to nurture their bodies and their children. Standing on her mother’s left side, the young daughter helps her mother port the lunch basket while also hold a sheaf of wheat and a small doll, appropriately imitating her

⁶⁵⁹ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 137-8.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁶¹ While Stone’s family group appears to represent rural workers, Linton pointedly states that “The nymph is almost always of the middle-classes.” She writes this, however, to highlight her point that nymphs are usually not upper class: “It is next to impossible indeed that she should be found in the higher ranks, where girls are not left to themselves, and where no one lives in far-away country places out of the reach of public opinion and beyond the range of public overlooking.” Therefore, Linton does not explicitly state that the nymph could *not* be found among the working classes. While I do not wish to conflate rural middle and working classes – and I wonder indeed if Linton would ever consider a milkmaid a potential nymph – the romanticization of pastoral female bodies seems to embrace both. *Ibid.*, 143.

mother's feminine duties and alluding to their agrarian lifestyle. While the pink of the woman's dress alludes to youth, freshness, health, and femininity, Stone also deploys the color to contrast the family group from the darker middle-ground foliage and to draw attention to where they are not: namely, the city in the background, the buildings of which are also bathed in pink. Stone makes no secret of their geographical distinction by a clear delineation of a brick wall, behind which walks the subject of the painting's title: a widow whose inability reproduce, or choice not to, has left her doubly bereft.

Linton makes clear what would have happened to Stone's country mother had she been transplanted to the other side of the wall. Her vigorous health would have given way, and in a few years she would have been "nervous, emaciated, consumptive, and with a pitiful yearning for 'home' more pathetic than all the rest."⁶⁶² These descriptors correlated with the symptoms of neurasthenia, a term that referred to the physiological and emotional effects of the stresses of modernity.⁶⁶³ While various rest cures and even electrotherapy were suggested remedies, those who could afford it left the city to convalesce in quieter, more remote environs.⁶⁶⁴

Oakley represented the success of the antidote of the American West, but, more than that, she demonstrated that the virtues and attractions of girlhood could be carried into adulthood. Linton also made this point, qualifying it by writing that a nymph-turned-woman, if kept away from the city, would preserve the appearance of girlhood "both in looks and bearing, both in

⁶⁶² Ibid., 145.

⁶⁶³ American neurologist George M. Beard popularized the term "neurasthenia" in 1869 and published regularly on the topic through the rest of the nineteenth century. These works – such as *Neurasthenia (nerve exhaustion): with remarks on treatment* (1879) and *American Nervousness, Its Causes and Consequences* (1881) – were widely read on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁶⁶⁴ The state of Colorado presented one location popular for such convalescence, as pointed out by Isabella L. Bird during her travels in America. See Isabella L. Bird, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1879) as well as R. G. Althearn, *Westward the Briton* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953).

mental innocence and physical power.” These women, she continued, have “the shy and innocent look of girls; they blush like girls; they know less evil than almost any town-bred girl of eighteen, mothers of stalwart youths though they may be; they can walk and laugh and take pleasure in their lives like girls; and their daughters find them as much sisters as mothers.”⁶⁶⁵ Oakley’s girlishness corresponded convincingly to ideas of the Western heroine as well as to Linton’s opinion that healthy, natural mothers would retain the most picturesque of their girlish qualities. One interviewer indirectly pointed this out by describing Oakley as “a muscular yet girlish-looking woman of twenty-one, below the medium height. Her hair drops unfettered over her shoulders. She wore yesterday a gown of old-gold silk that fell in graceful folds, without any needless rimming or embellishment.”⁶⁶⁶ Oakley’s girlish features, such as her youthful face and long hair, and modest femininity, evident by the grace and simplicity of her garb, rendered her a charmingly picturesque subject. Further, although she was not often directly asked about Frank Butler, who was both her husband and manager, Oakley did not purposefully disguise her wifely status, saying to one interviewer, “Of course all my acquaintances know that I am Mrs. Butler in private life, although always Annie Oakley on the bills.”⁶⁶⁷

Her behavior outside of the ring, and especially in the Wild West encampment during public hours, represented performances equally as important as her sharp shooting. Widely remarked upon in the British press, her hosting skills reassured visitors of the refined manners of this “little lady.” One reporter noted that visitors “cannot but admire the quiet and lady-like

⁶⁶⁵ Linton, *The Girl of the Period*, 145. According to this description, the innocent Jeanne Dempster in Edwardes’s *Vivian the Beauty* could be considered a “nymph.”

