Defining the Feminine in Ruskin and Baudelaire

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Introduction

“[...] c’est de ses entrailles [de l’art] que la critique est sortie.”
--Charles Baudelaire, *Salon de 1846*

John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) were among the most influential critics of nineteenth-century Britain and France, and both are often taken as emblematic of the attitudes of their era. Yet as individuals, they could hardly be more different. Ruskin was a wealthy, yet lonely and troubled man whose passion for art was only matched by his awe of the natural world. In his maturity, he became increasingly drawn to social justice work. The Oxford professor had a reputation for bouts of insanity, but was nonetheless the voice of morality for a generation of Victorians. While Baudelaire was nearly the same age as his British counterpart, his premature death cut short his own career. Unlike Ruskin, Baudelaire was most at home amid the bustle of urban society, and embraced the pleasure-seeking of Paris. Although he did not aspire to be a moral guide, he engaged directly with the world in a way which informed his ethical and aesthetic perspectives. And like Ruskin, he endeavored to strike a balance between aestheticism and morality.

Despite their differences, in their roles as critics Ruskin and Baudelaire converged on a number of fronts. As George Landow perceived, both men independently applied tenets of

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1 “[...] It is from its entrails [of art] that the critic emerged.”
All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
romantic poetic theory to form their own ideology of painting.\textsuperscript{6} Both theories centered the artist as the ideal man, who could be emotional and passionate while maintaining composure and control.\textsuperscript{7} It is notable that this ideal figure is both feminine in sensitivity and masculine in self-possession. Moreover, the art criticism of both men is deeply connected to and oftentimes intractable from their writing on other subjects. Baudelaire’s Salon and Universal Exhibition reviews are littered with ideas which repeat in the verses of his poetry collection \textit{Les Fleurs du mal}, and his “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” is more ethnographic study of Paris than treatise on painting. Likewise, Ruskin saw his writings on art as related to his later books on society, even including criticism in \textit{Fors Clavigera}, his letters to the laboring classes.\textsuperscript{8} To this end, both critics were keen observers of mid-nineteenth century Europe, which is to say modern Europe. A preoccupation with modernity, and how best to shape its direction, is deeply present in both men’s writing. Baudelaire, in fact, is credited with coining the term “modernity.”\textsuperscript{9} He in particular is often viewed as a precursor to the modernist artistic tradition, while Ruskin expressed a greater tradition in reviving elements of medieval artistic culture.\textsuperscript{10} Still, modernity at times proved challenging for both men.

As critics at mid-century, they lived on the precipice of one of the most dramatic shifts in art history. Coming of age in the era of J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) and Eugèn\textepsilon De\acute{l}\textacute{a}croix (1798-1863), Ruskin and Baudelaire would embrace a generation of artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) and Édouard Manet (1832-1883), which was the last to build its careers before Impressionism and later abstraction burst onto the scene. The artists of Ruskin and Baudelaire’s world probed at, critiqued, and theorized modernity, primarily through form and content. In this respect, the visual arts of mid-century were an ideal testing ground for expanding and articulating ideas which were far larger than the canvas. Much in the same way, the female

\textsuperscript{6} George P. Landow, “Ruskin and Baudelaire on Art and Artist,” \textit{University of Toronto Quarterly} 37, no. 3 (April 1968): 295.
\textsuperscript{7} George P. Landow, “Ruskin and Baudelaire on Art and Artist,” 301-302, 306.
body functioned as a vehicle for ideological expression, both in the arts and society at large. How Ruskin and Baudelaire sought to define femininity, and how these definitions lived up to or clashed against images of womanhood in the visual arts speaks not only to the cultural discourse surrounding gender, but to issues of modernity and identity as well. It is also indicative of how both men considered their purpose as critics.

The Role of the Critic

How Ruskin and Baudelaire understood their roles as critics is in many ways the result of their time and place. The critic, a figure who first appeared about a century prior, would finally become a fixture in the art world in nineteenth-century London and Paris. Both men would play a part in shaping the critic’s reputation and the public’s expectations of him.

Art criticism emerged in the early eighteenth century, as public exhibitions became more common in London and Paris. The first Salon criticism is dated to 1741. The role of the critic was dual: he expressed his individual opinion while also representing the voice of the public in the face of elites. In France, where art criticism had been periodically censored under the Ancien Régime, such writing became increasingly socially engaged, with political commentary sliding into art criticism in the Napoleonic era.

As in Paris, by the mid-nineteenth century British elites had become more interested in the influence of the visual arts over the public at large. The landmark 1835-1836 parliamentary Select Committee on the State of Arts and Manufactures grew out of a growing government patronage of the arts. The committee aimed to harness the visual arts to refine the moral and intellectual capabilities of Britain’s workingmen. To this end, it advocated for increased verbal instruction in art education, demonstrating a public need for critics, who could serve as teachers

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12 Houston, 25.
13 Houston, 28.
14 Houston, 30-33.
16 Kanwit, 14.
of good taste.\textsuperscript{17} William Hazlitt (1778-1830), Ruskin’s predecessor of the romantic generation, likewise believed that art served a purpose to better mankind.\textsuperscript{18} Ruskin inherited this line of thought, which would remain central to his work. In his writings, he instructed his audience to consider the arts as tied to the nation’s prosperity.\textsuperscript{19} Employing rhetorical styles from sermons and romantic poetry familiar to Victorian readers, he became, in the words of George Landow, a “secular prophet” for the British public.\textsuperscript{20} The arts were his own way of finding meaning, so much so that in \textit{Fors Clavigera} he described his critical and spiritual developments as intertwined.\textsuperscript{21} His legacy would be a greater public understanding of the sociocultural significance of art.\textsuperscript{22}

Baudelaire was also heir to an intellectual inheritance, and traces of Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Stendhal (1783-1842) are visible in his writings.\textsuperscript{23} Still, he succeeded in forging a unique place in critical discourse. Unlike his friend and predecessor Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), the established voice of the 1830s, Baudelaire aimed to uncover what an artwork accomplishes rather than lavishing on mere description.\textsuperscript{24} In his \textit{Salon de 1846}, Baudelaire expressed his early ideas of what a critic should be: “[...] la critique doit être partiale, passionnée, politique, c’est-à-dire faite à un point de vue exclusif, mais au point de vue qui ouvre le plus d’horizons.”\textsuperscript{25} This idea of a singular critical vision, yet one which is expansive, imaginative, and which reveals new possibilities, is key to understanding the critical perspective of not only Baudelaire, but Ruskin as well. Both critics took on an authoritative creative role in their writing equal to that of the artist.

\textsuperscript{17} Kanwit, 12. \\
\textsuperscript{18} Kerr Houston, \textit{An Introduction to Art Criticism}, 36. \\
\textsuperscript{19} George P. Landow, “How to Read Ruskin,” 59. \\
\textsuperscript{20} Landow, 52. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Kerr Houston, \textit{An Introduction to Art Criticism}, 40. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Houston, 41. \\
\textsuperscript{24} Houston. \\
\textsuperscript{25} “[...] the critic must be partial, passionate, political, that is to say of an exclusive point of view, but the point of view which opens the most horizons.” Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1846,” 877.
Baudelaire described the critic as originating from “les entrailles” of art. While this turn of phrase is gleefully macabre, and thus distinctly Baudelairean, it conveys the image not only of the grotesque but also of a kind of birth. This issue of birth was one which preoccupied Baudelaire, which I return to in the final chapter. The metaphor of the critic born from art perhaps accurately conveys not only Ruskin’s and Baudelaire’s passion for visual culture, but also their fascination with womanhood. Both critics were what could be thought of as almost-artists: while neither exhibited professionally, Baudelaire left behind several cunning sketches, and Ruskin was a talented watercolorist. In writing about art, they could express new ideas about the world at large through a medium in which they had some authority, but without being too self-referential. The art critic was an “expert,” but he also existed outside the direct framework of the arts, and this distance created safety. Likewise, for Ruskin and Baudelaire the woman was a figure who was at once familiar—in this case, the literal mother—and at the same time entirely separate from themselves. In projecting their fears, ideals, and aspirations onto her, both critics could explore ideas which were deeply personal without directly engaging with their own identities. Discussing femininity could be a roundabout way of addressing masculinity. More than that, both women and art were devices in the realization of a modern world.

As stated previously, modernity loomed large for Ruskin and Baudelaire, both as a present reality and as a future possibility. Like his predecessor Stendhal, Baudelaire urged artists to create in a way which reflected the contemporary world. Ruskin’s own advice to artists is quite similar, that each should be “so much of a human creature so as to care about the heart and history of fellow-creatures, and to take so much concern with the facts of human life going on around you as shall make your art in some sort compassionate, exhortant, or communicative [...]” In thus directing artists, Ruskin and Baudelaire communicated a desire not only to engage with the modern world, but to shape it in their own vision. Both men communicated this vision of an ideal world through representations of women in the artworks they wrote on, whether they be the

27 Kerr Houston, An Introduction to Art Criticism, 41.
fashionable demi-mondaines of Constantin Guys (1802-1892) or the fallen women of Pre-Raphaelite painting. Both inspired by and an influence on the artists of their milieux, Ruskin and Baudelaire used the visual arts to richly furnish interior worlds of their own making. Depictions of femininity and passionate discourse on the nature of womanhood played a key role in both of their visions.

In the sense that these are deeply personal constructions, neither Ruskin nor Baudelaire can be taken as wholly representative of nineteenth-century attitudes towards gender. Rather, their writings may be seen as reflective of and reactive against the existing conceptions of their era. Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites were considered somewhat eccentric by their contemporaries, even if they later came to be considered as emblematic of the Victorian age.29 Certainly Ruskin viewed women as capable of much greater social responsibility than many men of the era saw them as worthy of. Baudelaire, for his part, tended to draw attention to issues which many of his fellow Parisiens would have preferred to have ignored, such as the rampant prostitution of the Second Empire. In this, he was accompanied by much of the avant-garde. Both men, moreover, built a reputation for the new and singular quality of their vision–Victor Hugo remarked that Baudelaire contributed to poetry “un frisson nouveau.”30 Although they were influenced by the social codes of their day, Ruskin and Baudelaire rarely adhered to them. However, as members of the artistic vanguard, they were particularly attuned to the problems which plagued mid-nineteenth century society. In his response to societal crises, Ruskin’s vision is a more collaborative one, as he worked with and was impacted by feminist thinkers.31 Nevertheless, his perspective on femininity is essentially as individualistic as Baudelaire’s, insomuch as both are a search for meaning.

Defining the Feminine

I chose the title “Defining the Feminine” because it most accurately expresses the many things Ruskin and Baudelaire do when they write about women. They discuss what a woman should be, and what she shouldn’t be, what makes her good or bad, desirable or grotesque. Among these disparate thoughts, the central urge is to define, to lay out in clear terms what exactly a woman is, particularly a modern woman. Through this subject of definition, I have identified three themes for which both critics have much to say: the natural woman, the woman of the industrial market, and the monstrous woman. Each occupies a chapter of the text. My intention is not to provide an all-encompassing view of Ruskin and Baudelaire on gender—in Ruskin’s case, this has already been well examined. Rather, I hope to demonstrate how womanhood became such a fraught issue in the nineteenth-century masculine imagination, how its representation in the arts enabled Ruskin, Baudelaire, and their peers to discuss sensitive topics, and what Ruskin and Baudelaire’s convergences—and disagreements—on these issues reveal about their aspirations for the modern world.

In limiting my scope to three themes, I have regrettfully chosen to lay aside several areas of both men’s biographies. Ruskin, for example, was a great patron and advocate of female artists, admitting in his later years, “For a long time I used to say [...] that, except in a graceful and minor way, women could not paint or draw. I am beginning, lately, to bow myself to the much more delightful conviction that nobody else can.”32 His sponsorship of Elizabeth Siddal (1829-1862), for example, was at least equal to his interest in her partner Dante Gabriel Rossetti.33 While this work is certainly an essential aspect of Ruskin’s “stance” on gender, I have chosen to omit it from this text for a number of reasons. First, because it has already been well-documented, and secondly, because Baudelaire did not have parallel relationships with female artists, and I wish to focus on areas of shared interest between the two. However, my primary motive for omitting female artists is that this is a text about imagined femininity, how narratives of womanhood were formed in the masculine mind. While female artists are for the most part absent, I do try to bridge the distance between the real lives of the female models Ruskin and Baudelaire knew and their representation on canvas.

32 John Ruskin, quoted in Dinah Birch, “‘What Teachers Do You Give Your Girls?’: Ruskin and Women’s Education,” in Ruskin and Gender, ed. Dinah Birch and Francis O’Gorman, 125.
The secondary challenge I encountered was the very fact that Ruskin and Baudelaire lived among women of greatly different means. Baudelaire’s intellectual circle was primarily male. Choosing to forego a bourgeois marriage, he instead spent much of his life with his mistress Jeanne Duval (1820-1862), a biracial actress of humble origins. The women who populate the paintings and drawings of his artistic milieux are often courtesans and prostitutes, although there were exceptions, such as Édouard Manet’s model Victorine Meurent (1844-1927), who was herself an artist. To the contrary, the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood were generally less likely than their French counterparts to enlist an actual prostitute as a model, even if the subject was a fallen woman. Several of their working-class models, such as Annie Miller (1835-1925), succeeded in imitating bourgeois airs so well as to make advantageous marriages. Unlike Baudelaire, Ruskin wrote explicitly for women, although he himself admitted that his audience was those of the upper-middle class only. In this sense, Ruskin’s work for women is highly restricted, and excludes poor women and women of color. This compartmentalization is interesting, given that Ruskin’s writing usually crosses genres and defies classification. When he does address race, he treats it distinctly from gender, and in a manner surprising in its bitterness and brutality. In contrast, Baudelaire’s perspective on femininity is often deeply entangled with his exploration of black and Indian identity.

Female friendships were a fulfilling aspect of Ruskin’s life, not only with artists such as Siddal but with intellectuals and activists, such as the educator Margaret Bell (n.d.), and he donated generously to women’s education as well. He was particularly concerned with the welfare of girls, answering hundreds of letters from young fans. It is perhaps telling that in the greatest romantic encounters of his life, his unconsummated marriage to Effie Gray (1828-1897) and his obsession with his student Rose La Touche (1848-1875), the subjects of his affections

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were young, beautiful, and precocious.\textsuperscript{40} Still, most women who knew Ruskin would have remembered him fondly as a friend and supporter, one who declared “No girl should commit suicide of her mind—any more than of her body—for the sake of others, she should develop every faculty she possesses and then use it for the general good.”\textsuperscript{41} His many friendships with women moreover seem to have been reciprocal; he wrote in \textit{Sesame and Lilies} that “ […] no man ever lived a right life that had not been chastened by a woman’s love, strengthened by her courage, and guided by her discretion.”\textsuperscript{42}

Baudelaire’s position on gender is still more complex. It would perhaps be easy to be dismiss his ideas entirely: his notebooks contain jottings such as “La femme ne sait pas séparer l’âme du corps. Elle est simpliste, comme les animaux.”\textsuperscript{43} One particularly baffling note reads simply, “De la nécessité de battre les femmes.”\textsuperscript{44} Still, these same journals reveal a tender concern for the welfare of his mistress and mother, and plans to provide for them.\textsuperscript{45} Writing out his prayers by hand, Baudelaire entreated God to watch over his mother (while also asking intercession from the soul of Edgar Allen Poe).\textsuperscript{46} Nor is Baudelaire’s opinion on female intelligence wholly evident. He criticized men who disliked having a simpleminded mistress, arguing that “la bêtise est souvent l’ornement de la beauté.”\textsuperscript{47} However, in his treatise on the life of Eugène Delacroix, Baudelaire described a rare disagreement with his hero. Delacroix had laughed at Baudelaire’s assertion that women possessed the psychological depth to be melancholy and in fact “souvent montré d’ardentes vertus.”\textsuperscript{48} From this statement, Baudelaire at least seems to have identified a kind of emotional intelligence in the women he knew, even if he cared little for their intellectual abilities.


\textsuperscript{41} Dinah Birch, “What Teachers Do You Give Your Girls?,” 125.

\textsuperscript{42} John Ruskin in \textit{Sesame and Lilies by John Ruskin}, ed. Deborah Epstein Nord, 22.

\textsuperscript{43} “Woman doesn’t know how to separate the soul from the body. She is simple, like animals.”


\textsuperscript{44} “On the necessity of beating women.”

Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Journaux Intimes}, 90.

\textsuperscript{45} Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Journaux Intimes}, 106-108.

\textsuperscript{46} Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Journaux Intimes}, 111-112.

\textsuperscript{47} “Stupidity is often the ornament of beauty.”

Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Journaux Intimes}, 123.

\textsuperscript{48} “Often demonstrated an ardent morality.”

Of course, this attitude is still far afield of Ruskin’s deeply-held belief in the potential of women’s education. Still, despite their contradictory perspectives and social circles, Ruskin and Baudelaire nonetheless orbited the same questions about womanhood, even if they approached them from vastly different angles. This text centers on three areas of the search to define femininity where the two critics' worlds intersect, sometimes in surprising ways. Each chapter examines its particular theme through the writings of Ruskin and Baudelaire (both on art and other subjects) as well as a number of works by artists whom they personally knew and worked closely with. For Baudelaire, these artists include Eugène Delacroix, Édouard Manet, and Constantin Guys; for Ruskin, Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), among others. The written works of Baudelaire treated are foremost his three Salon reviews, his review of the Universal Exhibition of 1855, his treatise on modern painting, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne”, the poems of Les Fleurs du mal, and his personal journals. Ruskin left behind a larger body of work, including his early five-volume work Modern Painters, a variety of exhibition reviews, and his autobiography, Praeterita. He also wrote several treatises distinctly on gender, such as Sesame and Lilies, on male and female duties, The Ethics of the Dust, a series of lectures for schoolgirls, and The Queen of the Air, a musing on Athena. The letters of both men are also considered. These varied sources allow a closer look at the many ways in which questions of womanhood factored into their lives.

The first chapter, “Woman: Truth to Nature,” discusses the concept of the “natural woman.” Both Ruskin and Baudelaire repeatedly described women as “natural” or akin to nature in their essential characteristics.\(^{49}\) For Ruskin, this innate quality was akin to goodness, for Baudelaire it verged on the degenerate. Interestingly, this difference of opinion is mirrored in their contrasting views on painting from nature. In his treatise on landscape painting, Modern Painters, and through his support of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Ruskin advocated for a new school of art based in careful study of the natural world.\(^{50}\) Baudelaire, meanwhile,

\(^{49}\) For Ruskin, see: Lindsay Smith, “The Foxglove and the Rose: Ruskin’s Involute of Childhood,” in Ruskin and Gender, ed. Dinah Birch and Francis O’Gorman, 48-49.
For Baudelaire, see: Charles Baudelaire, Journaux Intimes, 48.
\(^{50}\) John Ruskin, Modern Painters, Volume 1 (Boston: Estes, 1894), 423.
For Pre-Raphaelites, see: John Ruskin, Pre-Raphaelitism (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1851), v.
consistently valued masculine inventiveness and ingenuity over imitation of nature. The chapter further considers how Ruskin and Baudelaire presented their own masculinity, and how this relates to the “unnatural.”

“Woman and the Modern Market” explores the consequences of an increasingly industrial and urban world on the discourse of femininity, particularly on the subject of prostitution. Painters in both Britain and France turned to the sex trade as subject, its representation shifting from romanticized to realist. Baudelaire, despite his insistence on modernity, appears to have preferred a romanticized vision of prostitution, while his friend Manet pushed to destabilize his fantasy. Ruskin likewise found himself at odds with his protégé, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose sentimentalized images failed to meet the critic’s moral standards. Through this fear of moral dissipation, the issue of prostitution can be viewed in relation to that of female consumers in the new industrial marketplace.

The final chapter is entitled “Mothers and Monsters.” It returns to the theme of the unnatural and examines the motif of predatory, monstrous women across Ruskin and Baudelaire, with particular regard to issues of women’s reproductive health. The legacy of the animalistic, villainous women is traced from Les Fleurs du mal to the later prints of Edgar Degas (1834-1917). Throughout, female sexuality is posed as a threat, and the issue of monstrosity repeats in Baudelaire’s unusual remarks on abortion. Anxieties surrounding women and reproduction are further explored in the work of Ruskin and Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893). Ruskin’s solution to this tension approached a dissolution of gender and sexuality.

In The Ethics of the Dust, Ruskin explains that the Saxon word for weaver is the etymological root of the English word wife. He then remarks, somewhat snidely, “I hope the

53 For Manet, see: Hollis Clayson, Painted Love: Prostitution and French Art (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 2003), 144.
French will someday get a word for it, yet, instead of their dreadful ‘femme.’” Baudelaire, it can be imagined, would have had something to say to that. Yet despite its derisive tone, Ruskin’s comment gets more or less to the core of the issues discussed here. The French femme is representative of much of human history, where woman and wife are taken to be the same. Ruskin and Baudelaire, however, were never much interested in wives. The roles which women play in their world—courtesans, muses, heroines, and lost souls—are sometimes restrictive, sometimes expansive, but they always reveal new possibilities, what Baudelaire might call “le plus d’horizons.” Moreover, Ruskin’s own interest in etymology is indicative of the desire he shared with Baudelaire to understand, to find the word or the image which will adequately define the feminine. The following chapters, then, take on the role of the weaver, constructing from the disparate threads a shared vision of what for these cornerstones of modern art criticism it meant to be a woman.

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57 Ruskin, The Ethics of the Dust, 150.
Chapter I
Woman: Truth to Nature

“From his peculiar nature, he was utterly incapable of making a woman happy. He is quite unnatural.”
–Effie Gray, Lady Millais, of her first husband John Ruskin.58

For John Ruskin and Charles Baudelaire, art was so often defined by its relation to nature. Ruskin’s appeal to painters to render faithfully the natural world was taken up by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, while Baudelaire viewed imitation of the natural world with disdain, even as he encouraged artists to take inspiration from the contemporary city. This discourse on naturalness can likewise be found in both men’s writings on womanhood. Both critics describe the ideal state of art, and its relation to nature, as similar to the ideal state of being for a woman.

In this chapter, I first examine the question of “truth to nature” and how it intersects gender and visual culture. Ruskin insisted on the value of painting from nature, believing the presence of God in the natural world to be transferable through art.59 Baudelaire, meanwhile, drew a different, yet equally moralizing distinction between art based in the study of nature, and art drawn from the imagination. He wrote, “Le mal se fait sans effort, naturellement, par fatalité; le bien est toujours le produit d’un art.”60 Both men’s writings on naturalism in the arts are echoed in their discourse on the “Natural Woman,” exemplified in Sir John Everett Millais’ Ophelia and Édouard Manet’s Nana. How their beliefs translated to a larger context is discussed through portraits of Effie Gray and Jeanne Duval. The final section considers the implications of “naturalness” on masculinity, particularly in regards to how both critics represented themselves on the page and on canvas. While Ruskin and Baudelaire diverged on the value of naturalism,

60 “Evil occurs without effort, naturally, as if fated; good is always the product of art.” Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” in Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Y.G. Le Dantec and Claude Pichois, 1,183.
they both identified the ideal woman as a work of art. Moreover, both critics would find themselves crossing the “natural” division between masculine and feminine attributes.

In Her Natural State: Woman, Truth, and Painting

In 1843, the end of Volume I of *Modern Painters*, his first book, the young John Ruskin issued the edict which would define the early part of his career. He urged painters to “go to nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth.”61 Ruskin’s command would be most faithfully taken up by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, although their style initially developed without his direct influence. 62 The exactitude and attention to detail of Pre-Raphaelite painting, as well as its reliance on working from nature, led Ruskin to name the artists as his intellectual heirs.63 In a May 1851 letter to *The Times*, Ruskin came forward as the primary defender of the movement.64 For the critic, the young Pre-Raphaelites presented an opportunity to redirect British art in a direction which prioritized morality and honest representation and over which he could hold particular influence.

Continually, the question of “truth” reveals itself as paramount to Ruskin’s allegiance to the Pre-Raphaelites. Defining the movement on his own terms, he wrote, “Pre-Raphaelitism has but one priciple, that of absolute, uncompromising truth in all that it does, obtained by working everything, down to the most minute detail, from nature, and from nature only.”65 It is notable that this conception of all-important truth is always set in opposition against its foil, imitation, which perpetually threatens it.66 In a second letter to *The Times* in 1854, Ruskin made a point to

63 John Ruskin, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, v.
differentiate between a “true” Pre-Raphaelite painting and an imitator: “The true work represents all objects exactly as they would appear in Nature [...] The false work represents them with all their details, as if seen through a microscope.”\(^{67}\) This statement is perhaps more descriptive of Ruskin’s own watercolors, which never attempted the same degree of hyperrealism as Pre-Raphaelite paintings.\(^{68}\)

For Baudelaire, the relationship between art and nature is not quite as straightforward. In his review of the Salon of 1859, he criticized naturalism as an attack on the imagination.\(^{69}\) He wrote, “Chez nous le peintre naturel [...] est presque un monstre. Le goût exclusif du Vrai (si noble quand il est limité à ses véritables applications) opprime ici et étouffe le goût du Beau.”\(^{70}\) Rather, Nature should serve as an aid, “un vaste dictionnaire” without limiting the scope of an artist’s work.\(^{71}\) The dichotomic tension between truth and artifice becomes one of truth and beauty, although as will be discussed, for Baudelaire these amounted to much the same thing. In this respect too Baudelaire would have found himself completely opposed to his British counterpart. Ruskin claimed that truth to nature could indeed achieve beauty, “accepting the weaknesses, faults, and wrongnesses in all things that it sees, it so places and harmonizes them that they form a noble whole, which the imperfection of each several part is not only harmless, but absolutely essential [...]”\(^{72}\) Moreover, he cautioned artists not to rely heavily upon the “scarlet and gold” of imagination before they had learned to successfully work from nature.\(^{73}\) Interestingly, the colors he invokes are reminiscent of the French Romantic school, particularly the work of Eugène Delacroix, who Baudelaire cited in his argument for inventiveness over working from nature.\(^{74}\) This is not to say that Ruskin did not value imagination—he wrote that

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\(^{67}\) John Ruskin, *Letters to “The Times” on the Principal Pre-Raphaelite Pictures in the Exhibition of 1854 (1876)*, 4-5.

\(^{68}\) Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld et al, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design*, 88.

\(^{69}\) Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1859,” 1,036-1,037.

\(^{70}\) “In our society the natural painter [...] is almost a monster. The exclusive taste for Truth (so noble when it is limited to its proper applications) here oppresses and suffocates the taste for Beauty.” Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1859,” 1,033.

\(^{71}\) “a vast dictionary”


\(^{73}\) John Ruskin, *Modern Painters, Volume 1*, 423.

\(^{74}\) Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1846,” 891.
“the purest art is wholly imaginative”—but that he viewed imagination and nature’s inspiration as ideally working in harmony rather than opposition.75

Baudelaire’s disapproval of the “truth to nature” principle can perhaps be partially explained by his complicated relationship with the Realist school. Although Realists like Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) and Champfleury (1821-1889) shared his sphere, Baudelaire, like Gautier and many others, found the term “Realist” undescriptive and confusing.76 His short essay of 1855, “Puisque réalisme il y a”, was critical of both Courbet and Champfleury.77 Ironically, Baudelaire’s poetry collection Les Fleurs du mal would later be charged in court for the offensive quality of its realism.78 Regardless of Baudelaire’s arguable position within the Realist school, what is clear is that the question of truth to nature held significance for him which extended far beyond the page or canvas. In his review of the Salon of 1859, he wrote, “Les artistes qui veulent exprimer la nature, moins les sentiments qu’elle inspire, se soumettent à une opération bizarre qui consiste à tuer en eux l’homme pensant et sentant [...]”79 Baudelaire’s particular diction here, his metaphor of a fatal operation, suggests a kind of intellectual castration. In this context, manhood relies on inventiveness and human genius, which oppose themselves to nature. Tellingly, it was in Nature that he found the feminine.

Sir John Everett Millais’ Ophelia (Figure 1) is possibly the best example of the point of convergence between natural painting and natural womanhood. Completed between 1851 and 1852, the work displays the defining traits of early Pre-Raphaelitism as well as several principles of femininity which would later be developed by Ruskin. For the resting place of the drowned girl, Millais chose an innocuous point along the Hogsmill River in Surrey, painting the background first in the outdoors.80 The angle is somewhat strange, a closely cropped portion of underbrush with almost no sky, as if the viewer has stumbled upon Ophelia’s body in the marsh.

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75 George P. Landow, “Ruskin and Baudelaire on Art and Artist,” 298-299.
79 “The artists who want to express nature, less the feelings it inspires, submit themselves to a strange operation which consists of killing within them the thinking and feeling man [...]” Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1859,” 1,077.
80 Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld et al, Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design, 96.
The landscape is humble, populated by dying, crinkled leaves, yet made lush by the rich color and incredible depth and texture Millais brings to each element of plant life. The painstaking project of rendering this microcosm took six months to complete.\textsuperscript{81} The figure of Ophelia was added later in the studio, modelled by Elizabeth Siddal.\textsuperscript{82} A working-class girl enlisted as a model by the Pre-Raphaelites around 1849, Siddal would become an artist herself and the wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, with her drawings much admired by Ruskin.\textsuperscript{83} For \textit{Ophelia}, Siddal posed in a bathtub, famously remaining still and silent (and falling ill) when the heating lamps extinguished partway through.\textsuperscript{84} With her small, pale face and wet hair fanning around her, Siddal appears much younger, more vulnerable and unguarded than in other works for which she modelled. Ruskin’s father, John James Ruskin (1785-1864), wrote of the dying girl, “[…] there is a refinement in the whole figure […] In her most lovely countenance there is an Innocence disturbed by Insanity […]”\textsuperscript{85} Hauntingly, his remarks bear a marked similarity to how the Ruskin family would come to speak of his John Ruskin’s new wife, Effie Gray.\textsuperscript{86}

In his own criticism, Ruskin noted a harmony of nature throughout Millais’ grim masterpiece. In his \textit{Notes on the Principal Pictures of Millais}, he narrated the painting, “The poor mad maiden lies on the water […] She is singing some last senseless melody. The robin in the background sings too.”\textsuperscript{87} As her body is consumed by the water, Ophelia becomes one with Nature even in her own requiem. The brilliant blooms of her bouquet disperse around her now empty hands. Millais included a variety of flowers for symbolic value, many of which did not share the same growing season, the single breach in his faithfulness to Nature.\textsuperscript{88} The floral motif may have been of particular interest to Ruskin, who in his later years would increasingly draw comparisons between flowers and girlhood.\textsuperscript{89} In \textit{Sesame and Lilies}, his 1865 treatise on gendered responsibilities, he commented that while male character can be shaped and chiseled, “a girl

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\textsuperscript{81} Rachel Barnes, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelites and their World} (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998), 62.  
\textsuperscript{82} Jan Marsh, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood}, 31.  
\textsuperscript{83} Jan Marsh, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood}, 15-16, 74-75, 178.  
\textsuperscript{84} Marsh, 31.  
\textsuperscript{85} John James Ruskin, quoted in William Milbourne James, \textit{John Ruskin and Effie Gray; the Story of John Ruskin, Effie Gray and John Everett Millais, Told for the First Time in their Unpublished Letters} (New York: Scribner’s, 1947), 176.  
\textsuperscript{86} William Milbourne James, \textit{John Ruskin and Effie Gray}, 146-147.  
\textsuperscript{87} John Ruskin, \textit{Notes on Some of the Principal Pictures of Sir John Everett Millais}, 8.  
\textsuperscript{88} Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld et al, \textit{Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design}, 96.  
\textsuperscript{89} Lindsay Smith, “The Foxglove and the Rose: Ruskin's Involute of Childhood,” 48-49.
grows like a flower does” and cannot be so easily directed.\textsuperscript{90} He may have considered this untameable quality as responsible for Ophelia’s demise. In \textit{The Ethics of the Dust}, a text for schoolgirls published around the same time, the connection with Nature is made even more explicit. Ruskin instructed, “Girls should be like daisies; nice and white, with an edge of red, if you look close; making the ground bright wherever they are; knowing simply and quietly that they do it, and are meant to do it, and that it would be very wrong if they didn’t do it.”\textsuperscript{91} This conception of woman-as-flower was a common trope of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{92} The state of feminine it assumes—simple, natural, quiet, and bright—is entirely at odds with the ideal of femininity as Baudelaire described it.

It is difficult to imagine what Baudelaire may have thought of \textit{Ophelia} itself. Despite his affirmed prejudice against the natural world, he may not have despised the painting; he once called Millais “ce poète si minutieux [...].”\textsuperscript{93} Moreover, he is known to have liked a slightly later work by Millais, \textit{The Order of Release} (Figure 2).\textsuperscript{94} The painting, for which Effie Gray modelled, was completed before her unexpected separation from Ruskin and eventual remarriage to Millais (further discussed below).\textsuperscript{95} This common ground is a reminder that for all that Ruskin and Baudelaire often positioned themselves on opposing ideological poles, the reality was in some ways more complex.

On a preliminary level, Baudelaire would have found himself in agreement with Ruskin’s assertion of Woman’s naturalness, yet he did not rejoice in it. In his journals, he wrote, “La femme est \textit{naturelle}, c’est-à-dire abominable [...] toujours vulgaire.”\textsuperscript{96} Perhaps it was because man in Baudelaire’s eyes was \textit{unnatural} that he took such issue with Nature in all of her manifestations. A poem describing a feud with a lover repeats Ruskin’s trope of woman-as-flower: “Et le printemps et la verdure/ Ont tant humilié mon coeur,/ Que j’ai puni une

\textsuperscript{90} John Ruskin in \textit{Sesame and Lilies by John Ruskin}, ed. Deborah Epstein Nord, 83.
\textsuperscript{91} John Ruskin, \textit{The Ethics of the Dust}, 105.
\textsuperscript{92} Alain Corbin, \textit{Le Miasme et la jonquille} (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), 215.
\textsuperscript{93} “that so meticulous poet [...].” Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1859,” 1,026.
\textsuperscript{94} Rachel Barnes, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelites and their World}, 64.
\textsuperscript{95} Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld et al, \textit{Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design}, 64.
\textsuperscript{96} “Woman is \textit{natural}, that is to say abominable [...] always vulgar.” Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Journaux Intimes}, 48.
fleur/ L’insolence de la Nature.” Ruskin’s description of the daisy suggests that Woman’s natural state and her ideal state are relatively interchangeable: she should simply be what she is, and do a good job at being it. Baudelaire, however, draws a distinction between what Woman is and what she ought to be, or ought to pretend to be.

In “Le Peintre de la vie moderne” Baudelaire gives his own instructions to womankind. He writes, “La femme est bien dans son droit, et même elle accomplit une espèce de devoir en s’appliquant à paraître magique et surnaturelle; il faut qu’elle étonne, qu’elle charme; idole, elle doit se dorer pour être adorée.” That phrase, “magique et surnaturelle,” suggests a transcendence and superseding of Nature by the powers of the imagination which is echoed in Baudelaire’s art criticism. Moreover, the act of maquillage itself represents a kind of art-making, with the woman as both artist and art-object. In his treatise on Delacroix, Baudelaire noted that the artist likewise shared a conception of woman-as-art. After Baudelaire’s death, his great friend Édouard Manet would perhaps best represent this vision of ideal femininity in Nana (Figure 3).

Rejected from the 1877 Salon, Nana depicts the courtesan Henriette Hauser (dates unknown) in her underclothes, watched by a man while she applies her make-up. Standing before a small mirror, a powder puff in one hand and what appears to be lipstick in the other, Nana has the air of an artist before a canvas caught in the act of self-portraiture. In this respect, the arrangement is likely derivative of François Boucher’s (1703-1770) Portrait of Madame de Pompadour (Figure 4), which represents a woman in a similar act of self-image making. Hauser’s figure appears impossibly contorted, stretched to an unnatural angle by her silky corset.

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97 “And the spring and greenery/ So humiliated my heart,/ That I punished a flower/ The insolence of Nature.”
98 “Woman is well within her right, and even performs a kind of duty in applying make-up to appear magic and supernatural; it must be that she surprises, that she charms; an idol, she must adorn herself to be adored.”
Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” 1,184.
The effect is so dramatic that the corset seems almost a part of Hauser; it is difficult to imagine her without it. Manet himself claimed that “The satin corset may be the nude of our era.”\(^{103}\) The natural nude, then, finds itself displaced by an artificial imitator, which relies on man-made materials and human invention. That the waving, gilded edge of the sofa behind her mimics the curve of Hauser’s corseted body demonstrates to what a great degree she has become one with the decorative elements. The composition echoes Baudelaire’s poem “Un Fantome”: “Comme un beau cadre ajoute à la peinture [...] Ainsi bijoux, meubles, métaux, dorure,/ S’adaptaient juste à sa rare beauté.”\(^{104}\) Like the woman-as-flower, this metaphor of woman as art would repeat itself in nineteenth century discourse on gender.\(^{105}\)

Furthermore, the synthesis of Hauser herself with the materials which enhance her beauty is as if imagined by Baudelaire himself. He wrote, “Tout ce qui orne la femme, tout ce qui sert à illustrer sa beauté, fait partie d’elle-même [...]”\(^{106}\) Interestingly, it is only in adorning herself with the products of industry, the inventions of the “thinking and feeling man” that Woman comes into her beauty. By accepting these materials—silk, rice powder, rouge— as an inalienable aspect of her person, acting as the artistic genius of her own composition, Woman becomes both more feminine and increasingly masculine.

As for so many before them, fashion and dress served for Ruskin and Baudelaire as irreplaceable indicators of gender, of women and of different kinds of women. Baudelaire was particularly drawn to the fashion sketches of Constantin Guys, and portraits of his mistress Jeanne Duval reveal a similar, although much more individualistic, quality of chic. Ruskin, meanwhile, endeavored to shape female fashion according to his more naturalistic ideal. These efforts were particularly directed at his wife, Effie Gray, whom he ultimately failed to control.