⁶⁶⁶ “The Woman Rifle Expert. Return of Buffalo Bill’s Wonderful Feminine Attraction.” *The World*, Sunday, 8 January, 1888, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Further, when an inquirer wrote to an unknown publication for information on Oakley, the publication’s response included her married name (Butler). Unknown publication from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

manner in which she acts the part of hostess” and “accomplished house wife” in her “neat and cheery” tent on Arapeah Avenue within the Wild West encampment.⁶⁶⁸ She was often observed “busily engaged arranging a heap of cut flowers, and sorting them into various combinations of light and shade”⁶⁶⁹ and serving her guests tea or juice. One London reporter mused upon Oakley’s thoughts as s/he witnessed her sitting “composedly at the entrance of her canvas dwelling-house,” where she was probably thinking “of her Western home and the folks she left behind her to cross the billowy Atlantic for the purpose of giving us exhibitions of her prowess with the rifle.”⁶⁷⁰ Amidst the heart of London’s seething metropolis, this reporter envisioned Oakley as Linton’s homesick nymph, and indeed, Oakley herself admitted that “I guess I could never settle down to city life and feel comfortable or happy.”⁶⁷¹

Oakley’s modesty, in particular, was thought an extraordinary attribute, and one reporter proclaimed that “This champion shot is as amiable as she is clever, and I don’t think I can pay her a higher compliment than that. Her shooting record is quite phenomenal, and her countrymen are justly proud of her; but all their petting and enthusiasm have failed to spoil her.”⁶⁷² Any other woman, it is implied, would have been easily corrupted by the amount of international praise Oakley enjoyed. However, her “pluck and skill”⁶⁷³ and admirable shooting,

⁶⁶⁸ *The Daily Press*, (1887), from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁶⁹ “Camp Sketches. – No. VII. Miss Annie Oakley.” unknown publication, 13 August, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁷⁰ *The Topical Times*, Saturday, 21 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁷¹ “‘Little Sure Shot.’ An Interview with Miss Annie Oakley.” in *The Evening News*, Dramatic Review, Friday, 10 June, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁷² A Sightseer, “At the Yankeeries.” *The Evening News and Telephone*, Tuesday, 10 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁷³ “Miss Annie Oakley. (Little Sure Shot).” *The Rifle*, n.d., from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

which she executed “with both eyes open, quickly and decisively,”⁶⁷⁴ was appropriately tempered by a reluctance to talk about herself. She was, one commentator wrote, “the very embodiment of unassuming geniality” with “a strong vein of quiet, refined humour, and... a rare diffidence in one who is such a public favourite.”⁶⁷⁵ While Oakley’s sharpshooting prowess created the foundation of her fame, it was her lack of vanity, apparently so prevalent in young women of the day, that rendered her most extraordinary.

Conclusion

The American Exhibition emphasized the shared economic and cultural interests of the United States and Britain. While claiming that Britain could not deny its inherent attachment to America because of a shared racial heritage and imperial prerogative, organizers were careful to posit Britain as the example from which America studied. By presenting the relationship as teacher/student, or mother/son, Britain did not need to feel threatened by America’s growing economic and political strength, but could instead indulge in the idea that America’s success was due, in large part, to Britain’s imperial example, financial investment, and scientific interest. While this shared narrative of conquest most privileged men’s roles and masculine virtues, representations of women’s bodies were key indicators of national success, health, taste, and virtue.