Dressing the Part; the Wife, the Mistress, and La Mode

\(^{103}\) Justine de Young, “Fashion and Intimate Portraits,” 124.
\(^{104}\) “Just as a beautiful frame adds to a painting [...] So jewels, furnishings, metals, gildings,/ Suited well her uncommon beauty.” Charles Baudelaire, “Un Fantome” verses 29, 33-34 in Les Fleurs du mal, 61.
\(^{106}\) “All that adorns the woman, all that serves to illustrate her beauty, is a part of herself [...]” Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” 1,181 - 1,182.
“Le Peintre de la vie moderne” is primarily a tribute to a single artist, the watercolorist Constantin Guys. Baudelaire lauded Guys for his commitment to portraying contemporary Parisian life, particularly the women of the demi-monde who made the city a center of fashion. Baudelaire’s conflation of a woman and what she wore was perhaps not uncommon in this epoch. The writer Arsène Houssaye (1815-1896) commented that a woman could only be a Parisienne by birth or by dress, and that likewise “The Parisienne is not in fashion, she is fashion [...]” It is unsurprising, then, that Guy’s work resembles fashion plates of the era, which were noted by Baudelaire himself as worthy exemplars of illustrating contemporary life.

His drawing Two Ladies and a Gentleman at the Theatre (Figure 5) is one such example. The theatre in which the scene is set is sketchily defined, a graphite haze of bodies and gas lights. The two women are close in conversation, heads turned together in gossipy conspiration. Their faces are pretty, doll-like, but it is clear that Guys is far more interested in their clothes: the proper placement of a rosette or a bonnet’s bow, the exact drape of a shawl, become matters of absolute importance here and in others of his drawings. The title proves misleading, as the top-hatted man has been partially erased. Gazing eagerly at his companions, he is present only to admire. A midcentury plate from The London and Paris Ladies’ Magazine of Fashion (Figure 6) also presents a trio, this time entirely female. Their bodies and even the fabrics appear stiffer, lacking the movement and joyous intimacy of Guy’s drawing, but the full skirts and ribboned bonnets are treated with a similar level of care. The women are gathered around a bench as if in conversation, with a few trees indicating their location in a park. Just like in Guy’s drawing, however, the imagined outing and conversation are nothing but a ruse. Both images bring to mind a Baudelairean reflection on Woman: C’est plutôt une divinité [...] C’est une espèce d’idole, stupide peut-être, mais éblouissante, enchantresse [...]” These women are not here for a jaunt around the park or a matinée; they are present to be worshipped. Moreover, that they are clearly mannequins and clotheshorses, not portraits, perhaps added to their appeal. For Baudelaire, fashion served as an antidote against the displeasing naturalness of the body. To

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109 “She’s more like a divinity [...] She’s a species of idol, stupid perhaps, but brilliant, enchanting [...]” Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” 1,181.
more or less remove the body altogether may have been alluring, although it would not solve the problem of how to represent the women of his real life.

Of all the women who shaped Baudelaire’s conception of the feminine, Jeanne Duval had perhaps the greatest influence. The biracial daughter of a prostitute, Duval built a career as an actress and may have been the celebrity photographer Nadar’s mistress before meeting Baudelaire. Duval met Baudelaire around 1842, and the two embarked on a stormy relationship which would not be completely severed until nearly twenty years later. An undated ink and watercolor portrait by Guys, believed to be of Duval (Figure 7), suggests how she may have fit in the world of fashion. Like the women in Guy’s previous drawing, she appears to wear a low-cut evening gown, but she dons her tenue with a stately elegance lacking among the Two Ladies: there are no bows, no bonnet, no rosettes. Instead, Duval wears a distinctive cape, a suitable touch of drama for an actress, and simple, heavy jewels, her thick hair coiled behind her head. Nothing about this drawing could be confused with a fashion plate. The most interesting part of the picture is undoubtedly Duval herself: her heavy gaze, her proud chin, the rounded curve of her cheek. Moreover, she appears to be herself; more natural woman than painted idol. As an actress, Duval was surely well-versed in the arts of fashion and toilette, as they would have been among her primary tools of self-promotion. Baudelaire, almost certainly, was inspired by the sight of her. In his notes on the critic, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) wrote, “Baudelaire as littérateur. This is the only vantage point from which to discuss his relationship with Jeanne Duval. For him as littérateur, the hedonistic and hieratic nature of the prostitute’s existence came to life.” Yet to suggest that this is the “only” or the correct way to understand a twenty-year love affair misses a great deal. There is a significant difference between how Guys, so respected by Baudelaire, drew Duval and the light hand with which he rendered grisettes and other more ambiguous female figures, such as those of Two Ladies and a Gentleman. While the prostitute was undoubtedly a potent motif for Baudelaire, Duval for him likely represented something quite exceptional—womanhood itself.

Still, it is difficult to imagine that she considered fashion and cosmetics as he did, as a manner of effacing the despicableness of her natural body. Moreover, as a biracial woman in Paris, she would have likely encountered hateful rhetoric around naturalness in the stereotype of the savage. This perception of black women as closer to nature is visible in the work of self-declared scientists of the period, among them Baudelaire’s own great-uncle, the naturalist François le Vaillant. His 1790 travelogue, *Voyage dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique*, described not only African plant life but the people he encountered as well, including a lithograph of an exposed Khoikhoi woman. The text places African people within the domain of study of a “naturalist,” as if they are no different than the flora and fauna. This trope of natural bodies persisted also in Baudelaire’s poetry, particularly in regards to women of color. His early poem “À une malabaraise”, for example, juxtaposes an Indian woman’s beauty against the corseted (i.e. artificial) bodies of French women. Interestingly, this poem’s perspective is somewhat at odds with his later assertion of artifice as the height of beauty. Baudelaire’s many poems on Duval in *Les Fleurs du mal*, referred to as the Vénus Noire cycle, likewise associate blackness with the exotic. Whether Duval had enough agency to defend herself against her lover’s assertions about the state of her body is unknown.

Édouard Manet’s 1862 *Portrait of Baudelaire’s Mistress, Reclining* (Figure 8) demonstrates how Duval may have fashioned and viewed herself. She had suffered a stroke in 1860, and although Baudelaire continued to provide her financial support, their intimate relationship was over. Manet, possibly unaware of this fissure, may have been painting from a photograph of Duval. By selecting a half-length format for his drawing of Duval which differed from the urban settings he chose for sketches of young prostitutes, as well as rendering her as an individual rather than a type, Guys in his portrait of Duval reinforced her class identity and distinguished her from the lowest genre of women. Manet’s portrait furthers this

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115 Sharpley-Whiting, 63.
116 Sharpley-Whiting, 63.
118 ibid, 726-727.
121 Dolan, 615.
establishment of Duval’s reputation in several ways, first posing her in a similar manner to portraits of his wife Suzanne (1829-1906) and his sister-in-law Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), two established members of the bourgeoisie. A frail figure against the expanse of the room and the breadth of her skirts, Duval in this portrait is presumably older and in far more delicate health than in Guy’s drawing, as suggested by the dark circles around her eyes. Her illness, while unavoidable, may have impacted how others perceived her. As Jan Marsh writes of Elizabeth Siddal, whose sickly condition facilitated her transition from working girl to bourgeois wife: “illness was an unbeatable means of asserting ladylike status and of obtaining general sympathy [...]” Duval’s corporeality, her “abominable” body, is therefore perhaps an indicator of not just her state of health but of class identification as well, of the delicacy which in the Western world was expected of wealthy, and particularly white, women, but not of their black or working class counterparts. The clearest indication of class, however, belongs thoroughly to Baudelaire’s world of artificial adornments: the massive crinoline which anchors Duval’s thin figure to the furniture.

Full skirts had long been in fashion, and in the early 1850s this aesthetic was achieved with as many as five petticoats, one typically made of prickly horsehair. The invention of the lightweight steel crinoline in 1856 rendered this layering obsolete, and the crinoline would rule supreme for over ten years. While obviously physically restraining and uncomfortable, the crinoline also provided women an imposing size and a barrier between themselves and men. As a symbol of wealth and power, it was effectively employed in this way by Empress Eugénie (1826-1920), a habit noted by critics of her influence. By exaggerating the snowy expanse of Duval’s skirts, as wide as a mountainside, as frothy as a wave, Manet draws a parallel between his subject and the leading lady of France. However, the steely frame of the crinoline, here
rising in resistance against its flattened position on the sofa, makes sculpture out of women, a motif typical of Baudelaire.\textsuperscript{130} Possessed of an unworldly beauty, moored into stillness by the difficulty of moving, women like Duval risked seeming increasingly decorative even while using fashion to assert their agency. Baudelaire is perhaps exceptional in that he recognized the weight which sartorial choices held for women. His poem “Confession” is almost humorous, relating the tale of a lover who is surprised to learn what work it is to be a woman of fashion, an “idol” like those of which he spoke.\textsuperscript{131} The arduous nature of an elegant toilette is described thus: “Que c’est un dur métier que d’être belle femme,/ Et que c’est le travail banal [...]”\textsuperscript{132} The description of womanhood as a \textit{métier}, a trade, reinforces the performative aspect of ideal femininity in Baudelaire’s eyes. For whatever it is worth, Baudelaire recognizes that what he desires is a fantasy, and that celebrated women like Duval used fashion to perform in life just as they play acted on the stage. Ruskin, who also spoke of female sculpture, instead chased a veritable Galatea, a decision which would wreck devastating consequences.

In 1848, John Ruskin married a childhood friend, the young and spirited Euphemia Gray.\textsuperscript{133} Already a sober character despite his youth, Ruskin evidently feared his compatibility with his beautiful new wife, writing to a friend before the marriage, “I love Miss Gray very much and therefore cannot tell what to think of her, only this I know, that in many respects she is unfit to be my wife unless she also loved me exceedingly. She is surrounded by people who pay her attentions, and though I believe most of them inferior in some points to myself, far more calculated to catch a girl’s fancy.”\textsuperscript{134} The combined anxiety and pomposity expressed here would reveal themselves in many of Ruskin’s dealings with Effie Gray. A letter dating from their engagement expresses his desire to control her image, split between pride and covetousness:

“Our beauty is conspicuous without the slightest adornment–and the least \textit{over} dress would appear as if you \textit{wished} to draw all eyes to you [...] I have a great fancy that I shall ask you sometimes to put on your finest dresses when we are alone–and always your simplest when we

\textsuperscript{131} Rosemary Lloyd, \textit{Baudelaire’s World}, 102.
\textsuperscript{132} “It’s a tough trade being a beautiful woman,/ And it’s banal work [...]” Charles Baudelaire, “Confession,” verses 28-29 in \textit{Les Fleurs du mal}, 70.
\textsuperscript{133} Dinah Birch, “Ruskin, John.”
\textsuperscript{134} John Ruskin, quoted in William Milbourne James, \textit{John Ruskin and Effie Gray}, 45.
are going in public.” Here, fashion becomes more than a Baudelairean tool of female art-making. It is a manner of regulating beauty, and beyond that, of regulating virtue. That Ruskin subsequently apologized for the presumptuousness of his wish indicates that he realized his overstep. Nonetheless, issues of image-making and control would accelerate the deterioration of their brief marriage.

In 1851, Ruskin’s father commissioned Thomas Richmond (1802-1874) to paint a portrait of Effie Gray, posed in an evening gown on an imaginary terrace (Figure 9). Far too painterly to belong to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the painting is characterized by an overwhelming softness, from Gray’s diaphanous handkerchief and velvet jacket to the wispy clouds of dusk on the horizon. Her body is dominated by rounded, drooping teardrop shapes, like that of a wilting flower, which repeat in the set of her hair, the fall of her skirts, even the arch of her hand. Her face, small, delicate, and pink, could belong to one of Guy’s parisiennes. The rust-colored gown is earthy, naturalistic, yet clearly silk, and its simplicity is perhaps a testament to Ruskin’s bearing on his wife’s wardrobe. Gray wrote to her mother, “It is the most lovely piece of oil painting but much prettier than me. I look like a graceful Doll, but John and his father are delighted with it.” Her admission, “much prettier than me,” reveals the degree to which Ruskin’s insistence upon truth to nature may have been subject to flexibility. Effie Gray certainly felt that her features had been softened, rendered doll-like, and the romantic sky and the vines which creep so perfectly around the balustrade are far less real than she. For all of Ruskin’s talk of truth, the vision he loved of Effie Gray was not so different from a Baudelairean painted idol.

Later in life, Ruskin would become something of a self-appointed authority on girlhood, and published several tomes explicitly aimed at young bourgeois girls and those who raised them. The issue of appropriate dress is at multiple points the subject of serious consideration. In a behavior manual for young ladies, he preached, “Now mind you always dress charmingly; it is the first duty of a girl to be charming, and she cannot be charming if she is not charmingly dressed [...] And it is quite the first of first in the duties of girls in high position, nowadays, to set an example of beautiful dress without extravagance,—that is to say, without waste or unnecessary

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135 John Ruskin, quoted in William Milbourne James, John Ruskin and Effie Gray, 50-51.
136 John Ruskin, quoted in William Milbourne James, John Ruskin and Effie Gray, 50-51.
137 Jan Marsh, Peter Funnell et al, Pre-Raphaelite Sisters, 46.
splendor.” In *Sesame and Lilies*, Ruskin recommended that girls learn to make their own clothing: “dress yourselves beautifully—not finely, unless on occasion [...] Also, you are to dress as many other people as you can [...] until everybody is as beautifully dressed as birds.” The insistence upon being charming as a “first duty” seems frivolous, particularly from someone like Ruskin who invested heavily in women’s education. The second quotation, which frames dressmaking as a charitable project, is perhaps more revealing of his true purpose. For Ruskin, the visual arts would always hold a moral purpose which extended beyond the primarily aesthetic considerations of Baudelaire. In this light, a beautifully dressed woman, particularly one who brings beauty to those around her, could fulfill a divine mission not unlike that of a work of art.

Moreover, the edict of “beautiful dress without extravagance” is reminiscent of the dress reform brought forth by the Pre-Raphaelites. In the years following Gray’s portrait, fashionable women like Jeanne Duval would take to the crinoline, and later, in the 1870s, the bustle. Women of the Pre-Raphaelite and later Aesthetic Movement circles, meanwhile, pioneered loose-waisted, wide-sleeved gowns with dropped shoulder seams, and no corset or crinoline. The artificial silhouette enforced by steel and whalebone shapewear was replaced by a natural figure, an acceptance of the female body in its true form. Elizabeth Siddal and Jane Morris (1839-1914) were both painted by Rossetti in dresses they had designed themselves. An Aesthetic gown from the turn of the century (Figure 10) likewise employs a subdued color palette and simple silhouette not unlike that chosen by Effie Gray, as well as an embroidered floral motif. A garment such as this is a particularly telling artifact in that it demonstrates to what degree the ideas of critics like Ruskin were accepted by women and incorporated into their wardrobes. While Gray never dressed in the Pre-Raphaelite manner, throughout her life she gained a reputation for good taste. In her years with Ruskin, decisions on her wardrobe may

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140 Dinah Birch, “‘What Teachers Do You Give Your Girls?,’” 124.
141 Dinah Birch, "Ruskin, John."
143 Ashelford, 229.
have been a collaborative affair: while in Venice, she recounted the two of them purchasing antique lace for a dress together. Nonetheless, Ruskin evidently regarded his wife as clay to be molded. In *Sesame and Lilies*, he wrote “A highly bred and trained English, French, Austrian, or Italian gentleman (much more a lady), is a great production—a better production than most statues [...]” The concept of woman as sculpture here is almost Baudelairean, although Ruskin makes room for men as art while racializing this human art form as an exclusively European phenomenon. Still, the production of such masterpieces of humanity rests primarily with the male creator. Later in life, Ruskin would confess of Effie Gray, “I married her, thinking her so young and affectionate that I might influence her as I chose, and make of her just such a wife as I wanted.”

In 1854, Gray successfully sued for an annulment of the marriage. The charge was incurable impotency. In this respect, the question of what a woman should be, and of her naturalness, becomes inexplicably bound with the issue of masculine identity. While Ruskin’s portrait by Sir John Everett Millais projects a certain image of masculinity, he would be increasingly accused of unmanliness and even effeminacy. Baudelaire also found himself drawing closer to the feminine. His ideal of masculinity, the dandy, bears marked similarity to his ideal of womanhood. For both men, the gender binary proved more complex in life than on canvas.

Against Nature: Ruskin and the Feminine, Baudelaire and the Dandy

The unraveling of the Ruskins’ marriage had begun from the start, but its intensification is traditionally traced to an 1853 voyage to Scotland with John Everett Millais and his brother, undertaken with the aim of painting Ruskin’s portrait (Figure 11). The friendship with Millais had begun several years before, when Millais and William Holman Hunt wrote Ruskin a letter to

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146 Gere, 145.
thank him for his public support in *The Times.* Ruskin and Gray responded in person, arriving at Millais’ home in their carriage the next day. For his own portrait, again commissioned by his father, Ruskin chose a remote spot at the mouth of Glenfinlas, and insisted on the work being done outside despite difficult weather conditions. This demand is perhaps not unreasonable, considering the importance he placed on painting from nature and that much of his body of work at that time was focused on landscape painting. It is only natural that Ruskin would wish to be represented in the kind of environment which he considered essential to the development of the visual arts. Millais’ *Portrait of John Ruskin,* then, is somewhat unique in that it could stand alone as a landscape painting with the removal of Ruskin’s figure, quite unlike Richmond’s *Portrait of Effie Gray.* In Millais’ typical style, the rocky waterfall before which Ruskin stands is treated with great consideration. The rock surfaces contain an astounding variation of texture and tone, even reflecting the water below. The rushing falls are likewise a multitude of colors, shades of purple, green, blue, cream, and gray coming together to resemble perfectly the stream of whitewater rapids. Notably, flowers, and indeed much greenery, are absent from the scene. Ruskin may have also have simply preferred stone and water; certainly Mont Blanc seems to have been his favorite of the many landscapes in which he travelled. The falls, moreover, suggest an energy and vitality which Millais and Ruskin may have considered particularly masculine. Against this dynamic force, Ruskin’s restrained and contemplative figure makes a stark contrast. Walking stick in hand, he poses in *contrapposto,* as if pausing to admire his surroundings on a ramble through the woods.

During the project, Millais secretly formed an attachment to Effie Gray, who Ruskin by this stage treated with indifference and even outright cruelty. The source of the couple’s conflict, Ruskin’s continual refusal to consummate their marriage, had led to further discord. Ruskin’s exact reasons for estranging his wife are unknown, but Gray’s letters suggest that he had been surprised and disgusted by the sight of her naked form, possibly her pubic hair. In

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151 Rachel Barnes, *The Pre-Raphaelites and their World,* 58.
152 Barnes, 58.
153 Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld et al, *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design,* 100.
157 Effie Gray, quoted in William Milbourne James, *John Ruskin and Effie Gray,* 220.
this strange turn of events, it was his own wife’s naturalness, the state of being which Ruskin espoused as the source of the good and the divine, which he found, in Baudelaire’s words, “abominable.” Ironically, Baudelaire’s claimed disgust of women did not prevent him from indulging in intimate relationships. For her part, Effie Gray recognized the situation in which she found herself as going against nature. In 1854, after finally confessing the truth to parents, she begged them, “I entreat you to assist me to get released from the unnatural position in which I stand to him [...]”\textsuperscript{158} The successful annulment and her marriage to John Everett Millais the following year are a testament to Gray’s courage and determination under intense social and psychological pressure.\textsuperscript{159} Millais’ \textit{A Waterfall in Glenfinlas} (Figure 12) shows Effie seated by a stream, working on a piece of sewing. Positioned at the edge of the frame, her red cloth too bright against the muted landscape, she seems not quite a part of the natural world which surrounds her: not natural woman or idolized woman, just \textit{woman}. Still, the resolve of her face, her intense focus on the task at hand, suggest a willpower strong enough to rival any storm.

As Millais finished Ruskin’s portrait back in the studio during the final days of the Ruskins’ marriage, he grew increasingly frustrated with his patron, describing the process as “the most hateful task I have ever had to perform.”\textsuperscript{160} Of Ruskin himself, he asserted “I think his Inquisitorial practice of noting down everything which could forward an excuse for complaining against his own wife, is the most unmanly, and debased proceeding I ever heard of [...]”\textsuperscript{161} Again, Ruskin’s cruelty is significant here precisely because it is unnatural in going against the expectations of manhood. By contrast, as both an individual and an artist, Millais was admired for his quality of rugged masculinity.\textsuperscript{162} Andrew Lang (1844-1912) described the artist as “the strongest, manliest, and most certain in his aims, of all modern English painters.”\textsuperscript{163} For the rest of his life, Ruskin would face charges of effeminacy. While some were harsh, such a literary critic who called Ruskin “a mad governess,” others were kinder.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{158} Effie Gray, quoted in William Milbourne James, \textit{John Ruskin and Effie Gray}, 220.
\textsuperscript{159} Jan Marsh, Peter Funnell et al, \textit{Pre-Raphaelite Sisters}, 50.
\textsuperscript{160} Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld et al, \textit{Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian Art and Design}, 100.
\textsuperscript{161} John Everett Millais, quoted in William Milbourne James, \textit{John Ruskin and Effie Gray}, 209.
\textsuperscript{163} Funnell, 60.
\textsuperscript{164} Dinah Birch, “Ruskin’s Womanly Mind,” 111.
wrote, “In Mr. Ruskin himself, there is a certain feminine element that perhaps enables him to judge women with a finer delicacy and more accurate eye than belongs to most men; certainly with a graver sympathy and more chivalrous regard.” Ruskin would describe his childhood self as feminine, and he spurned many of the roles typical of Victorian masculinity, such as the capitalist and sportsman. Like Dawson, he seemed to believe that this quality imparted him with a particular warmth and kindness. In 1874’s Fors Clavigera, he complained that his humanitarian efforts and compassion had given him a reputation for “effeminate sentimentality.”

This logic reveals a conception of the masculine-feminine binary which is quite at odds with Millais’ assessment of Ruskin’s “unmanly” character. Ruskin’s statement implies an association with the feminine as good and compassionate, and therefore the masculine as cold and unfeeling. Yet it is precisely this aloof cruelty which Millais found “unmanly” in his patron—not effeminate, per se, but simply unnatural to a man. From this perspective, certain qualities, such as compassion, might be shared between men and women who behave in a “natural” way.

Interestingly, Ruskin seems to have shared Millais’ opinion at one time, even if he later somewhat contradicted himself in Fors Clavigera. In the final volume of Modern Painters, he insisted that gentlemen possessed a heightened sensitivity: “Hence it will follow that one of the probable signs of high-breeding in men generally, will be their kindness and mercifulness [..]”

In his own writing, Baudelaire would also discover men and women—at least in their ideal forms—to be far more alike than they immediately appeared.

Just as he was profoundly interested in women’s fashion, Baudelaire regarded his own wardrobe and the art of masculine dress as topics of great importance. Perhaps he saw in fashion a quality of masculine invention: Benjamin noted that “Fashion stands in opposition to the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world.” For the most part, Baudelaire would describe his sentiments toward manhood through the figure of the dandy, a leisurely, gentlemanly character who for many was encapsulated by Beau Brummell (1778-1840), an

166 Dinah Birch and Francis O’Gorman, ed., Ruskin and Gender, 2-4.
167 Dinah Birch, “Ruskin’s Womanly Mind,” 118.
168 John Ruskin, Modern Painters, Volume 5 (Boston: Estes, 1894), 263-264.
English man of fashion and would-be aristocrat.\textsuperscript{170} While always known for his elegant dress and manners, Baudelaire lived his period of greatest luxury from 1842-1844, when he had just come into his inheritance and was beginning to court Jeanne Duval.\textsuperscript{171} An acquaintance of this time recalled seeing the young writer in a black suit, embellished with fine white linens, polished boots, and pale pink gloves, his hair long and curling.\textsuperscript{172} An 1844 portrait of Baudelaire by Emile Deroy (1820-1846) (Figure 13) is consistent with this vision. A poor and sometimes lonely artist, Deroy died young, but in his life he and Baudelaire were intimate friends, suggesting that his portrayal can be trusted as relatively authentic.\textsuperscript{173} Bathed in warm light, Baudelaire wears a fitted black jacket, white linen poking out around the collars and cuffs. But it is above all his pose–torso curved, long, elegant fingers extended, his gaze thoughtful and direct, almost challenging–which most speaks to the dandy.

Like Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) before him, Baudelaire defined the dandy as a man of leisure rather than work.\textsuperscript{174} In “Le Peintre de la vie moderne”, he describes him thus: “L’homme riche, oisif, même blasé […] accoutumé dès sa jeunesse à l’obéissance des autres hommes, celui enfin qui n’a pas d’autre profession que l’élégance [...]”\textsuperscript{175} As he grew older, Baudelaire’s style of dress would become markedly less extravagant, and his evolving taste also figures in his definition of dandyism.\textsuperscript{176} He asserts, “Le dandyisme n’est même pas […] un goût immodéré de la toilette et de l’élégance matérielle. […] la perfection de la toilette consiste-t-elle dans la simplicité absolue, qui est, en effet, la meilleure manière de se distinguer.”\textsuperscript{177} The emphasis on simple but pleasing dress is quite like Ruskin’s instructions to young ladies. The

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{172}] Lynette C. Black, “Baudelaire as Dandy,” 186-187.
\item[\textsuperscript{174}] Ronda K. Garelick, “The Treatises of Dandyism,” 20-21.
\item[\textsuperscript{175}] “The rich, leisured, even jaded man […] accustomed since his youth to the obedience of other men, who in the end has no other profession but elegance [...]” Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” 1,177.
\item[\textsuperscript{176}] Lynette C. Black, “Baudelaire as Dandy,” 187.
\item[\textsuperscript{177}] “Dandyism is not [...] an immoderate taste for ablution and material elegance. [...] The perfect manner of dressing oneself consists in absolute simplicity, which is, in effect, the best manner to distinguish oneself.” Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” 1,178.
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dandy, while an ideal of masculinity, harbors a space which is in many ways shared with the ideal feminine as defined by both Ruskin and Baudelaire.

Baudelaire, curiously, described the dandy as being of an “undecided sex.”\textsuperscript{178} Of course, the “vulgar” natural state of the feminine is the opposite of the dandy’s refinement.\textsuperscript{179} The dandy is above all an original, the product of his own genius, while nature serves only to be imitated.\textsuperscript{180} However, in her ideal state, after the rituals of dress and \textit{maquillage}, the woman is not so easily differentiable from the dandy. Like a courtesan or a wealthy woman, the dandy’s lack of practical occupation makes him decorative in the manner of a work of art.\textsuperscript{181} Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) noted that women and dandies were alike in their dependence upon spectacle and public opinion.\textsuperscript{182} The same could be said of most masterpieces. The carefully mediated categories, the differences which were so painstakingly established, of man and woman, nature and art, collapse into one another.

Across Baudelaire and Ruskin, talking about gender is not always talking about gender. As he set out his personal philosophy in his criticisms and poems, Baudelaire established a polarity of nature and art, a way of expressing the tension between the way things really were and their ideal state of being. It was simple, perhaps, to establish the woman as the incarnation of the natural, because she was his opposite, and their contrast placed him closer to art and the ideal. Yet, as Baudelaire’s own writing reveals, idealized men and women shared a \textit{raison d’être} which made them surprisingly similar, and which made works of art of them both. Baudelaire’s discourse on womanhood is perhaps more about a particular way of living out his ideal, which could apply to anyone, and less about gender difference, despite its claims to the contrary.

Ruskin, meanwhile, who had divided and gendered social responsibilities in \textit{Sesame and Lilies}, found himself continually accused of going against nature as his masculinity was drawn into question. However, his treatment of women in that work, particularly his criticism of their insulated lives, can be read as a critique of his own privilege and social isolation.\textsuperscript{183} Moreover,
Ruskin’s ideal state, of communion with nature rather than a rejection of it, is ungendered, belonging equally to the dying *Ophelia* and to his own self-portrait. For both Ruskin and Baudelaire, femininity was a subject of fascination, a mystery to be defined. But it was also a safe space to project and test ideas about the ideal state of being. When Ruskin and Baudelaire write about women, they are also speaking about themselves.
Chapter II

Woman and the Modern Market

“Lazy laughing languid Jenny,
Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea [...]”
– Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “Jenny”

Prostitution was no invention of the nineteenth century. Yet what was new, and perhaps to many unexpected, was the way in which the modernization of the industrial sphere was mirrored in the sex trade. The urbanization which took hold of Europe had a particularly strong effect in London and Paris, where masses of unemployed rural women and girls settled to look for work, only to enter prostitution by necessity or force. That this influx to the sex market caused significant social anxiety is evident in the increasing popularity of prostitution as a literary and artistic motif in the latter half of the century.

To understand this phenomenon quantitatively is difficult. In the 1856 Parisian census, only 0.16% of the population reported their occupation as that of a “fille publique.” That there were countless others is almost certain. In 1857 in London, meanwhile, a conservative estimate puts the figure at 8,600 working prostitutes. Against the 1861 census, this is a mere 0.3% of the Inner London population. While these figures perhaps do not justify Victorian hysteria surrounding prostitution, their indeterminancy and evasiveness do in part explain the cause of

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186 Clayson, xviii, 2.
189 Jan Marsh, The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood, 144.
that hysteria; the fear of the shifting unknown.\textsuperscript{190} Dr. William Acton (1813-1875), a proponent of prostitution reform, remarked in the \textit{British Medical Journal} that many Victorians were so afraid of prostitution’s evils that they hesistated to even pursue reform, an attitude he compared to children frightened of “bogies in the cupboard [...]”\textsuperscript{191}

This anxiety of numbers is juxtaposed against an industrial age dependent on rising figures: of commodities, bought, sold, and traded, identical goods shipped off the factory line. The prostitute herself was a commodity unlike any other. As labor, object, and seller of a good which could be continually resold, she distorted the laws of economics.\textsuperscript{192} Concurrently, with increased industrial production came decreased prices, the first department stores, and commodity culture. Walter Benjamin remarked that, “In big-city prostitution, the woman herself becomes a mass-produced article.”\textsuperscript{193} Meanwhile, women on the opposite end of the social spectrum found themselves not goods to be sold, but rather conspicuous consumers whose lives were increasingly taken up with the act of purchase.\textsuperscript{194}

For both Ruskin and Baudelaire, the idea of modernity is in many ways concerned with how the evolving economy changed social relations and in particular gendered relations. It was also an issue which impassioned the artists of their circles, such as Édouard Manet, Dante Rossetti, and William Holman Hunt, and one which caused friction. More than that, as topics of contemporary prostitution increasingly became artistic subjects, they drew into question art’s social and moral responsibilities. The Pre-Raphaelites in particular charted a course which at first opposed the sentimentalized concubinage of Romanticism then eventually returned to it. Meanwhile, Ruskin and Manet resisted commoditization and argued for art with a social purpose. Manet would accomplish this with \textit{Olympia}, Ruskin through the social justice writings which dominated the latter part of his life.

This chapter begins with a consideration of Delacroix’s \textit{Death of Sardanapalus} and its pre-industrial, fantasized conception of prostitution. The artistic shift to contemporary

\textsuperscript{191} William Acton, "Editor's Letter Box: Public Prostitution,” \textit{The British Medical Journal}, January 30, 1858.
\textsuperscript{192} Ib. 99.
\textsuperscript{193} Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” in \textit{The Painter of Modern Life}, 146.
\textsuperscript{194} Hollis Clayson, \textit{Painted Love}, 58.
prostitution as subject is then discussed, in both the early, moralistic paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and Manet’s more realist *Olympia*, which destabilizes the romance of prostitution espoused by Delacroix and Baudelaire. The final section examines Ruskin’s concerns about the conspicuous pleasure-seeking and consumption of the modern world, made evident in his writings on James Tissot and the later work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

**Woman, Past and Present: Baudelaire and Delacroix**

Baudelaire’s name is so often associated with Manet and his *Olympia*. Yet for Baudelaire, before Manet, there was Eugène Delacroix, and his admiration for the great master proved to be one of the most lasting loves of his life. The two likely met through their mutual friend Fernand Boissard (1813-1866) at the Hôtel Pimodan, where Baudelaire lived for a time in the 1840s. Delacroix, and particularly his lushly violent masterpiece, *The Death of Sardanapalus* (Figure 14), represented for Baudelaire a certain conception of life and of Woman which peculiarly belonged to both the past and the quickly slipping present. Delacroix’s own consideration of the painting and Baudelaire’s treatment of it in his criticism reveal an understanding of the sex trade which is in some respects pre-industrial and completely pre-*Olympia*.

The subject is the suicide of an Assyrian king, described thus by Delacroix: “Sardanapalus gives the order […] to slit the throats of his women, his pages, and even his horses and favorite dogs, none of the objects that served his pleasure should survive him […]” If women according to Delacroix are objects, then, what kind of objects are they? The women of *The Death of Sardanapalus*, each rendered individual in her own singular writhing, agonizing pose, appear like jewels in a cluttered treasure chest. Yet it was also Delacroix who said, “A woman is always a woman, always basically like the next one […]” The flippancy of this remark seems far more typical of the “modern” late century and the culture of mass-production, reminiscent of racks of department store clothes.

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198 Eugène Delacroix, quoted in Simon Lee, *Delacroix*, 81.
The tension between the imagined past and the impending modern world is critical to the painting and Baudelaire’s relation to it. Delacroix’s canvas is an exhaustively cluttered, glittering mass of humans and animals, all pressed against the scarlet island of Sardanapalus’s bed, strangely set apart from the foggy, vaguely shifting background. Spatial boundaries are confused. It is a conception of space far afield from the strict linear perspective which orders Jacques-Louis David’s (1748-1825) somewhat similar painting *The Rape of the Sabine Women*. One could read this slightly nonlinear space as somewhat pre-modern.

This was perhaps Delacroix’s intention, particularly in consideration of his remark upon his visit to Morocco: “C’est beau! C’est comme au temps d’Homère. La femme dans le gynécée s’occupant de ses enfants, filant la laine ou brodant de merveilleux tissus. C’est la femme comme je la comprends.” Here, the Western past and the North African present are conflated, alongside the statement that this “kind” of woman is comprehensible where modern, Western woman is not. The female occupations Delacroix describes in Morocco—raising children, spinning wool—are the kinds of service women have traditionally performed without adequate compensation. The same can be said of the concubines of *Sardanapalus*, who are ostensibly his property. They are not rented or paid by the hour, they cannot take their services elsewhere, and whatever trinkets they receive in return are different from a monetary wage which can be exchanged for other goods. To be a pre-modern woman connotes a certain lack of economic liberty.

*The Death of Sardanapalus* clearly conveyed a certain nostalgic meaning for Baudelaire. Writing in 1861, he declared “*Le Sardanapale revu, c’est la jeunesse retrouvée.*” Moreover, he recognized that the painting’s feminine presence was consciously antiquated:

“des très-belles femmes, claires, lumineuses, roses […] Sardanapale lui-même était beau comme une femme. Généralement les femmes de Delacroix peuvent se diviser en deux classes: les unes, faciles à comprendre, souvent mythologiques, sont nécessairement belles […] riches, très-fortes, plantureuses, abondantes […] Quant aux autres […] plus souvent des femmes de

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199 “It is beautiful! It is like the time of Homer. The woman in her quarters caring for children, spinning wool or embroidering marvelous fabrics. It is woman as I understand her.” Eugène Delacroix, quoted in Armand Moss, *Baudelaire et Delacroix*, 112.

caprice, de tableaux de genre […] je les appellerais volontiers des femmes d’intimité […] elles portent dans les yeux un secret douloureux […]”

Like Delacroix himself, Baudelaire qualifies the “Ancient East” imagined women of Sardanapalus or contemporary Morocco as easy to understand. Yet Baudelaire believes the artist to be equally capable of modernity as antiquity, continuing to write, “M. Delacroix me paraît être l’artiste le mieux doué pour exprimer la femme moderne, surtout la femme moderne dans sa manifestation héroïque, dans le sens infernal ou divin. Ces femmes ont même la beauté physique moderne, l’air de rêverie, mais la gorge abondante […]” What Baudelaire seems to say is that the Modern Woman is a thinking woman, with an “air de rêverie,” and probably a woman of the real world too, to have lived a life which forced upon her a “secret douloureux.”

It is this emphasis on activity which in the Baudelairean mind separates the concubine of the past, with a knife against her lovely, abundant throat, from the woman of the present. Not enclosed in a king’s palace but rather free to wander city streets, she is as unknowable as her predecessor was comprehensible. Her occupation is a mystery. The chaos of Sardanapalus’s bedchamber is replaced by la foule of the street. For Baudelaire and Ruskin, the modern city, its economy, and woman’s role within it would prove challenging and exhilarating.

Dawning Realities: Holman Hunt in London

Given the popularity of prostitution as a literary and artistic subject, Ruskin and Baudelaire would have frequently encountered its representations. The Pre-Raphaelites, moreover, had a tendency to pull lower-class women into their inner circle, a habit which in Rossetti’s case widened his access to the sex trade. In the beginning, given the Brotherhood’s founding

201 “very beautiful women, fair, luminous, rosy […] Sardanapalus himself was beautiful like a woman. Generally the women of Delacroix can be divided into two classes: the first, easy to understand, often mythological, they are by necessity beautiful […] rich, quite-strong, voluptuous, abundant […] As for the others […] more often women of caprice, of genre paintings […] I would call them with pleasure women of intimacy […] they carry in their eyes a distressing secret […]”

202 “M. Delacroix seems to me the artist best endowed to express the modern woman, above all the modern woman in her heroic manifestation, monstrous or divine. These women have the same modern physical beauty, the air of reverie, but the abundant throat […]”

religiosity, interactions involving illicit sex were imaginary, as in William Holman Hunt’s *The Awakening Conscience* (Figure 15), in which a kept woman realizes her sin and returns to the moral path.\(^{204}\) While the painting depicts a woman dependent on sex for her livelihood, it ultimately fails to fully engage with the darker realities in the life of such a woman, holding a fearful distance somewhat emblematic of Hunt himself.