⁶⁷⁴ “Shooting at the Wild West Show.” unknown publication, n.d., from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁷⁵ “‘Little Sure Shot.’ An Interview with Miss Annie Oakley.” in *The Evening News*, Dramatic Review, Friday, 10 June, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW. Her sense of humor was often noted, and “Diana’s Diary” provided one example: when visiting Miss Oakley’s tent, the author was “most hospitably pressed to come in and sit down. [Oakley] showed us the medals and trophies she had won, and also a darling little pistol of mother of pearl and silver.” The author remarked that the small pistol looked like a toy, to which Oakley jokingly recommended she not try it on her friend unless she wanted to see him in the next world. “Diana’s Diary,” 17 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

Although in retrospect trick-riding and sharpshooting women appear to represent new models of femininity and female labor that could have potentially aggravated already contentious debates about women's work and behavior in the late nineteenth century, this discussion of Oakley's reception and performances argues that her figure reinforced conservative ideas regarding the appropriate maturation of women. These ideas were not only about the necessity of preserving the racial strength and purity of maternal Anglo-Saxon bodies, but more profoundly addressed one of the period's most prominent anxieties: that British culture was degenerating due to over-civilization and decadence resulting in part from a disintegrated connection between Man and the virtues of Nature. However, the symbolism of Oakley's figure was not necessarily straightforward. Reporters reveled in Oakley's old-fashioned normalcy and the charm of her girlish good looks, but she also served – as did the Wild West more broadly – as a foil against which British audiences, and particularly British women, stood out more distinctly as symbols of Britain's taste and refinement. In this way, Oakley's figure pointed to social ills resulting from excessive vanity and materialism of British women and also highlighted the perceived excellence of their sartorial and aesthetic taste resulting from Britain's advanced development as a cultural leader. For example, in a passage that recorded Oakley's simple and well-mannered charm, the dresses of the fashionable world might be given in detail, thereby emphasizing the degree of British women's cultivation.⁶⁷⁶ Similarly, and much more pointedly,

⁶⁷⁶ See, for example, an excerpt from *The World*, 11 May, 1887, that details the dresses of the Princess of Wales, who wore a "tailor-made dress of fawn colour," the Comtesse de Paris "in black and jet, with white braided gloves," and Princess Louise "in ruby silk and velvet." The Annie Oakley scrapbook at the BBCW has a number of examples of such descriptions of the fashionable world, such as reported by *The Sportsmen* on 10 May, *St. Stephen's Review* on 14 May, and *The Sporting Life* in "The American Exhibition and the Wild West" on 10 May, who recorded that recognizable persons of "Art, Science, and Society" thronged to the performance arena. *The Metropolitan* reported (1887) that, while the fashions were "very noticeable" due to tall hats and bright colors, only a few dresses of the "aesthetic kind" were noted, and the wearers of these "looked very superior indeed." Altogether, however, "the show of beauty and fashion was a fine one." The same author focused on the cleverness of Oakley's performance, describing her as "perfectly marvellous (sic)," but did not detail her attire. In my research thus far, only one author from *The Bat* made any kind of value judgment on Oakley's performance attire: "Now, Miss Annie Oakley, at the Buffalo Billeries, though a bit daring in her dress, looks very well on her horse, and her

American women attendees were often singled out by British commentators for their vulgar voices and clothing, both of which were often considered too loud.⁶⁷⁷

It was of great importance to the American Exhibition and Wild West organizers that fashionable audiences attended in order to reinforce the cultural importance of the event, and they were not disappointed.⁶⁷⁸ The Wild West marketing team did not hesitate to utilize this high-class interest to argue for the cultural and historical import of the spectacle,⁶⁷⁹ as can be seen in the 1888 billboard commemorating the Wild West's triumph in England. **(Figure 5.4)** The vignette in the lower left corner of the billboard, printed to appear as if it were a separate poster, underlines the mounted "picturesque" performers above. The curve of the grandstand on the left within the vignette mirrors the curve of the larger grandstand on the right in the billboard, thereby placing Buffalo Bill within the embrace of the entire circular structure. Further, it brackets him between members of the British audience: on the left, the fashionable audience and, on the right, the Royal Family. This billboard could have been pasted onto a wall or fence at

get up is that of the real Wild West. Nice as she looks, I wouldn't care to copy her." Outside of the ring, Lillian Smith's choice of dress did receive some criticism, such as that at the pen of *The Weekly Dispatch* on 24 July: at a gun club event, she "presented a striking combination of native eccentricity and feminine slavishness to the dictates of fashion in her garb," which consisted of a white summer dress, cut short (at the hem), with a bustle (dress improver) and "incongruous" yellow silk "Mexican" sash and plug hat.