In Victorian London, most sex workers entered the trade in their late teens, typically moving onto a new occupation or domestic life by their mid-twenties.\(^{205}\) In 1857, 40% of the city’s prostitutes served luxury clientele, the social peers of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites.\(^{206}\) Unlike those in Continental Europe, British prostitutes tended to have more independence and were less likely to be under the control of a pimp.\(^{207}\) Likewise, with increased regulation the number of London brothels was in rapid decline, from 933 in 1841 to 410 in 1857.\(^{208}\) This suggests that some Londoners may have viewed prostitution as a series of unfortunate individual cases rather than an industrial trade, although this attitude perhaps shifted in the 1860s, when the Contagious Diseases Acts targeted prostitutes as distributors of infection.\(^{209}\) The former perspective is typical of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, where the fallen woman is more often a lost soul than an active agent of commerce.\(^{210}\) The term itself, “fallen woman” indicates a certain kind of sex worker, one who was perhaps born upper-class and has found herself a victim of seduction.\(^{211}\) Her situation was one of romantic origins rather than economic necessity, thus treated, it was considered more womanly.\(^{212}\)

Mistresses, or kept women, occupied a liminal zone in the social hierarchy. In the words of Alain Corbin, these women “lived on the frontiers of venal sex, since the union in which they lived with their lovers was often based on the bourgeois matrimonial model.”\(^{213}\) In London, a


\(^{206}\) Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, 144.


\(^{208}\) Walkowitz, 24.

\(^{209}\) Walkowitz, 1-2.

\(^{210}\) Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, 70.

\(^{211}\) Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 95.

\(^{212}\) Nead, 95-96.

kept woman might live in the neighborhood of St. John’s Wood in a so-called “love nest.”

The position was rife with financial and social instability. On the one hand, a prostitute might aspire to the greater security of being a kept woman, while an established mistress might hope to make a marriage. However, for some kept women, the precariousness of living outside respectable society might also facilitate a gradual transition into prostitution. Moreover, kept women risked becoming social outcasts on the same level as the women of the street. In his landmark 1857 treatise on prostitution reform, William Acton notes that “many forcible divines and moralists have maintained that all illicit intercourse is prostitution [...]” Acton maintains that the “‘kept woman’ (a repulsive term, for which I have in vain sought an English substitute)” is not necessarily a prostitute. Still, he makes a point of the difference between a woman with a single lover, and “kept women who are, as it were, in the business” and find new lovers to continually meet their financial needs. The latter is ever closer to becoming a common prostitute.

The kept woman of The Awakening Conscience therefore faces an uncertain future, although this is not evident in the painting. Hunt listed Emily’s story from David Copperfield as an inspiration, although he did not intend the painting to be a literal illustration. For the cluttered, gaudily furnished room, he rented a veritable “maison de convenance” in St. John’s Wood. The space is claustrophobic, a cacophony of printed carpet and walls, gilding and carved surfaces. There is a richness, almost a sensuousness, of color and texture: azur-and-gold wallpaper, a rug in rich magenta, a piano and sideboard which gleam with the freshness of wood polish. Everything speaks to modern taste and the comforts which can be bought, and the weight of the bourgeois money which rented this room seems to impose itself. In his “Letter to the Times” in defense of the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin wrote, “There is not a single object in all that room […] but it becomes tragical if rightly read.”

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215 Perkin, 223-224.
216 Alain Corbin, Women for Hire, 138-139.
218 Acton, 31,61.
219 Acton, 61.
The model herself, Annie Miller, was what one might call a not-quite-fallen-woman. An impoverished girl, she was discovered by Hunt, who claimed to have rescued her from the edge of ruin.222 Intrigued by Miller but nervous about marrying her, Hunt departed for Palestine, where he would paint *The Scapegoat*, after the completion of *The Awakening Conscience*.223 He paid for Miller to take etiquette lessons while he was away, and letters to Hunt from other Pre-Raphaelites she modelled for stress her lady-like decorum.224 John Everett Millais called her a “good little girl.”225

In *The Awakening Conscience*, Miller is in the act of rising from the lap of a genial young bourgeois in a velvet coat. Her hair loose, she wears a dressing gown or nightdress of some sort, a cashmere shawl looped around her waist, attire better suited for a boudoir than the bright sunny day which can be seen through the window reflected in the mirror. She is a woman of the interior. While the painting does not explicitly state their relation, the woman’s state of undress and her physical intimacy with the laughing gentleman leave little ambiguity. However, in this moment the mistress has spiritually surpassed her lover. Her rapturous face and bright eyes are fixed on the spring day outside the window, for she has quite literally seen the light. The device of the open window draws the Magdalenesque whore/redeemed woman dichotomy into one of commodified interior/divine nature as well.

When Hunt finally resolved upon a marriage, he attempted to collect and destroy images of Miller by other artists.226 This episode reveals the all-importance of class, even among socially conscious groups like the Pre-Raphaelites, as well as the tension and possessiveness surrounding women and trade. While a distinct profession from prostitution, modelling was not utterly dissimilar in that a woman could sell her physicality, many times to different men, all of whom might claim some ownership to it. Hunt may have felt uncomfortable with the parallel. Later on, jealously, alongside frustrations about Miller’s refusal to play the perfect lady of his fantasies, led Hunt to break the engagement.227 When she approached him for financial assistance, he told

222 Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood*, 60.
224 Marsh, 62-63.
225 Marsh, 62-63.
226 Marsh, 161.
her that she did “not know the value of money because she has never worked for it.” The quotation is striking not only because it is untrue, but because it levels a charge of laziness at Miller at a time when respectable women were not supposed to work for money. By insisting that Miller should have been working, or working harder, Hunt reinforces her lower-class position while defeminizing her. In the end, it was perhaps Miller who had the last laugh: she married rich and seems to have lived happily thereon.

For his part, Ruskin reacted favorably to Hunt’s picture of this “lost girl.” In his “Letter to the Times,” he narrated the painting’s action for the public: “The poor girl has been sitting singing with her seducer; some chance words of the song, ‘Oft in the stilly night’ have struck upon the numbed places of her heart; she has started up in agony [...].” It was, he concluded, a work prepared to “meet full in the front the moral evil of the age in which it is painted.”

*The Awakening Conscience* is among the more genteel representations of prostitution, uninvolved in the plight of poor sex workers, or the fate which might await its heroine after her revelation. Still, Ruskin’s remark reveals that despite the painting’s emphasis on the individual situation of a singular woman, he saw it as emblematic of and connected to the greater issues of sexual morality facing London. Hunt’s painting is a response to what Ruskin saw as a period of moral decrepitude, and it fulfills his vision of art which delivers truth. For Ruskin and for others, an artwork’s success would be judged on its ability to engage with problems facing contemporary society. What that engagement should look like would become a topic of fierce division.

**On the Market: Rossetti’s *Found***

Despite his fondness for Hunt, much of Ruskin’s patronage in the mid 1850s centered on Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whom he had met in 1854. The following year, Ruskin established an

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agreement to purchase a certain portion of Rossetti’s work per year in the style of an aristocratic patron.233 The relationship between the two men was often fraught with tension, as Ruskin tried to enforce his artistic vision upon Rossetti and Rossetti rebelled to assert his own independence. In a particularly critical letter of 1857, Ruskin wrote, “You are a conceited monkey, thinking your pictures right when I tell you positively they are wrong. What do you know about the matter, I should like to know?”234 Still, for a brief time the partnership was productive, and Rossetti’s unfinished picture *Found* (Figure 16) exemplifies their shared interest in art as an instrument of social justice.

*Found* depicts the story of a rural woman who fails to make her fortune in the city and turns to prostitution, only to be discovered by her former fiancé.235 In a sense, it could be conceived of as a kind of sequel to The Awakening Conscience, if the two were panels in the style of William Hogarth’s (1697-1764) A Harlot’s Progress. Hogarth’s series of six prints follows country girl Moll Hackabout, whose position as a mistress eventually leads to her fall to common prostitution and prison.236 Rossetti began sketches in 1853, then stopped because he feared *Found* too similar to The Awakening Conscience, which was already completed although Hunt had started it later.237 In its decades-long lifetime in the studio, *Found* would be reworked, commissioned by three separate patrons, but never finished.238 Ruskin evidently appreciated the work: in 1855 he wrote to Rossetti to borrow a sketch of *Found*, then referred to as “end of Blackfriars Bridge” in order to show his friend Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) something “with feeling in it.”239

*Found* is intriguing not only for what Ruskin rightly described as its “feeling,” but also for its expression of class difference and the economy on which this hinges. In his peasant smock, his calf on a cart ready to be taken to market, the countryman so clearly belongs to an old-fashioned agrarian economy which seems out of place in an industrial city. The fallen

233 Bristow, 145-146.
237 “Hogarth”.
238 “Hogarth”.

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woman appears hopelessly garish beside him, her clothes too brightly colored and a plume hanging off her silky bonnet, lips and fingernails painted. Her style of dress reflects that of contemporary prostitutes, who often imitated the more luxurious garments of their social superiors, and this was likely deliberate on Rossetti’s part. During a period of work on the painting in 1873, he wrote to his assistant Henry Treffry Dunn (1838-1899), “About clothes for Found which I shall be taking up, could you look in second-hand shops? The woman should wear something with a pinkish tinge I suppose, to balance the sky—also a mantle of some sort—pretty showy but seedyish.” The woman’s worn clothing is reminiscent of Baudelaire’s poem “À une Mendiante rousse,” albeit without the poet’s lascivious attitude towards the begging woman. Moreover, it is significant that her dress is evidently contemporary to the period. In this respect, Found contrasts starkly against John Roddam Spencer Stanhope’s (1829-1908) Thoughts of the Past (Figure 17), with which it shared a model, Fanny Cornforth. Stanhope also depicted a prostitute, but in a long, medieval-esque dressing gown which does not necessarily belong to the mid-nineteenth-century.

The emphasis on class imitation through dress further recalls Hogarth’s A Harlot’s Progress of 1732, the illustration of a country girl’s rise and fall in the London demi-monde. In the second print, although dressed in a lady’s fashionable gown, the country girl’s ungainly manner reveals her true social origin (Figure 18). The calf also draws to mind Hogarth’s first print, in which a wagonful of country girls arrives in the city, like so many cows to market (Figure 19). Rossetti’s calf seems to resist the ropes which bind it, appealing to the viewer for freedom from sale.

Found’s contemporary subject makes it profoundly different from much of Rossetti’s oeuvre, and although the painting held personal significance for him, he was unable to finish it. In 1879, he wrote to the work’s then-patron William Graham (1817-1885) that he wished it to

243 Wall text, Thoughts of the Past, Pre-Raphaelite Sisters, National Portrait Gallery, London.
245 Alicia Craig Faxon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 66.
refute “what is so often alleged against poetic painting such as I follow commonly to the best of my ability,—I mean the charge that a painter adopts the poetic style simply because he cannot deal with what is real and human. I should wish to show,—as such a picture as Found though small, must do, if I succeed with it—that my preference of the ideal does not depend on incapacity to deal with simple nature.”

For Rossetti, as for Ruskin, to be a serious painter meant to be able to faithfully represent the events of actual human lives. Interestingly, this is a charge not unlike Baudelaire’s command to paint the modern world. However, given the French critic’s equivocal response to a sister-work of Found, Olympia, it is difficult to imagine how he might have taken Rossetti’s much-belabored masterpiece. In 1873, Rossetti declared to Ford Madox Brown, “I have often said that to be an artist is just the same thing as to be a whore, as far as dependence on the whims and fancies of individuals is concerned.”

Years before, Baudelaire had scratched in his own notebook, “Qu’est-ce que l’art? La prostitution.” These appear at first glance identical sentiments. Yet further analysis reveals a discordance, conflicted understandings of the consequences of that word, prostitution. In Olympia, Manet would ask what it really meant to sell oneself, a question for which Baudelaire may have found himself unprepared.

Olympia: Qu’est-ce que la prostitution?

When Baudelaire met Édouard Manet in the 1850s, the Parisian sex trade was in a period of prosperous transition. The advent of Haussmanization would shift some historic centers of prostitution, such as those in central Paris around the Cité and Ile Saint-Louis, and the area where the extended Rue de Rivoli now sits. The hubs around the Palais-Royal and Hôtel de Ville remained, but new brothels sprung up near the Madeleine, Opéra, and Bourse, demonstrating a relation between prostitution and bourgeois commercial areas. Brothels were dominated by class difference, existing in a hierarchy which ranged from the elite maison de luxe, to the

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249 Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 56.
250 Corbin, 56.
humble *maison de quartier*, to the squalor of the *maison d'abattage*.\textsuperscript{251} The hygienist Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelelet (1790-1836) described this phenomenon as somewhat fated, expressing his belief that prostitutes took on the characteristics of the social class they served.\textsuperscript{252} With gentrification taking hold of Paris, luxury-market prostitution expanded at the expense of lower sectors.\textsuperscript{253} After mid-century, economic factors partially tied to Haussmannization would lead to a decline in brothels.\textsuperscript{254} However, prostitution continued to thrive in other ways: the year 1878 estimated nearly four thousand prostitutes working in the city.\textsuperscript{255} As analyzed by Walter Benjamin, the figure of the prostitute took on life in Baudelaire’s imagination as a representation of the increasingly commodified nature of the modern world.\textsuperscript{256}

Completed in 1863, Manet’s *Olympia* (Figure 20) was exhibited to a tempestuous reception at the Salon of 1865.\textsuperscript{257} The painting is paradoxical: monumental and traditional in its arrangement, one model’s pose reminiscent of the *Venus of Urbino*, yet radical in its portrayal of working-class Paris.\textsuperscript{258} Victorine Meurent, one of Manet’s favored models and herself a painter, poses on a divan, one hand clamped defiantly over her genitals.\textsuperscript{259} Where the Venus’ figure was rounded, Meurent’s appears hard and flat, a body which is accustomed to work rather than leisure. The name itself, *Olympia*, was one commonly taken by prostitutes in luxury brothels.\textsuperscript{260} Interestingly, contemporary writers noticed that *Olympia* has a specific class identity, making up stories in which they gave her a working-class neighborhood or a history of impoverished labor.\textsuperscript{261} The painting’s demonstration of class is indeed part of what makes it so singular.\textsuperscript{262}

While Meurent wears no clothes, she is not exactly nude, instead adorned with jewels and silky slippers. Curiously, the gold armband she wears is nearly identical to those of

\begin{itemize}
  \item[251] Corbin, 58-59.
  \item[252] Corbin, 6.
  \item[254] Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 115-117.
  \item[255] Corbin, 38.
  \item[256] Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love*, 7-8.
  \item[258] Grigsby, 438.
  \item[262] Clark, 146.
\end{itemize}
Sardanapalus’ concubines. Yet without the grounding figure of the doomed king, the presumption is that this woman has worked for these jewels, perhaps for many men. The shawl she lounges upon, perhaps cashmere, is not unlike those which adorn the models of The Awakening Conscience and Found. It would have been immediately recognizable to contemporary viewers as a much-envied symbol of fashion and an object of potentially immense monetary and social value.\textsuperscript{263} Originally a bourgeois bridal gift, as shawls became mass-produced in France they lost part of their power to differentiate between social classes.\textsuperscript{264} Therese Dolan writes that the shawl in Manet’s work serves as a “price tag” to the prostitute’s being.\textsuperscript{265} Insisting upon Olympia’s unequivocal participation in the urban economy, Manet constructs what Hollis Clayson describes as “an imagery of modernity out of the eroticized, commodified working-class woman.”\textsuperscript{266}

Behind the bed, the second model, a woman identified only as Laure (dates unknown), poses as the courtesan’s maid, offering a bunch of flowers likely from an admirer or client.\textsuperscript{267} It may have been Baudelaire who made the introduction between artist and model.\textsuperscript{268} Like several Impressionists, Baudelaire and Manet lived in the north of Paris, which was also home to many black Parisians.\textsuperscript{269} Laure’s modest gown makes a bold contrast against Meurent’s nudity. Yet despite their differences, critics who viewed the painting often converged the two women, for example applying racist language to the white Meurent.\textsuperscript{270} A prostitute and a working black woman, together they represented a double destabilizing threat to the Parisian bourgeois.\textsuperscript{271} Ironically, it was their labor on which that bourgeois depended. Like many lower-class women, both the maid and her employer may have held multiple roles in the urban economy.\textsuperscript{272}

\textsuperscript{265} Hiner, 426.
\textsuperscript{266} Hollis Clayson, Painted Love, 144.
\textsuperscript{268} Higonnet, 27.
\textsuperscript{269} Higonnet, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{272} Grigsby, 441.
In “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” Baudelaire offers a quasi-anthropological sketch of a courtesan which is completely at odds with Manet’s painting. His courtesan possesses “une élégance provocante et barbare [...] Elle s’avance, glisse, danse, roule avec son poids de jupons brodés [...] Elle représente bien la sauvagerie dans la civilisation.” Olympia thoroughly lacks the romantic charms of this dancing figure. It is not so much that she herself represents savagery, but that she reveals its presence in those who seek her services.

Already gravely ill at the time of the 1865 Salon, Baudelaire may never have seen the painting. His reaction to whatever he may have seen or heard of Olympia appears complex. In a letter of May 11, 1865, Baudelaire offered his friend that much-cited reproach, “vous n’êtes que le premier dans la décrépitude de votre art. J’espère que vous ne m’en voudrez pas du sans-façon avec lequel je vous traite. Vous connaissez mon amitié pour vous.” His further remarks are more encouraging: “ce que je sais de vous, et ce que quelques gens d’esprit disent de vous: ‘Il y a des défauts, des défaillances, un manque d’aplomb, mais il y a un charme irrésistible.’” Baudelaire continues to write of a friend of his, whose opinion he esteems, who had been to see Olympia. “Il a ajouté que le tableau représentant la femme nue, avec la nègresse, et le chat (est-ce un chat décidément?), était très supérieur aux tableaux religieux.”

Harsh as Baudelaire’s earlier critique seems, it demonstrates a respect for Manet and a desire to see him create to the best of his ability. The praise for Olympia is more difficult to unravel. The woman here is a “femme nue,” not a prostitute or courtesan, and Baudelaire’s greatest interest is perplexingly fixed on the cat. The remarks could be read as somewhat

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273 “A provoking and barbaric elegance [...] She advances, gliding, dancing, twisting with the weight of her embroidered skirts [...] She represents well the savagery of civilization.” Charles Baudelaire, “Le Peintre de la vie moderne,” 1,187.
276 “what I say of you, and what certain people of sound mind say of you: ‘there are faults, errors, a lack of assurance, but an irresistible charm.’” Charles Baudelaire, Correspondance Générale, Tome V, 97.
277 “He added that the painting representing a nude woman, with a black woman, and the chat (is it decidedly a cat?) was much superior to religious paintings.” Charles Baudelaire, Correspondance Générale, Tome V, 95-97.
flippant, as if denying the social subversity of the painting. It could also be a commentary on the work’s mundanity.

For all their friendship, it is generally believed that Baudelaire valued the psychological drama and romanticism of Delacroix’s work over Manet’s somewhat drier oeuvre. As with Ruskin and Rossetti, the painter did not always meet the critic’s expectations. While Olympia has been compared to Baudelaire’s “Les Bijoux”, it lacks the poem’s softly erotic quality. Likewise, some have argued that the black cat on the courtesan’s divan is a Baudelairean device. Yet the cat in Baudelaire’s poem “Le Chat” functions as a substitute for the sensual caresses of a lover. The intimacy of the poem, its unabashed pleasure, is at complete odds with Manet’s painting. Although they share the same subject as Olympia, to a certain degree The Awakening Conscience and Found have more in common with The Death of Sardanapalus in that they represent exceptional moments: revelation, discovery, destruction. In contrast, Olympia is radical because it argues for the banality of prostitution.

Meurent’s courtesan stares dead at the viewer, her gaze slightly hostile, and more than a little bored–like she does this all day, everyday. Yet another page in Baudelaire’s notebooks offers the consideration, “Qu’est-ce que la prostitution sacrée? Excitation nerveuse. Mysticité du paganisme. Mysticisme, trait d’union entre le paganisme et le christianisme.” This pondering is reminiscent of Baudelaire’s friend, who declared Olympia better than religious paintings. Baudelaire may have viewed prostitution, and commerce more broadly, as a kind of new worship for the masses. Commerce itself he considered both satanic and natural, perhaps one a condition of the other. As women were in his eyes likewise “naturelle, c’est-à-dire abominable,” perhaps prostitution seemed to him an inevitable occurrence, natural and dreadful beings working their natural and ungodly trade. Yet on the whole, Baudelaire’s remark seems to belong much more to the world of Sardanapalus, where acts of suffering are dazzling physical and exquisitely

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279 Hiddleston, 571.
280 T.J. Clark, The Painting of Modern Life, 85, 139.
282 Charles Baudelaire, Journaux Intimes, 49-50.
283 Charles Baudelaire, Journaux Intimes, 93-94.
284 Charles Baudelaire, Journaux Intimes, 48.
emotive. *Sardanapalus* nearly could be a religious painting; just call him Herod or Holofernes. *Olympia*, however, represents no sacred moment. Stripped of excess or excitement, it lays bare prostitution as simply a business, and an unpleasant one at that. Set against the resigned austerity of her face, *Olympia*'s ribbon and jewels are so clearly artifice, a pretense of pleasure. *Sardanapalus* appears almost crassly inauthentic in comparison. The work of a courtesan occurs in what Baudelaire himself described as an “enveloppe d’apparat.”

He should, perhaps, have reconsidered his original question. It is not, “Qu’est-ce que l’art?” but rather, “Qu’est-ce que la prostitution?” *Olympia*, and its unmasking of what is so often hidden behind an artifice of beauty, suggest the answer is “L’art.”

The Price of Pleasure: Ruskin and Rossetti

In the years shortly before *Olympia*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was undergoing his own artistic coming-of-age. The result would be a profound shift in style concurrent with the disintegration of his relationship with Ruskin. For Ruskin, the break with Rossetti may have been representative of a broader failure of the arts to address the social problems which were increasingly important to him. In his later years, his attention would be drawn to social justice efforts to battle industrialization and its crippling effects on the British landscape and society. The divergent directions of the two men are perhaps in essence a conflict over consumption, pleasure, and the true cost of indulgence.

In 1859, Fanny Cornforth (1835-1909) sat for Rossetti’s *Bocca Baciata* (Figure 21). A model and sex worker, Cornforth would move into Rossetti’s residence as his mistress in 1862 after the death of his wife, the artist and model Elizabeth Siddal. Cornforth had likely been Rossetti’s lover for a short time before his marriage. Tellingly, William Holman Hunt remarked that with *Bocca Baciata*, Rossetti had abandoned “Stoicism for Epicureanism.”

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288 Marsh, 233-234.
289 Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 150.
degree, this shift had been simmering below the surface for some time, as evidenced in Rossetti’s poem “Jenny.”

First begun in 1846, “Jenny” recounts a man’s inner monologue as he visits a courtesan. The poem was perhaps inspired by a passage in the infamous Memoirs of Regency-era courtesan Hariette Wilson (1786-1845). Rossetti’s speaker ponders the troublesome mix of class difference, money, and sex which has concerned much of this chapter. To a certain measure, the poem is aware and penitent of the treatment of prostitutes as disposable commodities, although the speaker himself does not deign to speak to Jenny. He bemoans the archetypal man “Who, having used you at his will,/ Thrusts you aside, as when I dine/ I serve the dishes and the wine.” Acton himself described prostitution in terms of “supply and demand.”

The speaker’s sympathy is characteristic of Rossetti himself, who would frequently give women on the street all of the coins in his pockets. He is also aware that all class difference is superficial; Jenny sleeps “Just as another woman sleeps!” and is quite like his bourgeois cousin, except that circumstances have rendered one dishonorable. Nonetheless, Jenny is tainted by her necessarily commercial role, and the speaker is anxious about how this impacts her character. Twice, it is implicated that she cares more for money than human society: “Whose person or whose purse may be/ The lodestar of your reverie? [...] My Jenny, while you dream. And there/ I lay among/ your golden hair/ Perhaps the subject of your dreams,/ These golden coins.” The sounds of people and animals moving towards the marketplace further underscore that Jenny is a good for sale. Still, the speaker seems to sense that he has perhaps been unfair, asking more of himself than of Jenny, “And must I mock you to the last,/ Ashamed of my own shame [...]”

Despite these reservations, Rossetti’s narrator subscribes to the system. He is willing to pay the

290 Alicia Craig Faxon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 64.
294 William Acton, Prostitution, 213.
295 Alicia Craig Faxon, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 67.
296 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, “Jenny,” verses 177, 186-205.
298 Amanda Anderson, Tainted Souls and Painted Faces, 162.
299 Rossetti, verses 384-385.
price of pleasure, and therefore endure personal relationships which are increasingly commodified and thus lacking in meaning.

Ruskin outright refused to help Rossetti publish “Jenny.” In a letter of 1859, he expressed concern about the speaker’s detached attitude towards Jenny: “I don’t mean that an entirely right-minded person never keeps a mistress: but, if he does, he either loves her—or, not loving her, would blame himself, and be horror-struck for himself no less than for her, in such a moralizing fit.” His statement is interesting in that it places the client on more or less the same moral ground as the courtesan. From *Bocca Baciata* forward, however, the contentious issue for Ruskin would be sensuality rather than ambivalence.

*Bocca Baciata*, taking its name from Boccaccio, is as much a painting about nothing as *Olympia* is a painting about something. Unlike in earlier works by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the setting is spatially unclear, a garden-like somewhere which perhaps existed only in Rossetti’s imagination. Cornforth is portrayed in bust, her thick hair blooming outwards in abundance and her generous neck, rounded face, and dainty hands rendered in shades of alabaster, pink, and blue. Physically, she could belong to *Sardanapalus*. Her dress is bohemian: an open jacket which suggests an intimate moment, and somewhat flatly painted gold jewelry not unlike the coins in Jenny’s hair. The flowers and fruit which surround her are only vaguely reminiscent of nature’s full force, and they lack the purifying power which the outdoors hold for *The Awakening Conscience*. Cornforth’s own gaze is dreamy, almost thoughtless, and it evades the viewer’s eyes. That Rossetti’s style was in transition is evident: the brushstrokes are flat and the composition unoriginal, making the work somewhat staid although it represented a departure for him personally. Later works, such as 1865’s *The Blue Bower* (also of Cornforth), would benefit from a bolder approach, greater texture and dimensionality.

From 1859 onward, Rossetti’s influences would shift towards the Venetian and his primary medium from watercolor to oil. Heroines of Dante and the Bible would be replaced by femme fatales with an expressive sensuality and a more ambiguous morality as Aestheticism moved into prominence. In 1864, he travelled to Paris for a Delacroix retrospective, during

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303 Alicia Craig Faxon, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 148-150.
which time he met Manet.\textsuperscript{304} However, Rossetti’s work lacks much great evidence of either master. In 1873, he wrote approvingly of Ford Madox Brown’s plan to paint a \textit{Sardanapalus} of his own.\textsuperscript{305} He recalled, “I remember Delacroix’s picture much as you describe it, with strong colour and picturesqueness, but also a marked flavour of the ordinary Eugène Devaria lithographic art of the day.”\textsuperscript{306} Presumably, Rossetti intended his own art to be something more than a look-alike to an “ordinary” lithograph. Yet in its evasion of the moral work of the visual arts, its representation of a sex worker with golden hair and a dreaming face, \textit{Bocca Baciata} is no more, if not less, than \textit{Sardanapalus}.

For Ruskin, Rossetti’s transition marked a surrender to debauchery which he himself could never quite condone. In his autobiography \textit{Praeterita}, Ruskin wrote lovingly of the painter but noted that his artistic ability was often hindered by “the strength of his animal passions.”\textsuperscript{307} It was an issue which he sometimes struggled to confront frankly: upset by the unabashed nudity of \textit{Venus Verticordia} (Figure 22), Ruskin buried his discomfort in a criticism of the “coarseness” of the painting’s flowers.\textsuperscript{308} Nor was Rossetti alone in facing Ruskin’s ire: in 1870, Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) was summoned to the writer’s seat at Denmark Hill for a lecture on the dangers of “carnality” in painting.\textsuperscript{309} It is easy to write off these reprovals as the badgering of a prudish old man, ill at ease with his own sexuality, and in great part they probably were. However, the difference in perspective between Ruskin and the bolder artists of the Pre-Raphaelites could also be considered in the context of the expanding consumer culture of the industrial age.

In their early correspondence of 1855, Ruskin seemingly felt some pressure to explain himself to Rossetti—it was only a short time after his humiliatingly public divorce. Ruskin describes himself as neither wholly good nor bad, but quite alone.\textsuperscript{310} Yet on the matter of his public service projects, such as the Working Men’s College, for which he would persuade

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Faxon, 160.  
\item Dante Gabriel Rossetti, \textit{Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Volume 3}, 1,134-1,135.  
\item Rossetti, 1,132.  
\item John Ruskin, \textit{Praeterita, Volume 3 and Dilecta}, 22.  
\item Alicia Craig Faxon, \textit{Dante Gabriel Rossetti}, 137.  
\item Jan Marsh, \textit{The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood}, 285.  
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Rossetti to teach, Ruskin is clear.\textsuperscript{311} He writes, “One thing, by-the-bye, I hope you will not permit even for a moment to slide into your head. That anything I am doing for workmen, or for anybody, is in any wise an endeavour to regain position in public opinion. I am what I always was; I am doing what I always proposed to do, and what I have been hindered by untoward circumstances from doing hitherto; and the only temptation which is brought upon me by calumny is, not to fawn for public favour, but to give up trying to do the public any good, and enjoy myself misanthropically.”\textsuperscript{312}

The phrase is one of few clues that Ruskin, who was something of an ascetic, struggled to tame self-indulgence. On the client’s end, prostitution is a pure act of indulgence. It is also, in a way, “misanthropic” in that it shuns genuine human relations for a hollow, commodified shell built on cash rather than trust. For Ruskin, this problem of self-absorbed consumption was in danger of pervading the whole of British society. His written work increasingly argued for a distinctly different way of life and drew attention to the role of both genders in a fair economic system.\textsuperscript{313} Ruskin himself saw a connection between his writings on greed and capitalism in \textit{Unto this Last} and those on gendered duties in \textit{Sesame and Lilies}.\textsuperscript{314} Although he had little to say on prostitution itself, his social justice projects, such as the housing reform work he bankrolled under the direction of the feminist activist Octavia Hill (1838-1912), may have benefited women in the most vulnerable circumstances.\textsuperscript{315} This project was part of a larger effort on Ruskin’s part to encourage women to participate in social improvement work, in which he was likely influenced by feminist thinkers Anna Jameson (1794-1860) and Barbara Leigh Smith (1827-1891).\textsuperscript{316} Jameson believed that women should have an active social role, even working outside the home, although in domains suitable to their gender.\textsuperscript{317} In her 1857 treatise, \textit{Women and Work}, Leigh Smith defined women’s role as a divine duty to improve society.\textsuperscript{318}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[311] Alicia Craig Faxon, \textit{Dante Gabriel Rossetti}, 124.
\item[314] Deborah Epstein Nord, “Editor’s Introduction,” xiv.
\item[317] Peterson, 91-2.
\item[318] Peterson, 97-98.
\end{footnotes}
To upper-class women, Ruskin issued warnings about the dangers of earthly pleasure similar to those raised to the Pre-Raphaelites, albeit given slightly different temptations. In *The Ethics of the Dust*, he admonished schoolgirls, “Was any woman, do you suppose, ever the better for possessing diamonds? but how many have been made base, frivolous, and miserable by desiring them? Was ever man the better for having coffers full of gold?” But who shall measure the guilt which is incurred to fill them?” Over a decade earlier, in *The Stones of Venice*, he likewise reminded women of the grossly underpaid labor responsible for making the glass beads they bought. Ruskin recognized that mechanization made machines out of laborers, so that their lives were spent in “an unrecognized abyss, to be counted off into a heap of mechanism, numbered with its wheels, and weighted with its hammer strokes [...]” The warning against the new conspicuous consumption made possible by industrialization is not unlike that of Émile Zola’s (1840-1902) depiction of the bewitching department store in *Au Bonheur des dames*. The sentiment, however, is curiously in line with *Olympia*: a reminder that for every cheaply bought pleasure, there is a suffering body. In *Unto This Last*, Ruskin urges the reader to consume “nobly” as “that man is richest who [...] has also the widest helpful influence [...]”

However, such noble restraint was becoming increasingly difficult in urban Europe. In 1852, Le Bon Marché had become the first department store in France. Likewise, the 1851 Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, which Ruskin publicly disparaged, included alluring commodity displays and likely influenced the next generation of department stores. By 1865, Parisian shoppers could buy ready-made clothing at the shops. Interestingly, the new commodity

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322 John Ruskin, *Unto This Last* (Digireads, 2010), 77-78.

On Ruskin:
culture—what one might call “consumption for consumption’s sake”—was mirrored by what Ruskin may have considered to be similar developments in the art world.

In *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin reviewed an 1877 exhibition at Sir Coutts Lindsay’s Grosvenor Gallery. The review proved fateful for Ruskin, as his criticism of James McNeill Whistler’s (1834-1903) painting *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* led Whistler to successfully sue for libel. The legal loss was a turning point in Ruskin’s life, and the trial was indicative of the art world’s movement away from Ruskin’s moralistic philosophy and towards the “art for art’s sake” of Aestheticism. Whistler’s friend James Tissot (1836-1902) (who refused to testify in the trial) was also included in the review. What Ruskin has to say of him is telling. He writes of Tissot’s paintings, “their dexterity and brilliance are apt to make the spectator forget their conscientiousness. Most of them are, unhappily, mere coloured photographs of vulgar society; but the ‘Strength of Will,’ though sorely injured by the two subordinate figures, makes me think the painter capable, if he would obey his graver thoughts, of doing much that would, with real benefit, occupy the attention of that part of the French and English public whose fancy is at present caught only by Gustave Doré.”

Ruskin’s description of a viewer so struck with the beauty of Tissot’s canvas that they “forget their conscientiousness” speaks to a kind of sinful temptation. Like a woman in a department store or a man awaiting a courtesan, an individual faced with an object of desire might make bad decisions. Such is perhaps the case of the unseen shopper in Tissot’s *La Demoiselle de magasin* (Figure 23). The playful perspective positions the viewer as a shopping woman leaving a fashionable Parisian millinery shop. On the counter and in the shop window, silky ribbons and sheets of lace form alluring, disheveled heaps. Two shop girls are at work, one of them holding open the door for her client. A man on the boulevard pokes his head curiously

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327 Gordon, 116-118.
328 Gordon, 118-119.
330 Wood, 119.
towards the shop girl at the window. As Tamar Garb notes, the French term for window shopping, “lèche vitrine,” suggests a sexual experience. The painting was after all part of Tissot’s *Parisiennes* series, and for many at the time Parisian women exemplified “commodified femininity.” Interestingly, like luxury brothels, the most expensive milliners in Paris could be found in the district of L’Opéra. In this way, bourgeois men and women bought pleasure within a few meters of one another.

The one painting of Tissot’s which Ruskin held up as worthwhile was *The Triumph of Will: The Challenge* (Figure 24), mistitled by Ruskin as *The Strength of Will*. Curiously, the work is the antithesis of Tissot’s many pictures of “vulgar” daily life. Originally intended as part of a set of five, it was likely inspired by the mythical woodlands of Edward Burne-Jones. The central allegorical figure, Will, is a young woman dressed in the manner of Jeanne d’Arc, red ribbons around her hair and her bare feet. Between her legs and the point of her sword she holds captive on the ground a sensually writhing figure. Her upper half is that of a voluptuous nude, with an arm bangle reminiscent of *Sardanapalus*. Below the waist she has the body of a wild cat, perhaps a tiger, enfolded in a brilliantly red sash. One can’t help but wonder if it is cashmere. Beside her a pile of snakes coil around a human skull. This human-animal mass was collectively referred to as Vice and Temptation. Given the story of Genesis, it is likely that the snakes represent Temptation. Woman, who first succumbed to it, can only be Vice. Behind them stand the two lushly costumed figures of Audacity and Silence.

There is nothing distinctly modern about Vice or Temptation. Still, in the age of decadence the female signs of these sins—the prostitute, the compulsive shopper—came increasingly to the fore. It is unsurprising that Tissot’s allegory of Vice is a woman. What is noteworthy, however, is that like Ruskin and the feminists of his circle, Tissot conceived a female heroine to redeem a world descending into avarice. Moreover, to set the scene in a

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333 “window licking” Garb, 111.
334 Garb, 97.
337 Wood, 95.
338 Wood, 95.
Pre-Raphaelite wood suggests that such a victory of the will requires a return to nature, a
severance of the modern city and all of its temptations. Ruskin may have seen the Triumph of
Will as a refute against the complexities of life in an industrialized society.

Nonetheless, the modern world was rearing forward with steam-engine speed, and both
men and women would have to find their place in it. Whether prostitutes or purchasers, women
played an essential role in the industrial marketplace. On canvas, they became the manifestation
of modernity. In his review of the Salon of 1846, Baudelaire defined modern art: “Qui dit
romanticisme dit art moderne,–c’est-à-dire intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l’infini,
exprimées par tous les moyens que contiennent les arts.” Thus conceived, modern art is the
thrill of passion, bursting with color, much like Sardanapalus itself. In its boundless desire, its
“aspiration vers l’infini,” there is a sense of the rampant pleasure-seeking of Rossetti’s later
works, the fleetingness of a purchased moment. How different from Ruskin’s chosen modern art,
which meets “full in the front the moral evil of the age.” Tellingly, it was women themselves
whom he saw as most worthy of the monumental task of purifying the modern world.

339 “Who says romanticism says modern art–it is to say intimacy, spirituality, color, desire for the infinite,
expressed by all means possible in the arts.” Charles Baudelaire in “Salon de 1846,” 879.
Chapter III
Mothers and Monsters

“And she, deranged by Hera, was sent to wander
The ends of the earth in madness.
That’s why she leapt into the sea.”
Euripides, The Medea

This final chapter returns to the question of the natural woman, but considers her opposite: the unnatural woman. She is a particularly relevant figure for the rapidly changing nineteenth century, for modernity is nothing if not nature come undone. As discussed in chapter two, the industrialization of Europe saw increases in prostitution, feminist activism, and a larger reckoning about the role of women. In the shared lexicon of Ruskin and Baudelaire, modern woman is the antithesis of the natural. She is, in other words, something of a monster.

Here, woman is discussed in her most powerful, and by extension most dangerous aspects: as both mother and monster. In Baudelaire’s portrait of Jeanne Duval, as well as in many poems of Les Fleurs du mal, the woman’s sexuality becomes the subject of predatory and animalistic metaphors. I will discuss how these representations work to subvert female agency into masculine fantasy, and finally arc beyond Baudelaire’s lifetime to examine Edgar Degas’ brothel monotypes. While the monotypes embrace the underbelly of Parisian life, so central to the Baudelairean philosophy, they lack its dark romanticism. Instead, they revel in the unvarnished and monstrous aspects of prostitution, which, while largely ignored by Baudelaire in his writing, were evidently apparent to him, as in the infamous botched abortion dream he wrote of to his friend Charles Asselineau (1820-1874).