⁶⁷⁷ "Diana" noted the tasteful attire of fashionable women, such as Miss McGregor's light grey beige dress "embroidered in cross-stitch of grey wool, and... a most becoming brown bead and tulle bonnet" and Mrs. Joplin's "youthful and light," appearance "in grey and white." In contrast, however, "Diana" pointed to American women's fashionable faux-pas: "The enormous headgear worn by the women would betray them as Yankees anywhere," and one American was particularly noticeable due to her outrageous attire, which consisted of grey alpaca trimmed with black passementerie, a black floppy straw hat with black ostrich plumes, and a black tulle veil over her face. "Diana's Diary," 17 May, 1887, from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁷⁸ For one example among many, *The Metropolitan* reported (n.d., 1887) that the "cream of the fashionable, the artistic, and theatrical world" attended, with lords, ladies, and actresses abounding. *The Sunday Chronicle* reported on 24 July that "Nothing surprises American visitors more than the patronage accorded the West Brompton Hippodrome [The Wild West arena] by the cream of London fashionable society. Among the middle and lower classes little interest is evoked by the vagaries of the Red Man and the Cowboy." All from the 1887 Annie Oakley Scrapbook at BBCW.

⁶⁷⁹ See "Appendix 3: Promotion, Reception, and the Popular Press" in the 2012 version, edited by Frank Christianson, of William F. Cody's *Wild West in England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), which was originally published in 1888 as part of Cody's *Story of the West and Campfire Chats*.

ground-level for analysis by passers-by, and so its creators paid attention to minute details. This is apparent in the nuances of each performer's attire as well as in the tightly-packed evening crowd in the vignette in which individual hats, facial hair, monocles, and lace collars have been carefully rendered. While faces are given minimal attention – enough to express enjoyment and interaction – the fashionable attire and accoutrements of this crowd make a very specific statement about the importance of the event. Further, they present a distinct vision of civilization placed in contrast to the savagery of the Wild West: the bright array of beaded, quilled, and feathered leather Native American garb above stands in contrast to the predominantly black suits, hats, and dresses of the civilized crowd. Further, while Native Americans, cowboys, vaqueros, the Deadwood Stage, elk, and bison chaotically jumble underneath the electric lights of the arena in the vignette, the crowd sits politely enthralled, attentive but reserved. Images such as these, while unabashedly part of a marketing strategy, also help us understand how late-nineteenth century Americans and Britons understood the achievements of imperial conquest to look.

Female Wild West performers such as Oakley reassured British attendees of the ultimate results of a shared narrative of conquest. While supposedly representing “faithful” examples of particular historical moments, they also demonstrated the extent to which appropriate, demure femininity remained a constant. In this narrative of conquest, undertaking new labor was posited as self-sacrifice to aid the civilization of a savage wilderness. However, this did not mean that new labor and behavior supplanted femininity or maternity. Rather, it reinforced assumptions of racial superiority and biological imperative. For British audiences, the female performers of the Wild West symbolized an appropriate arc within westward expansion in which women acquired and honed new skills, ultimately rendered civilized urban entertainment, at the same time that they matured into polite women. In this context, the American Exhibition presented a focused

venue for considering the relative state of well being of both nations as indicated by the appearance of its women and for upholding Victorian Britain and America's self-fulfilling expansionist ideologies.

Conclusion

This dissertation has considered the relationship between image, text, imagination, and body in London's dynamic visual ecosystem by focusing on two case studies of female celebrity – the professional beauty and the Western tomboy heroine – during the second half of the nineteenth century. In this context, static images such as commercial photographs and dime novel covers became nearly filmic when activated by viewers' imaginations. Such fantasies, when inspired by and dependent upon female celebrity representations, propelled debates regarding female labor and self-presentation. Further, the circulation of female celebrity representations both reinforced as well as risked destabilizing the racial and cultural hierarchies of a supposedly static vision of empire.

I closed the dissertation with the American Exhibition of 1887, a purposefully constructed vision of Anglo-Saxon empire. In this context, Buffalo Bill's Wild West presented a multi-sensory spectacle of American westward conquest that brought to life the imaginative components of popular Americana. Writing of the Western genre, Dyer states that

It is in the visceral qualities of the Western – surging through the land, galloping about on horseback, chases, the intensity and skill of fighting, exciting and jubilant music, stunning landscapes – that enterprise and imperialism have had their most undeliberated, powerful appeal.⁶⁸⁰

The Wild West brought this spectacle of “enterprise and imperialism” to life before attendees of the American Exhibition. Oakley's incarnation of the sharp-shooting Western tomboy heroine allowed female viewers to participate vicariously in westward expansion as vigorous and resourceful agents.