Ruskin, too, is troubled by woman’s role as procreator, a tension exemplified in Ford Madox Brown’s Take Your Son, Sir! Here, the ideal fertile wife takes on a quality of the monstrous, an anxiety echoed in Ruskin’s rejection of normative heterosexual male-female

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relations. Instead, he came to embrace the fantasy of chaste feminine power in the idea of Athena and the virgin goddess. For Baudelaire, however, the powerful woman remained a creature with which to wrestle, sometimes joyously, sometimes with vengeance. The following, then, concerns both the women of dreams, and the women of nightmares.

**Man-Eater: The Insatiable Baudelairean Woman**

In the winter of 1861, Baudelaire completed a pen and ink drawing of Jeanne Duval looking coyly at the spectator (Figure 25). She is a formidable figure: her large eyes are framed by strong brows, and Baudelaire’s frenzied crosshatching accentuates the forceful energy of her breasts. Moreover, she is a woman of fashion: hair styled, bow around her neck, even a very French beauty spot in place. Seen from three-quarters view, Duval’s arm seems somewhat awkwardly stretched behind her back, as if she is gathering her strength. In Latin—likely a language Duval could not read—Baudelaire has scribbled upon her skirt the words *in search of someone to devour.*

Nearly everything about this is at odds with the most familiar image of Duval: the delicate, elegant invalid of Manet’s portrait. In that portrait, Duval’s power stemmed from her “civilisation”, the distance her daunting crinoline creates between herself and the viewer. Here, despite the girlish details of Duvall’s *tenue*, Baudelaire’s words aim at something primal and predatory. This animalistic representation is echoed among some of the most troubling poems of *Les Fleurs du mal*, as well as *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, in which he dismisses woman as “*un bel animal*.” No matter that Baudelaire, as a white man born to a not-inconsiderable name and fortune, held every imaginable social advantage over his mistress. In the strokes of his pen, she becomes the predator.

Yet again, Baudelaire proves himself more a romanticist than a modernist. In “Tu mettrais l’univers entier dans ta ruelle” (“You Would Let the Whole World in Your Chamber”) he rails against the supposed faithlessness of a lover: “Femme impure! L’ennui rend ton âme

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Regardless of whether it is “about” Duvall, we can be relatively certain that this is a poem about a woman like her, that is to say, a woman who was economically and socially vulnerable in Baudelaire’s Paris. Such a woman would have had little choice in who entered her bed, as Baudelaire would have well known. A laundress or milliner, for example, might work up to eighteen hours per day, yet would often be forced to turn to prostitution when meager wages or the slow season left her hungry. Relying solely on her own salary, a laundress would be two hundred francs in debt at the end of a year. Baudelaire’s poem does not acknowledge this grim reality. Instead, it spins a fantasy. This is not sex for sale, but the sex of seduction. And the unfortunate woman at the center of it has gained the teeth of a beast and the torture devices of a Grand Inquisitor. Perversely, it is only by turning the tables in this way, with woman as predator and man as prey, that Baudelaire can sidestep an even larger upset to the status quo: the courtesan of romanticism giving way to the courtesan of the industrial world.

Likewise, in “Sed non satiata” it is the woman whose appetite is insatiable. Baudelaire writes,

“Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits […]
Sorcière au flanc d’ébène, enfant des noirs minuits […]
Ô démon sans pitié!
[… ] Hélas! et je ne puis, Mégère libertine,
Pour briser ton courage et te mettre aux abois,
Dans l’enfer de ton lit devenir Prosperine!”

346 “Impure Woman! Ennui renders your soul cruel,/ To exert your teeth at this singular game,/ You require each day a heart on the rack.” Charles Baudelaire, “Tu mettrais le monde entier dans ta ruelle,” verses 2-4 in Les Fleurs du Mal, 44.
348 Ibid, 130.
349 “Strange deity, brown as the nights… Sorceress of the ebony flanc, child of black midnights… O pitiless demon!/ Alas! And I cannot, libertine Megaera,/ To break your courage and bring you to ruin/ In the hell of your bed become Persephone!” Charles Baudelaire, “Sed non satiata,” in Les Fleurs du Mal, 45.
Again, the gender reversal is as evident as it is surprising. Woman is Hades, and Man an unwilling Persephone. To a certain degree, such a strong expression of feminine lust is startling in itself: it was only in 1849, with the publication of Dr. Auguste Debay’s (1802-1890) *Hygiène et physiologie du mariage* that the idea of normal or even healthy desire in women reached the French scientific public. Debay argued that sex (within the confines of marriage) could even improve a woman’s beauty and intelligence. The prevailing attitude of the 1840s and 1850s was that women did not experience desire at all. This view was perhaps influenced by Diderot, who wrote that women felt aversion during the act of conception. “Sed non satiata,” however, is perhaps not speaking of “normal” desire. Rather, there is an exoticizing influence at play.

Three times, Baudelaire invokes the color of his lover’s skin, juxtaposed against names like “sorcière”, “démon.”

The effect is not altogether dissimilar from that of the previous poem: once again, Baudelaire inverts the social order in one aspect to maintain the hierarchy in a larger sense. Yes, it is radical that his lover is Hades rather than the captive goddess. Still, the narrative “others” Duvall, so that her sexual drive seems more a product of her race than of her natural state as a woman. In this, Baudelaire contributes to a preexisting fantasy of blackness in the French public imagination; he is the civilized foil to his lover’s wild and boundless desires. This pervasive fetish of the “savage,” discussed in chapter one, is exemplified in the naturalist George Cuvier’s (1769-1832) horrific examination and eventual dissection of Sara Baartman (1789-1815) in the early nineteenth century. Cuvier’s claims that Baartman was hypersexed and of a species between human and animal speak to larger cultural prejudices, which were inherited by the Parisians of midcentury. This blatant racism continued to permeate popular prints of Baudelaire’s generation. Notable too is that Baudelaire’s choice of an “insatiable” partner runs parallel to trends in the Parisian sex trade. Women kept by the most exclusive brothels, *maisons*

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352 Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women*, 64.
355 “Sara ‘Saartjie’ Baartman.”
were expected to feign desire and interest in their clients, a marked departure from the resigned sex workers of the lower orders.\textsuperscript{357} Desire then, was desirable, and the game of pretense threatens to encircle itself.

Further entries in \textit{Les Fleurs du mal} are even more explicit in the depiction of the lover, perhaps Duval, as predator. In “Le Lethe”, the woman is literally an animal, albeit a tamed one, as if a pet, “Tigre adoré, monstre aux airs indolents.”\textsuperscript{358} Less benign is the lover of “Les Metamorphoses du vampire,” who sucks the blood from her bed fellows.\textsuperscript{359} If Baudelaire had been in the habit, like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, of prefacing his drawings with poems, one can imagine either of these as a fitting epigraph to his portrait of Jeanne Duval. The tension between adoration and hatred is as taut as the inky curve of her arched spine.\textsuperscript{360} Yet among these myriad descriptions, it is integral that while Baudelaire shapes the female form as savage or animalistic, the Baudelairen Woman never descends to the grotesque, nor does she pretend to the objective. Throughout, Baudelaire’s response to harsh reality is to shape it into beautiful fantasy, entrancing narrative. Roughly two decades later, Edgar Degas would continue this legacy of making art out of the unturned stones, the “spleen” of Paris. But the woman of Degas’s underworld is no sensual vampire or petted tiger, but an animal unmediated by civilizing forces.

\textbf{Degas Goes to the Zoo}

Later in his life, Degas would admit that he had “perhaps too much considered women as animals.”\textsuperscript{361} The monotypes he made of elite brothels sometime between 1876 and 1879 postdate Baudelaire’s death, but they are difficult to imagine into existence without the groundwork of his poetry, his invitation to paint the modern world.\textsuperscript{362} In their aims, however, the monotypes depart radically from Baudelaire’s vision. If Degas’ brothel monotypes render explicit what is already

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{357} Hollis Clayson, \textit{Painted Love}, 28-29.
\textsuperscript{359} Charles Baudelaire, \textit{Les Fleurs du Mal}.
\textsuperscript{362} Rey, 70.
\end{footnotesize}
implicitly expressed in his more respectable works, they also reveal the reality lurking behind the clever phrases of *Les Fleurs du mal*.\textsuperscript{363}

The women in these images are almost always entirely in the nude, a characteristic of the most expensive *maisons closes*.\textsuperscript{364} Ironically, these sought-after women have lost the clothing which in the works of Baudelaire and Constantin Guys serves to civilize, feminize, and indicate the class identity of the women portrayed. Nor do their bodies betray the same sensuousness as Duvall’s curved figure and coquettish gaze. Take for example *The Madam’s Birthday* (Figure 26). If Duval according to Baudelaire is a tigress, ready to pounce on her prey, these women are animals of a decidedly lesser order. Stomachs, breasts, and jowls hang puffy and flaccid. They hold clumsy, graceless poses, more like infants than women.\textsuperscript{365} A group clusters around the seated madam like a pack of beasts, one naked body blending into another. In fact, the women resemble one another much more than they do individuals.\textsuperscript{366}

Eugenicists had long searched for “uniform” physical characteristics with which to regulate prostitution and sexual deviancy.\textsuperscript{367} In his treatise on prostitution, Alexandre Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchatelet (1790-1836) devoted an entire chapter to “Considérations physiologiques,” commencing with prostitutes’ supposedly distinctive girth.\textsuperscript{368} However, he failed to discover much more in the way of common traits.\textsuperscript{369} In the monotypes, Hollis Clayson writes, Degas invents a “prostitutional body.”\textsuperscript{370} The two standing women hold a wide stance, like that of a man’s, which conceals nothing. The oversized bouquet in the first woman’s hand mimics the dark spread of her pubic hair.\textsuperscript{371} If woman is an animal, there is a fine line between sensuality and what a nineteenth-century critic might call “degeneracy”. It is a line the Baudelairean Woman never crosses. For all that she belongs to the Parisian underworld, she is

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\item[364] Xavier Rey, “The Body Exploited,” 70.
\item[365] Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love*, 35.
\item[366] Clayson, 44.
\item[367] Clayson, 43.
\item[368] Parent-Duchatelet, 117.
\item[369] Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love*, 43.
\item[370] Clayson, 43.
\item[371] Xavier Rey, “The Body Exploited,” 81.
\end{footnotes}
always an individual, defined by a relation to a man which is of the narrative and romantic order. In contrast, Degas’ brothel monotypes are often devoid of plot. The figures rarely bend to the spectator’s desires; the acceptance of the commodification of the female body is unflinching. Degas may have borrowed constructions from pornographic photographs used in brothel advertisements, reaffirming this capitalist treatment of the body, yet he subverts their sensuality.

In some works, *The Madam’s Birthday* primary among them, the effect is of defeminization. No longer an object of desire, Woman devolves into a monster.

Other monotypes still speak to desire, but in a manner exterior to the dominant social narrative. In *Admiration* (Figure 27), the woman stands with her curving, powerful backside in full view of the spectator. Her buttocks are given a serpentine curve. The only body part rendered sensually in the brothel monotypes, exaggerated buttocks had long been a recognized sign for primal sexuality and racial degeneracy. Beside her bathtub, a worshipful man kneels gazing up at her, enraptured. As in “Sed non satiata,” the woman’s dominance is obvious. What is less clear in *Admiration* is the relation between the figures. The woman’s face and breasts are concealed from the viewer, somewhat transmuting her role as sexual object as well as giving her an edge. Is she as lustful as the heroine of “Sed non satiata,” does she desire this man as he does her? Or is her role here purely transactional, sex for sale without the romance? The lover of Baudelaire’s poem needs her partner, not just for survival but for the fulfillment of her desires. In Degas’ brothel monotypes, women are not so dependent upon their male counterparts.

*Two Women* (Figure 28) is a hazy print of a lesbian tryst. The work may have been inspired by the verse of Baudelaire and Gautier, though Degas’ monotype lacks the ferocity of a poem such as “Femmes Damnées (Delphine et Hippolyte).” In the poem, the predator-prey dynamic returns, this time occupied by two women: “Delphine la couvait avec des yeux ardents,

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Comme un animal fort qui surveille une proie,/ Après l’avoir d’abord marquée avec les dents.”

Hippolyta’s sexual awakening, completed without a male touch, would be an expression of a kind of female power, were it not that the entire scene is constructed for the reader’s pleasure. The monotype is a depiction of sex workers, not mythical figures. Still, one woman’s body has been contorted so that almost her entire front side is directly visible, a most convenient angle for a voyeur. The second woman does not even have a face, only a sinuous back and behind. Their surroundings are fuzzy and cloudlike, as if one could almost imagine the figures to be two nymphs. Except, that is, for the soft outlines of more bodies in the background, a reminder that this no dreamy bower, but a place of business. Degas would have been aware that such lesbian “scenes” were not always authentic, but rather staged for the viewing pleasure of male clients.

The clever and neatly tied solution to “deviant” female behavior, to feminine agency and emancipated female pleasure, is a distortion of that pleasure for the male gaze. Once again, the monstrous rears its head, yet is tamed.

Degas’ gaze is fundamentally different from Baudelaire’s in that it claims to be objective, as much as it fails on that particular point. Like many Realists, the artist had an interest in physiognomy, even dedicating a painting to the subject, Criminal Physiognomies, at the 1881 Impressionist exhibition. The physiognomics of the brothel monotypes are complex. On the one hand, the women are clearly intended to be read as of the same type. However, as Carol Armstrong writes, the sparse style and intimacy of the works strips their bodies of a “public, representational function.” The resulting images are grotesque in their detachment and anonymity. In contrast, Baudelaire’s gaze is decidedly subjective and romantic, as anti-scientific as his hero Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). Perhaps he saw how the increasingly “objective” eye

379 “Delphine smothered her with ardent eyes,/ Like a strong animal which surveilles a prey,/ After having marked it with its teeth.”
381 Rey, 81-83.
382 Carol Armstrong, Odd Man Out, 86.
384 Carol Armstrong, Odd Man Out, 152.

The brothel monotypes lack the representation of discrete social cues and status markers which make Degas’ works of public life legible. The viewer can make nuanced inferences about a bourgeois businessman by Degas based on his dress and mannerism in a way which is impossible in the much more private, deconstructed context of the brothel monotypes.
of the nineteenth century, set on science, industry, and capitalism, tore at the last romantic
vestiges surrounding sex, seduction, and the fraught rapport between man and woman. Degas’
brothel monotypes are in this way paradoxical: they reveal how modernity erodes traditional
social conventions and as a result returns to a primitive state.\textsuperscript{385} The curtain stripped away,
Baudelaire may have found himself uncomfortable with the monstrous remnants of the Parisian
demi-monde. This revulsion at the unsightly side of commercial sex manifested itself in his
subconscious world.

\textbf{Baudelaire’s Museum of Feminine Monstrosity}

At five o’clock on the morning of March 13, 1856, Baudelaire awoke from a nightmare,
which he immediately recorded in a letter to his friend, Charles Asselineau.\textsuperscript{386} The letter begins
with a remark upon the “hieroglyphic” nature of his dreams and their lack of relation to his
actual life.\textsuperscript{387} Given what follows, this statement seems obtuse at the very least. In the dream,
Baudelaire visits a luxury brothel, perhaps not unlike that drawn by Degas. He is thrown off his
guard when he realizes first that his pants are hanging open, and second that he is barefoot.
Embarrassed, he dares not approach any of the house’s young women: “Je me sens très triste et
très intimidé; je crains qu’on ne voie mes pieds.”\textsuperscript{388} Instead, in typical Baudelairean fashion, he
turns to the pictures on the walls. He finds art of all sorts, until he sees something which captures
his fascinated disgust. A little gallery has been hung with scientific sketches of aborted fetuses,
which he describes as “[…] des images d’êtres bizarres, monstrueux, presque amorphes […]
Dans un coin de chaque dessin, il y a une note: \textit{La fille une telle, âgée de , a donné le jour à ce
foetus, en telle année.”}\textsuperscript{389}

\textsuperscript{385} Armstrong, 156.
\textsuperscript{388} “I feel very sad and very intimidated; I fear that someone might see my feet.”
\textsuperscript{389} “… images of strange beings, monstrous, almost amorphous… In a corner of each drawing, there is a
note: the girl such , aged years , expelled this day this fetus, in such year.”
Miraculously, one fetus has survived, “un monstre né dans la maison et qui si tient éternellement sur un piédestal,” a piece of living sculpture in what amounts to a macabre art show. Baudelaire and this sad creature converse for a time, until a jostle in his bedchamber awakes him suddenly. Inexplicably, he remarks that the dream was likely the result of his having slept in a contorted position, much like the fetus. But of course, it would be impossible to extract a moral from this dream “drôle.”

Baudelaire’s subconscious world is even richer than his literary one, and a great deal more revealing. His dream raises the question: what would a man of his standing have known of the difficult choices facing women of the lowest orders and their unwanted offspring?

The average working-class woman in Paris was malnourished on her own measly salary and simply could not afford to feed a child without help. Moreover, as Baudelaire surely knew, the Napoleonic Code prohibited an unwed mother from approaching the father for financial support or recognition of the child. It was a law designed to protect bourgeois men like himself. With the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834, fathers in Britain were likewise not responsible for their illegitimate offspring. This considered, it is evident why many women turned to abortion. If they chose to do so, they had several meager options. An ineffective cocktail of white wine, rue, and absinthe was often turned to as a home solution. When this did not work, a woman might turn to a “professional”: usually another woman, and often a midwife in the community. The procedure would cost about three months’ wages, and it typically involved the injection of soapy water into the uterus, followed by a probe. A woman would walk home, and if she was lucky, expel the fetus hours later without bleeding to death herself.

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393 Fuchs, 37.
396 Fuchs, 189.
397 Fuch, 189-190.
398 Fuchs, 190-191.
 Needless to say, all of this was highly illegal. So while Baudelaire knew that abortions were being performed, it is unclear how much he knew about the process, beyond perhaps one or two home remedies. For him, the fetus functions more as metaphor than practical reality. As his description indicates, however, an educated man would have had a visual lexicon for what a fetus might look like, if such a thing interested him. In 1774, William Hunter (1718-1783) of the University of Glasgow published *The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus*. In a Goncourt brothers novel of 1851, not unlikely reading material for Baudelaire, the protagonist studies drawings of malformed fetuses. An artist making such studies would have had access to the forty-three ancient fetal remains, part of the collection of the naturalist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844), housed in Paris’s Museum of Natural History. Saint-Hilaire’s successor, the specialist of experimental embryology Camille Dareste (1822-1899), was pioneering the field of teratogeny, the science of malformed fetuses. In the 1850s, the fetus was already emerging as “sign” with its own set of definitions. For Baudelaire, as for others after him, this symbology turns on questions of naturalness. Pregnancy is representative of the deepest “natural” function of Woman, whose innate condition Baudelaire so despised. Interrupted pregnancy, then, is nature undone, but monstrously. If a painting, or a dressed and painted-up woman, is nature gilded and improved upon, than an aborted fetus is nature ravaged. Several decades later, the fetus would become a motif of decadence in Europe, and in particular, a symbol of the decadent woman. By 1885, the fetus had even taken on the poetic voice in the work of Jules Laforgue (1860-1887).