⁶⁸⁰ Dyer, *White*, 33.

The potent “visceral qualities” of the Wild West proved attractive for early moving picture technologies, and in 1894 Thomas Edison (1847-1931) filmed Oakley demonstrating her sharpshooting skills and small groups of Native Americans performing a series of dances.⁶⁸¹ These short film clips, roughly thirty seconds long, presaged Edwin S. Porter’s twelve-minute long *The Great Train Robbery* of 1903.⁶⁸² Over a century of ensuing films have repeated the formulaic Western tropes established by popular fiction and Wild West shows. Further, they have reinforced the legends built up around a mythic American West that, even in the late nineteenth century, simultaneously and often uncomfortably represented hope for expansion and enterprise as well as nostalgia for a seemingly more liberated and sublime natural wilderness.

A consideration of professional beauties, savvy business women attuned to fashion, artistic trends, social networks, and marketplace realities, also reveals the nuances of a complex and often contradictory historical moment whose legacies continues to influence the present. As di Bello points out, the criticism made by Rosenberg against Cornwallis West in describing the production of her representations “seems eerily anticipatory of later developments”⁶⁸³ including celebrity magazines, the invasions of paparazzi, and reality television. While the details of the lives of specific professional beauties are now most often the purview of disciplinary subfields within performance, gender, and celebrity studies, the construction of their fame from representations and gossip, often in lieu of “actual” achievement, remains relevant to the digital age. Indeed, their careers ask us to reconsider the ways in which “achievement” might be defined for women, in the nineteenth century and now. In the 1870s, labelling the creation of a

⁶⁸¹ The Library of Congress has made these available on their Youtube page, accessed 11 March 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/user/LibraryOfCongress/search?query=edison>.

⁶⁸² Available at the Library of Congress, accessed 11 March 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694220/>.

⁶⁸³ Di Bello, "Carte-de-visite Celebrities," 247.

public profile female “work” would have seemed anomalous,⁶⁸⁴ hence why the phrase “professional beauty” was both humorous and critical. However, the careers of these women as professional beauties signaled a shift in the gendered ideology of public presentation in which women could, in some instances, support themselves as self-representing and self-fashioning public figures. Such a shift has contributed to the development of a contemporary multi-billion-dollar celebrity industry intimately connected with fashion, cosmetics, film and media, travel, and high-end retail.

This has not meant, however, that twenty-first century women with public profiles might escape censure for self-promoting and self-imagining. Indeed, the sentiment of one critical voice from 1879, quoted in the second chapter, still sounds familiar. Professional beauties, wrote the anonymous author, “By denuding themselves of the old-fashioned sanctities... have also stripped themselves of the right to much sympathy when those sanctities are brutally invaded... they have lost the right to complain of indiscriminate criticism...”⁶⁸⁵ While such criticism is now written in less formal language, contemporary responses both to celebrity and non-celebrity female self-representations remain vehement, especially in online venues. Further, the Victorian critic’s opinion that rendering a female body available to the public gaze is an act of “denuding” that “strips” her of rights to human sympathy and exposes formerly protected “sanctities” to “brutal invasion” strikes uncomfortably close to a rhetoric of slut-shaming that informs a dangerous contemporary rape culture and too often accompanies public commentaries on representations of self-fashioning women.

⁶⁸⁴ Per Denney, “Anxiety comes into play, however, when we explore how she is pictured in relation to society’s view of her as an anomaly – a professional woman – and hence perceives her as transgressive and scandalous.” Denney, *Women, Portraiture and the Crisis of Identity*, 2.

⁶⁸⁵ *The York Herald*, Monday, 13 October 1879, issue 7071, p 4.

“Professional beauty” is now a redundant phrase, as attested to by the multi-million dollar empires of female celebrities such as reality television star, entrepreneur, and selfie connoisseur Kim Kardashian (b. 1980). While Kardashian’s role-playing mobile game *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* challenges participants to vicariously ascend West Coast American social elite from an E-list to an A-list celebrity level,⁶⁸⁶ it seems that anyone with an “independent” or “pioneering” spirit – especially if wearing appropriate attire – may aspire to the label “cowgirl.” The National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame’s definition of the word extends to include those “whose lives exemplify the courage, resilience and independence that helped shape the American West.” National Hall of Fame Honorees are chosen in the categories of Champions and Competitive Performers, Ranchers (Stewards of Land and Livestock), Entertainers, Artists and Writers, and Trailblazers and Pioneers.⁶⁸⁷ The breadth of women chosen as Honorees under these categories – from ranch women of the nineteenth century to senators of the present – points to the difficulty of setting parameters for the definition of “cowgirl,” which may refer to a job description as well as, more broadly, to an independent attitude and “spirit of self-reliance.”⁶⁸⁸

I shall conclude by returning to Queen Victoria’s imperial city. In 1878 a time capsule including twelve photographs of professional beauties was buried in London in the pedestal of an

⁶⁸⁶ The free-to-play mobile app was developed by Niccolo De Masi and Kim Kardashian. It was released for iOS and Android phones on 27 June, 2014.

⁶⁸⁷ “Plan Your Visit: Exhibition Galleries.” National Cowgirl Museum website, accessed 15 January 2015, <http://www.cowgirl.net/museum/plan-your-visit/>.

⁶⁸⁸ “About: Mission Statement.” National Cowgirl Museum website, accessed 15 January 2015, <http://www.cowgirl.net/museum/about-the-museum/>. Its exhibition halls divide “cowgirl” into three main divisions. “Into the Arena” focuses on women performing and competing within the rodeo ring, while “Claiming the Spotlight” celebrates “entertainers, artists, and writers who shaped the way we view the cowgirl in popular culture.” Finally, “Kinship with the Land” focuses on women who manage cattle and find gainful employment as ranch women.

Egyptian obelisk called Cleopatra's Needle.⁶⁸⁹ This act of embedding the faces of these women within the archaeology of the modern city occurred on the Thames Embankment, a project completed in 1874 that presented "a new vision of London; drawn from the discourses of the 1860s, but belonging more properly to the later decades of the nineteenth century. It [was] a vision of London not as metropolis but as capital of an empire."⁶⁹⁰ Analysis of professional beauties and the Western tomboy heroine reveals ambivalent and often ambiguous attitudes towards the man-made, self-made, and media-made personas of female celebrities. Considering their reception elucidates the nuanced ways in which some women negotiated, rather than overtly rebelling against, established representational tropes of femininity and expectations of feminine behavior. In so doing they publicly appeared in ways that, at the time, were notably modern and inextricably intertwined with the multivalent city of London.

⁶⁸⁹ One commentator remarked: "It is most earnestly hoped that the photographs of a dozen pretty Englishwomen, which have been laid beneath the Needle of the Serpent of old Nile, included all the most prominent among the professional beauties. To have omitted some of these fair beings would have been decidedly unjust, for they have striven so hard to put themselves and their beauty before the eyes of the world, and have been so readily accepted as types of the beautiful, that they deserve some form of immortalisation." From "Variorum Notes," *The Examiner*, Saturday, 21 September, 1878, issue 3686. Although the obelisk had been gifted by Egypt to Britain in 1819 to commemorate Britain's victories over France at the Battle of the Nile (1798) and the Battle of Alexandria (1801), no one wished to fund its transport to Britain. It was not until the 1870s that a solution, which included a custom-made boat named the *Cleopatra*, enabled its transit. Incredibly, after nearly foundering in the Bay of Biscay, and after the death of six volunteers chaperoning its journey, the obelisk made its way to London in 1878.

⁶⁹⁰ Nead refers to a depiction of the Embankment by John O'Connor in *Victorian Babylon*, 56.

Appendix I:

A Note on the Condition of Photographs and Albums

A number of the photographs discussed in this project are found in the Helmut and Alison Gernsheim photography collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas. This appendix provides information regarding the condition of these images, particularly those of professional beauties discussed in the second and third chapters, and the current context of their collection and display. I consulted Roy Flukinger, Curator of Photography, and Barbara Brown, Conservator, Photography Conservation in June of 2015.