This obsession of which Baudelaire was an unwitting forerunner holds significance because the aborted fetus is not just unnatural within itself, but rather indicative of an unnatural relation between men and women. A man like Baudelaire, who approached all of life through the flâneur’s eyes, chose the romantic passions of the courtesan over the typical bourgeois.

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400 Stead, 420.
403 Evanghélia Stead, *Le Monstre, le singe, et le foetus*, 444.
404 Stead, 492.
arrangement of wife, children, and mistress on the side. To have shared a child with Jeanne Duvall would have changed everything: the cruel and ravenous lover of “Sed non satiata” is so clearly not a wife or mother. It was perhaps a generational problem: in Guy de Maupassant’s (1850-1893) 1887 novel Mont-Oriol, the protagonist notes that modern man is “de la race des amants, et non point de la race des pères.”

Baudelaire’s strange dream, then, and its dialogue of abortion in the sex trade, present two realizations. The first is that with the commodification of the female body, the expectations placed upon its natural functions were likewise industrialized. The women of Baudelaire’s dream brothel or Degas’ monotypes are constantly available for pleasure: a hiatus of nine months simply will not do, and the all-important, life-giving function of the body is rendered inconvenient or obsolete. The second is that this philosophy of female body as machine renders not just Woman unnatural, but Man as well.

**Madox Brown: Heir Apparent, Heir Imagined**

To be an “unnatural” man was something with which John Ruskin was well-acquainted, and often accused. The 1854 annulment of his marriage in London made the respectable art critic somewhat infamous. For Ruskin, a woman’s sexuality in any form could denote the monstrous. Even before his marriage to Effie Gray, he described her as a threat, a “Medusa.”

In a letter of 1847, he scolds her, “You saucy—wicked—witching—malicious —merciless […] mountain nymph […]” As the inconsummate years wore on, Gray would later confess in a humiliated letter to her family, “[...] he had imagined women were quite different to what he saw I was, and that the reason he did not make me his Wife was because he was disgusted with my person the first evening […]. In one of their final conversations on the subject, Gray wrote that she brooches the possibility of consummating the marriage for the sake of having children.

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405 “of the race of lovers, and not at all of the race of fathers.” Guy de Maupassant, quoted in Evanghélia Stead, *Le Monstre, le singe, et le foetus*, 436.
406 Dinah Birch, “Ruskin, John.”
408 John Ruskin, quoted in *John Ruskin and Effie Gray*, ed. William Milbourne James, 58.
409 Effie Gray, quoted in *John Ruskin and Effie Gray*, ed. William Milbourne James, 220.
In turn, Ruskin charged her with madness (a common accusation wielded against Gray in the Ruskin family) decrying that she was unfit to be a mother.\textsuperscript{410}

In the perilous world of society gossip, the Ruskins were hardly the only ones preoccupied with the state of their marriage and its childlessness. One evening in the summer of 1855, Ford Madox Brown even recorded this curious anecdote in his diary: “Woke up on the sofa in the Parlour at 4 A.M. Dreamt I had been dining with Ruskin who boasted that he had got one child out of his late spouse at least, whatever the slanderous world might say.”\textsuperscript{411}

Interestingly, this dream seems to have been triggered by a tumultuous week in his own marriage, which left Brown sleeping on the sofa.\textsuperscript{412} Emma Hill (1829-1890), now Emma Brown, had suffered much for her husband’s art, constantly short of money and enduring a number of Pre-Raphaelite houseguests. In one diary entry, Brown recounts giving the boot to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, sleeping on the parlor floor, as his pregnant wife was approaching her due date.\textsuperscript{413} Over several days in July 1855, Emma Brown aggrieved her husband by locking him out one evening and borrowing money without asking, triggering a drama such that he wrote her a letter “which our fate now seems to hinge on.”\textsuperscript{414}

In this period of distress, it perhaps not unusual that he began to compare his marriage to those around him. Ford Madox Brown, as far as it is known, did not particularly like Ruskin. He recalled of their meeting at an art show, at which Ruskin was critical of Brown’s work, “[...] he talks divers [sic] nonsense about art hurriedly in shrill flippant tones.”\textsuperscript{415} The word itself, \textit{shrill}, connotes a kind of effeminate madness. The issue of masculinity may have felt particularly keen between Brown and Ruskin, as Brown continually failed to adequately provide for his children and female dependents, and Ruskin enjoyed a prosperous existence, albeit one without an heir.

What this meant for both men is perhaps exemplified in Brown’s long-worked and unfinished painting, entitled \textit{Take Your Son, Sir!} (Figure 29).

\textsuperscript{410} Effie Gray, quoted in \textit{John Ruskin and Effie Gray}, ed. William Milbourne James, 226-227.
\textsuperscript{412} Marcia Pointon, \textit{Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 112.
\textsuperscript{414} Ford Madox Brown, \textit{The Diary of Ford Madox Brown}, 142.
As stated, Brown’s own familial situation was as complicated as Ruskin’s, if in a very different manner. As a young man, Brown had married his cousin Elisabeth (1819-1846), who died not long after, leaving him to care for their daughter Lucy (1843-1894). In 1850, Brown’s model Emma Hill gave birth to an illegitimate child, Catherine (1850-1927). A bricklayer’s daughter, Hill was illiterate, and socially unfit to serve as Brown’s wife. Although they eventually married in 1853, Emma Hill was sent to a ladies’ seminary to improve her standing, much like the Pre-Raphaelite models-turned-wives of the younger generation. While her position was scandalous for a gentleman’s wife, it was not unusual for a woman of her class. After all, a third of women in nineteenth-century Britain were pregnant on their wedding day. It is interesting, then, to consider her as the model for Take Your Son, Sir!, which Brown began in 1851 and picked up again in 1856. Originally a small portrait of Hill laughing, it was later enlarged to a standing portrait in which Hill holds a child in her arms. In early sketches, the child was Catherine, but in the final version it is Arthur, a son born in 1856 who died a year later.

The painting, then, is personal in every possible way. The father, reflected in the mirror with his arms outstretched in a construction borrowed from The Arnolfini Wedding, is likely a self-portrait. The Flemish choice, perhaps inspired by Brown’s artistic education in Belgium, presents an intriguing foil: an idealized and consecrated union in which a couple stands together replaced by a mother seemingly on her own.

The subject is often taken to be a woman presenting a bastard child to her lover, although some argue that the two are shown as married. However, it is worth noting that the painting was begun in a decade of what would be a social reckoning on the state of “fallen” women.

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418 Julian Treuherz, Angela Thirlwell, and Kenneth Bendiner, 69 and 76.
419 Jan Marsh, The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood, 42.
420 Joan Perkin, Victorian Women, 60.
423 Hallman Bryant, “Two Unfinished Pre-Raphaelite Paintings” 62.
425 Marcia Pointon, Naked Authority, 107.
426 Hallman Bryant, “Two Unfinished Pre-Raphaelite Paintings,” 57-58.
Under the lead of Prime Minister William Gladstone (1809-1898), general sympathy and aid efforts on their behalf increased. Interest in issues of illegitimacy grew as well: a bastard child plays a central role in Dickens’ *Bleak House* of 1852-1853, and Lady Caroline Norton (1808-1877) even broached the subject in an 1855 letter to the Queen on behalf of single mothers, which she published in *The Times*. Moreover, the unusual arrangement of Brown’s painting, and the mother’s suffering features, point to a complex rather than traditional relationship. Hill’s head is tilted back, perhaps from the original laughing pose, but here it appears flushed and exhausted. The unusual set of her mouth, a realistic representation of Hill’s abnormally short upper lip, makes her expression somewhat difficult to read, although it seems pained. Her long, voluminous dress represents the largest swath of entirely unfinished canvas: her face, the mirror, and the infant in its swaddling clothes are all finished in remarkable detail, as if Brown began with what interested him most. Against the blank white, the infant stands out as almost grotesquely three-dimensional, like an image on the page of a medical textbook. The swaddling cloth forms an unusual circle which brings to mind a fetus in utero, while the tie hanging from the folds is reminiscent of an umbilical cord. Her mysterious lover hidden in the mirror, it is as if the exhausted mother is presenting her illegitimate child not to him, but to the spectator themselves and by extension society as a whole.

So what does all of this have to do with Ruskin? Perhaps it is that *Take Your Son, Sir!* represents a kind of double divergence in regards to his life. If Brown diverted from the laws of appropriate gender relations when he impregnated Emma Hill, he committed a relatively common transgression, and one that he ultimately righted. By contrast, Ruskin’s own rejection of his legal wife is a complete toppling of the system- a reversal of the natural order- and far more baffling to his contemporaries. That Brown at least subconsciously recognized a relation between

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427 Bryant, 57-58.
431 Bryant, 64.
their two digressions from the social order is evident in Ruskin’s strange remark in his dream. In this parallel universe, Ruskin and Effie Gray’s imaginary child—who would have been a legitimate, privileged heir—takes on the quality of secrecy and illegitimacy which pervaded Brown’s familial relationships. The dream child exists in secret, much as Emma Hill and her daughter Catherine were forced to do, out of sight of the “slanderous world.” However, the Ruskin of reality had long lost his interest in his wife and their heirs, real or imaginary. He might have seen the darker elements at play in *Take Your Son, Sir!* Indeed, there is something of the grotesque in the lolling of the woman’s head, the gargantuan infant in her arms. Yet Brown’s man recognizes them as his burden, arms outstretched, his own name scrawled possessively on the blank space of Hill’s dress. One can imagine that Ruskin, disgusted by his own wife’s nakedness, would have been overwhelmed by the monstrosity of it all.

**Medusa Meets her Match**

Ruskin’s great paradox, then, is that as much as his works like *Sesame and Lilies* and *The Ethics of the Dust* prepare women to succeed as mothers and homemakers, it is a life which he ultimately struggled to participate in. The same might be said of his readers: his primary followers were by and large “spinsters” who possessed the time and resources necessary to perform the social work which he saw as one of women’s essential contributions.\(^{432}\) It is clear that Ruskin liked and admired women, but in his personal relationships far preferred the virginal and chaste to the sometimes grisly realities of maturity and motherhood, as in his many devoted friendships with young girls. In the real world, however, this model of eternal youth is as unsustainable as Baudelaire’s courtesan, who brings pleasure but never bears forth new life. Effie Gray grew up, as would have the short-lived Rose La Touche, Ruskin’s pined-after teenage pupil, who confessed “I cannot be to him what he wishes, or return the vehement love which he gave me which petrified me and frightened me.”\(^{433}\) Baudelaire, to a degree, embraces the female sexual “monster”, Ruskin never can.

\(^{432}\) Seth Koven, “How the Victorians Read ‘Sesame and Lilies,’” 185.  
However, this difference is not merely representative of personal phobias, but of two disparate conceptions of female power. In Baudelaire and Degas, female sexuality is a powerful force, but ultimately exists to be subverted, made monstrous and twisted. Ruskin, by contrast, rejected female sexuality outright, but in his later years increasingly found himself drawn to expressions of female agency, what one could consider the “answer to his life’s enigma which had tormented and puzzled him so long.” Stripped of her sexuality, what could a woman’s power be? Enter Athena.

The preliminary, vaguely shifting conceptions of a female deity first expressed in his pedagogical work *The Ethics of the Dust* come to a head—quite literally, the Godhead—in *The Queen of the Air*, Ruskin’s treatise on Athena, which is part history, part etymology, and a great deal of his own philosophy. Her father’s “brain child” without a mother, nor a mother or mistress herself, Athena is free from the conventions which entrapped Baudelaire, his courtesans, and even Ruskin and Effie Gray. With the head of Medusa on her shield, Athena possesses the powers to both create and destroy. Moreover, her position as Medusa’s natural foil posits her in opposition to the “man-killer” monstrous woman: the Jeanne Duvals, grotesque whores, and even Effie Grays of the world. Ruskin gives the ancient understanding of Athena as thus: “she is the Spirit of Life in material organism […] secondly, she is inspired and impulsive wisdom in human conduct and human art, giving the instinct of infallible decision, and of faultless invention.”

Thus conceived, there is a feminine spirit which pervades every great act in human history. Ruskin’s Athena reveals herself to be his own understanding of the divine. She continues throughout time, changing her name but never her truth—Ruskin goes as far as to assert the final member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. To insert her into this most masculine of triumvirates—the Father, the Son, and the Other—is a radical declaration of woman not only as a source of power, but as a source of sacred power and the Good. More than that, it expands and

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438 Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, “Mythic Language and Gender Subversion,” 357.
confuses a traditionally masculine space into something more ambiguous. Athena becomes a shadow of Ruskin’s own self, what Dinah Birch describes as “an authoritative expression of the sexual ambivalence in his own work.”

An undated sketch of the goddess in profile (Figure 30), which Ruskin drew from a Greek amphora, provides a further clue to his conception of the divine. As far as can be discerned, the Head of Athena appears true to the typical Greek model, as if Ruskin felt no desire to impose his own design upon the perfect ancient one. What is striking about the drawing is not at all Athena’s femininity–she appears to just as easily be a young man–but the air of a vital and perceptive nature which Ruskin manages to render in only a few strokes. Although drawn as if on red clay, her eyes appear bright.

Perhaps what is most appealing in Athena is exactly this limitless quality. Unrestrained by gendered responsibilities, she is that rarest of creatures in the history of human narrative: a person who can decide. It is in this respect that she differs most greatly from the feminine monsters who haunt Ruskin and Baudelaire. Frederick Sandys’ (1829-1904) Medea (Figure 31) shows a sorceress at work, the potion boiling before her evidence of her cunning and meddlesome nature. A follower of the Pre-Raphaelites, Sandys paints Medea with her eyes wide and face slightly contorted, as if horrified by the havoc she will soon set loose. One hand grasps the beads around her neck in agony. Yet unlike this Medea, whose table is littered with mysterious or occult objects, tools of her trade, the monsters we have so far encountered are such precisely because they have no tools, no magic to turn to. The Medea of Euripides, it should be remembered, only truly metamorphoses into a monster when her back is against the wall. It is the women without choices, ravaged by the consequences of poverty and social expulsion, who become the stuff of nightmares.

Baudelaire, whose embrace of the modern is so often tempered by nostalgia, might have understood Ruskin’s aims in turning to the Greek. The debate over female agency and sexuality, after all, was born in the ancient world: it was what drove the Mycaeneans to sail a thousand ships across the Aegean Sea. Baudelaire’s own “Delphine et Hippolyte” takes its namesake from

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441 Barringer, 168.
the ancients, he admits himself a Persephone. The sexual politics of the nineteenth century are perhaps more complex; and certainly the issues which rise from notions of scientific progress, whether woman-as-commodity or the biological study of teratogony, are unabashedly modern. Still, at their core, the ideas at stake are the same: women and desire, women and the children of (un)desired consequences, the monsters which these consequences unleash. The ancients had their own monsters, Medusa and Medea. Yet, frustratingly, the solutions which Baudelaire and Ruskin provide to the multi-headed hydra, what one might call “the powerful woman problem,” are unsatisfying. Baudelaire inverts female agency to serve his own pleasure, hiding that which disgusts him in the back of his subconscious, a twisting logic which writhes and coils like the many snakes of Medusa’s hair. Ruskin needs woman to be strong, to have the will and the force of life necessary to remake the world in his vision, but he strips her of all desire. His Grecian solution in such modern times is a perfect meeting of the ancient thread, as if several millennia had not passed. The Gordian knot grows ever tighter.
Conclusion

In his essay “Baudelairean Ethics,” Edward K. Kaplan examines the prose poem “Le Désespoir de la vieille,” in which an old woman, bald and toothless, is shunned by a child she tries to amuse, destined instead to a “solitude éternelle.” The old woman, Kaplan writes, can be taken as representative of the narrator, “who himself seeks to reconcile truth and beauty, reality and the imagination, the ethical and the aesthetic.” How curious that Baudelaire chose to represent himself, in a sense, in the most vulnerable of all female characters. And how fitting that her damnation is loneliness, that most modern of all maladies.

Ruskin, likewise, seems at the height of fulfillment as a writer when he takes on the guise of the Old Lecturer, a professor of “incalculable age” who instructs, guides, and watches over the eager young schoolgirls of The Ethics of the Dust. At the book’s end, the Old Lecturer asks one of his students to read the following passage from Modern Painters: “A pure or holy state of anything is that in which all its parts are helpful and consistent [...] The other name of death is ‘separation.’” Like Baudelaire’s narrator, Ruskin is seeking a state of communion and togetherness. In its nature, this desire seems to oppose itself to modernity, as in Baudelaire’s poem “À une Passante,” in which the narrator falls in love with a woman at first sight, only to be separated from her among the deafening crowd of an urban street, never to see her again.

Notably, the artists who triumphed in the years following the death and decline of Ruskin and Baudelaire made fragmentation of the female form a signature of their work. Cézanne’s female Bathers often have an air of alienation, even within their groups. With Duchamps and Picasso, the woman’s body itself is splintered, almost beyond recognition. She loses signification in and of herself, becoming a vehicle for the expression of the artist’s own modernity.

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442 “The Despair of the Old Woman”
“Eternal solitude”
https://www.poetica.fr/poeme-1444/charles-baudelaire-le-desespoir-de-la-vieille/.


445 Ruskin, 171.

446 Charles Baudelaire, “À une Passante” in Les Fleurs du mal, 140.
The imagined images of womanhood conceived by Ruskin, Baudelaire, and the artists of their circles, from Rossetti to Manet, are doubtless far afield of how the woman they represent would have considered themselves. Still, there is a desire for communion with the feminine which runs almost throughout. Each in their own way, Ruskin and Baudelaire recognized the threat which increasing industrialization posed to the world as they knew it. Ruskin found hope in scenes of redemption, from *Found* to the *Awakening Conscience*, and in empowering women to resist commodity culture, while Baudelaire persisted in shaping a romantic vision in his poetry which did not always correspond to reality. Moreover, both men defined femininity in a way which intersected their own identities. Baudelaire’s dandy is in many ways just as “unnatural” as the woman he posits as his opposite. Ruskin went so far as to mark himself with feminine attributes, and he found his idol in Athena, a deity of somewhat ambiguous gender. Above all, Ruskin and Baudelaire are both at their worst—their most ungenerous, least perceptive state—when they alienate the women of their lives. In making monsters out of women, they succeeded in making monsters out of themselves as well.

Ruskin and Baudelaire cannot tell us anything of what it really was to be a woman in the mid-nineteenth century. Rather, their attempts to define the feminine are perhaps best interpreted as their own attempt at understanding. In *Modern Painters*, Ruskin wrote, “The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something [...] To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion—all in one.” It is worthwhile, in whatever small way, that Ruskin and Baudelaire attempt to see women, to see them whole, not splintered, and in the process see something of themselves in the feminine. Unexpectedly, it is through this act of seeing—of watching men watching women—that we are best able to see Ruskin and Baudelaire for who they are. The search for understanding reveals that womanhood defies all definition. Rather, it is self-knowledge that is gained, so that the pursuit of communion with the other draws one ever closer to communion with the self.

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