According to Flukinger, the Gernsheims most likely acquired the two albums featuring photographs of professional beauties and J. E. Mayall's *The Royal Album*, discussed in the first chapter, during their early years of collecting in Britain (starting in 1945).⁶⁹¹ They may have chosen these albums and prints for their good condition as well as for the generous number of brightly-colored hand-painted examples. However, it is not clear whether the Gernsheims acquired the albums as complete sets or if they acquired the portraits individually and filled the album sleeves themselves. Flukinger confirmed that, although discerning collectors, the Gernsheims did not leave detailed records about their purchases (date, location, etc.). He agreed that there was a strong likelihood that they collected the albums as complete sets, after which Helmut Gernsheim pulled out the individual portraits and transcribed relevant information about the sitter listed on the back of the cabinets in pencil below the relevant album sleeve windows. Brown removed a selection of the portraits from their sleeves, and a variety of different handwriting appeared on the back of the photographs, none of which was Gernsheim's. This

⁶⁹¹ For more information regarding the Gernsheims and their collection, please see Roy Flukinger, *The Gernsheim Collection* (Austin: Harry Ransom Center and University of Texas Press, 2010).

suggests that a different collector, or collectors, could have compiled the portraits in the albums before the Gernsheims purchased them. According to my research to date, all of the portraits referenced in this project were created in the 1880s with some outliers in the 1870s and 1890s.

The first album of beauties consulted is made of brown calf and heavier than its modest dimensions would suggest (8 1/8 inches tall x 6 1/2 inches wide x 1 5/8 inches deep) due to the leather cover, intact metal clasp, and six gilt-edged sleeve pages (each of which can hold two mounted cabinet cards).⁶⁹² The spine and back cover of the album feature the most wear. The album is full except for one missing cabinet card (thus, eleven cabinet cards). Along the bottom edge of the sleeve window of the missing cabinet card is written in pencil and in Gernsheim's hand "Langtry." Five of the cabinet portraits are hand-colored, probably with aniline dyes and watercolors.

The second album consulted (8 1/2 inches tall x 7 inches wide x 2 1/4 inches deep) was manufactured by William Whiteley, Universal Provider, Westbourne Grove, London.⁶⁹³ It has a shiny dark green cover with an embossed diamond pattern and contains twenty gilt-edged pages. These are filled to capacity, equaling forty total cabinet cards, some of which are hand-colored. The collector(s) responsible for this album seems to have been concerned primarily with the stage. Most portraits feature actresses, but the album opens with a series of professional beauties and also features three actors and Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft (1841-1926 and 1839-1921, respectively).⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹² Accession numbers 964:0488:0001-0011 (location: f TR 655.11 C525 HRC-P)

⁶⁹³ Accession numbers 964: 1020: 0001-0040 (location: f TR 655.11 C526 HRC-P)

⁶⁹⁴ The Bancrofts were managers first of the Prince of Wales's Theatre (1865-1880) and then of the Haymarket Theatre (1879-1885).

A number of the prints studied show scattered white spots. These can be seen in all of the photographs discussed in the second chapter, although the hand-colored image of the Countess Dudley with lilies is perhaps the most obvious example. **(Figure 2.4)** Brown said that these are caused by a reaction between the silver used in the photographic image and particles of the gilt edging used on many albums (particularly along the edges and surfaces of the album pages), as well as on individual card mounts. The gilt material is made of copper-zinc powder meant to emulate bronze. These particles could have easily been in the air of the photographer's studio, meaning the spotting process probably started from the moment the image was developed. However, this reaction would be exacerbated by keeping the photograph in close proximity with gilt edging.

A number of the photographs have faded around the edges, such the cabinet card of Cornwallis West amidst furs **(Figure 2.6)** and Wheeler between drapes **(Figure 2.14)**. Brown said this could have occurred because of problems during the fixing process. Sometimes the glue used to adhere prints to paper causes fading, although this is less likely with prints adhered to card mounts, as these are. Acid from the paper of the album sleeves can also deteriorate the prints. Brown confirmed that these photographs are in excellent condition, judging by their rich albumen tones and hand-coloring, although it is impossible to tell the how much they have faded from their original condition.

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